# Looking at Racial Segregation

## An Exploratory Case Study
## of a Predominately Somali Charter School

*Robert H. Courtney*

### Introduction

In 2005, a group of concerned parents who had arrived in the United States as refugees from war-torn Somalia received approval from their local school district to establish the Iftin Charter School. This K-8 school has been operating for the past seven years. Iftin Charter School (ICS) continues to engender hope and intellectual strength in its students and parents. ICS finds itself uniquely equipped to meet the needs of newcomers to the United States because the community facilitates the transition of immigrants into American society. The school emphasizes English language acquisition and the cultural values of freedom, responsibility, and productivity; the founders are dedicated to the academic and social success of children in the school.

ICS is located in one of the most diverse, low-income neighborhoods in southern California. It has an historic Latino/Hispanic population, and the area continues to house newly arrived immigrants and first-generation families from Africa, Mexico, Central America, Southeast Asia, India, and the Middle East, altogether speaking over 30 languages and dialects. The area nearest the school has become the center of a large and growing Somali community, many of whom have come to America as refugees.

ICS applied to renew its charter in 2010. The charter was renewed but not without controversy. The school district board conceded that ICS had met the academic performance requirements established for renewal by charter law and had continued to show progress as

*Robert H. Courtney
is a doctoral student
in the combined graduate program
at Claremont Graduate University/
San Diego State University,
San Diego, California.*

the school's Academic Performance Index rose each year. However the school board expressed concerns regarding diversity and recruitment.

Specifically, the school was required to make a financial commitment to achieve a racial and ethnic balance among its pupils that is reflective of the general population residing within the school district. ICS's student population is characterized as 96% African American and 2% Latino, while the school district as a whole is 16% African American and 60% Latino.

Additionally, the district required ICS to submit a plan to diversify the school's community board. The district felt that the community board did not represent the stakeholders who lived in the neighborhood. Of the six school board members, five are Somali, as are also the executive director, the director of operations, and the outreach coordinator.

ICS has begun to more actively recruit students from the Spanish and Vietnamese speaking communities and has asserted that as school board seats become vacant, new board members will be selected based on skills and experience. Further, ICS selection practices for board members are non-sectarian and do not discriminate against any potential board member on the basis of ethnicity, national origin, gender, or disability. The district school board was satisfied with ICS's plan and did not request that racial quotas be provided within the student population or school board membership.

### Statement of the Problem

Nevertheless, issues and concerns remain about ICS, including:

♦ To what extent does ICS provide an education that is at least equal to what students would otherwise receive in their neighborhood school?

♦ Is ICS reflective of good public

policy that promotes multiculturalism and inclusion?

### Importance of the Study

If, in fact, ICS is successful in educating a population of low social-economic status English language learners, it is vital to identify the characteristics and practices of this school that have led to its success. In doing so, other schools that have large numbers of Somali students may want to utilize the same practices and strategies with their students.

### Historical and Social Background of Somali Refugees

For centuries before the European colonial era, Somalia was a pastoral and nomadic society. Herders of camels, cattle, and sheep lived in a world of egalitarian anarchy where the main preoccupation of clan families was the well-being of the herd. With the exception of small Bantu communities along the Juba and Shebelle Rivers, there were no ethnic or religious minorities (Hirsch & Oakley, 1995).

Throughout the pre-colonial era, the clan structure had functioned cohesively even as the Somalis eked out their nomadic livelihood in a harsh and difficult terrain. From the tenth century on, ethnic Somalis were dispersed throughout the Horn of Africa in a continuous search for forage and water for their herds. Between the Juba and Shebelle Rivers, a small number practiced maize and millet agriculture, and a small trading class along the coast maintained contact by sea with the Arabian Peninsula (Hirsch & Oakley, 1995).

Somali clans have been compared to Greek or Hebrew tribes, sharing common ethnic and linguistic identities but distinguished from each other by lineage, history, and custom. Somali society is composed of five principal clan families who, according to tradition, shared a common ancestor. Each clan is divided into smaller clans

that, in turn, divide into sub-clans (Hirsch & Oakley, 1995).

Over many centuries, clanism has been at times a source of conflict and at others a basis for reconciliation. When parochial interests prevailed, clanism was negative and divisive; it was often a form of elite manipulation through which leaders turned one clan or sub-clan against another in a competition for power. Historical conflicts between neighboring sub-clans for water, livestock, and other resources carried over into post-independence politics. On the positive side, there is a long history of clan relations promoting mediation by elders, and extensive intermarriage has often brought rival groups together (Hirsch & Oakley, 1995).

By virtue of its remoteness and isolation, Somalia remained untouched until the Nineteenth Century by the broader currents of international politics. It took the opening of the Suez Canal and competition among Britain, Italy, and France for control of the Horn of Africa to bring Somalia into the modern world. The division and colonization of Somalia in the 1880s into areas under Italian, French, and British control was inherently artificial. Ethnic Somalis live in French Somaliland (later Djibouti), northern Kenya, and the Ogaden, as well as in what is known today as Somalia (Hirsch & Oakley, 1995).

After World War II, Italy retained its former colony in the south as a trusteeship, and the British continued to administer Somaliland in the north until an independent and unified Somali Republic was declared on July 1, 1960. As in many other African countries, the experiment in democracy was unsuccessful. When a bodyguard assassinated the Somali President in October 1969, the stage was set for a military takeover. Major General Mohamed Siad Barre's coup in October 1969 ushered in 21 years of military dictatorship. The government forbade clanism and stressed loyalty to central authorities. An entirely new writing script for the Somali language was introduced (Hirsch & Oakley, 1995).

The Somali economy collapsed after a decade of Soviet-style collective agriculture and clan-controlled state monopolies. Clan-based insurgencies broke out, inspired by opposition to Said Barre's autocratic and repressive rule. In the fighting that followed, an estimated 300,000 Somalis became refugees in Ethiopia and thousands of others were displaced internally.

As the insurgency closed in on Mogadishu, thousands of people were killed in brutal urban warfare. Siad Barre was forced to flee the capital. As the conflict raged on, the civilian population was caught in the middle and suffered immensely. Throughout the region, farmers fled into the bush, precipitating the famine that quickly spread to the "Triangle of Death."

The humanitarian disaster in Somalia was the result of two contributing factors: the warfare between the Barre government and the subsequent factional fighting between clans and sub-clans and a period of severe drought. The result was starvation, a large refugee population, and a crippled recovery capacity. A large number of people, displaced by drought and war, had begun to move in search of relief.

By mid-1992, close to one million people had become refugees, with the majority (some 700,000) fleeing to neighboring countries. Livestock herds were depleted, both through slaughter for food and as a result of disease. Damage to infrastructure also posed an obstacle to recovery; economic activity was hampered by lack of communications, electricity, and formal banking facilities (Hanley, 1993; Peterson, 2000; Sens, 1997).

## Somalis in the Diaspora: Values of Family, Identity, and Democracy

Somalia's political culture is mainly egalitarian; social and political changes have resulted in new patterns of family life. Newly arrived immigrants struggle to make ends meet, in addition to having difficulty adjusting to an environment, laws, and beliefs that are different from their own. In recent years, Somali families have stressed the importance of greater educational opportunities and more access to government services.

Many Somali values are comparable to U.S. values. For example, Somalis value independence, democracy, egalitarianism, and individualism. Somalis also value their friendships and have generosity for others. Somalis are brought up to respect their parents and to seek advice and blessings (*du'o*) from them. A lack of respect and esteem brings forth *habaar* (a curse).

There is one value that remains consistent among the Somali people, and that is the importance of family. Family is the ultimate source of personal security and identity; the strength of family ties provides security in times of need. The protection of family honor and loyalty are extremely important to Somali families (Castel & Kurata, 2004).

Regardless of age, the Somali son or daughter must ask for blessings and even advice on how to deal with certain matters. Grandparents are the center of the extended family. They often have the role of a mediator, arbitrating disputes between siblings. It is an obligation for a grown son or daughter to contribute to a family member who may not be doing well. In Somali families, parents in their senior years continue to have a large role in family management (Abdullahi, 2001).

The Somali community in this neighborhood in southern California is a tight-knit community, with most of the essentials available within close proximity. Somalis emphasize the inclusion of extended families, regardless of whether they are blood relations. It is not unusual to have several families living together in one apartment or home (Castel & Kurata, 2004).

Most Somalis have come to the United States because they are seeking refuge. Refugees, by definition, are people who are forced to leave their homeland because of a well-founded fear of persecution, violence, or death. As a result, they come to their host countries with mixed feelings. On the one hand, they look forward to a more stable existence with greater personal and social security. On the other hand, they are often unprepared for, and even strongly opposed to, collateral changes, particularly where their interpersonal relationships involving spouses and children are concerned (De Voe, 2002).

Economic changes may involve all adult family members working outside the home; social changes include mandatory education for all children, male and female, until they are 16 years of age. Trying to balance these changes with their own cultural expectations is a challenge to many Somalis. While some may want to encourage and accelerate change, others want to restrict and slow the rate of change in order to maintain pre-refugee status, ethnic identity, and social equilibrium (De Voe, 2002).

Racialization is a socially constructed process where race becomes the predominant way of defining oneself or being defined by others. It is also a powerful mechanism for excluding, lumping, or stereotyping based on race, for the purpose of denying equality. Racialization masks the complexity of racial identities, but even though racial identities are infinitely complex, racial identifications are shockingly simple (Schmidt, 2002).

Somali parents and community leaders worry that the youth are forgetting

their culture, their language, and, most important, their religion. Most worrisome is when they see adolescents appropriating what they think typifies or expresses African-American culture. Frequently, adult members of the Somali community do not consider it possible to both be Muslim and to dress in hip-hop clothing.

Some see a racialized identity as an unquestioned threat to ethnic, national, and religious identities. It is probably more likely that Somali youth are reconstructing national and religious identities; these new constructions challenge traditional versions of what it means to be a Somali Muslim teen. Despite how adults perceive Somali youth, research shows that the youth are holding fast to national and ethnic identities, regardless of the clothes they wear.

While they quickly become citizens of their new countries, Somali youth nevertheless continue to strongly identify themselves as Somali and Muslim, despite the fact that their religious practices may have changed. Asked to indicate a racial category on school forms, if given the option of writing something under "Other," Somali youth will generally write "Somali." This is a small but significant act of resisting being racialized (Bigelow, 2010; Shah, 2006).

Clothing is a "silent symbol of self and community" and the way that some Muslim women dress is often at the center of discussions of an entire community's integration into a Western country. Consequently, Islam can profoundly affect women with respect to issues of immigration and schooling. The negative and positive consequences of wearing the *hijab* to work or school vary greatly across national and local contexts and the socio-cultural setting matters enormously in terms of how Muslim students feel at school.

Veiling, as a socio-cultural construct, differs across Muslim cultures, and even across time in any given culture. Many urban Somali women can recall times in Somalia when veiling was not required. In the migration and immigration process, veiling has taken on new meaning for Somalis. The veil may be a manifestation of Somali immigrants' wish to retain and maintain their culture in a new land, or it may be a simple expression of a desire to be close to God and follow their culture's interpretation of Islam law.

A film "What's up with the *Hijab*?" produced by Somali adolescent girls for an audience that does not understand Islam and the veil offers these explanations (Minnesota Historical Society, 2004). Although possibly surprising to some Westerners, the veil or *hijab* may serve additional or alternative purposes, including resistance. In such cases, Islamophobia among the larger population is co-constructing a female Muslim identity. In some settings, wearing a veil makes clear the fact that a young woman is Somali, not African American (Bigelow, 2008).

## Somali Students in U.S. Education

Many Somali girls may have received little or no previous education, while Somali boys may have had their education disrupted by war and the refugee experience. In Somalia educating girls was not considered necessary or appropriate. Yet, once in the United States and given the opportunity for a free public school education, many Somali families encourage their daughters to become educated. This reflects the parents' understanding of the importance of being able to read and write in the United States, both for employment reasons and for daily survival such as being able to read labels in the grocery store, signs on a bus, and bills (De Voe, 2002).

In addition to death, injury, and witnessing immense human tragedy, the struggle for survival followed by long waits in refugee camps also results in a high incidence of low print literacy and limited formal schooling among many recently arrived Somali adolescents.

Limited formal schooling is also the result of coming from rural backgrounds where there was little access to government services. Three fifths of the Somali population was comprised of pastoralist nomadic people, living off of their herds and the harsh terrain. Non-sedentary nomadic schools existed with religious men teaching children how to read, write and memorize the *Koran*.

Pupils in this setting learned by rote from wooden tablets and some were able to acquire some familiarity with the Arabic language. Girls were also admitted to these *Koranic* schools, but provision of traditional and Islamic education was essentially male-oriented. The preferential treatment for boys was basically continuing the gender-biased decision-making process where only adult men had a say in community affairs.

Moreover, as the sheikhs (religious scholars) were self-employed in this manner and were living on fees collected from the pupils, the economic situation of subsistent pastoralists may not have allowed them to send all sons and all daughters to these schools. Obviously then, the sons would have had the educational priority in the patriarchal Somali society (Abdi, A., 1998).

Although refugee camps sometimes offer schooling, classes typically have few materials and are large. It is nearly impossible for most families to afford to send children to school in the camp because of the requirement to buy books, uniforms, and other materials. Furthermore, the culture of the camps makes it more and more dangerous for girls to persist with schooling. For example, in Dadaab elementary schools, the ratio of boys to girls was 3:2, with 11,479 boys compared to 7,222 girls. There were only 69 girls among the 665 high school students in Dadaab in 2003, or 10% of all students. This is consistent with girls' high school participation in Somalia (Abdi, C., 2007).

One reason proposed for girls' low attendance in schools relates to economic insecurity, with families requiring girls' labor in the home so that the mother can go out to work. But another reason that cannot be discounted involves the reluctance of parents to send their girls to coed schools, especially as they become teenagers. Heightened sexual violence against women contributes to this reluctance. In the absence of gender-segregated schools, the dropout rate increases as girls get closer to what is considered marriageable age (Abdi, C., 2007).

In the absence of a tradition of print literacy, one of the most important cultural artifacts of Somalis in the Diaspora is their ongoing and exuberant sense of orality. Oral language in the form of stories, dramas, jokes, riddles, proverbs, and poems is centuries old and this love of the spoken word has transferred to English and reaches through all means of communicating through today's technology. Proverbs are used in everyday verbal exchanges in both rural and urban societies. Riddles are more commonly used by nomads, who test each other's knowledge and intelligence by presenting complicated oral puzzles to one another (Bigelow, 2010).

The role of traditional oral texts in the everyday lives of adolescent Somalis is often apparent. It is impossible to refute that primarily oral cultures can produce amazingly complex and intelligent and beautiful organizations of thought and experience. They compose and perform poetry at school and in community settings. Even Somali children who are English-dominant enjoy reading and telling long Somali folktales and jokes in English. These secular oral

texts are often part of collective memories and stories of survival. Many of these stories are intended to teach a lesson. In many cases, the characters take on animal forms that serve to represent individuals with unacceptable behavior or qualities; e.g., greed, theft, lying, cowardliness, etc. (Bigelow, 2010).

## Methodology

### Detailed Analysis of ICS Data and Data of Comparable Schools

This study examined data from the California Department of Education Dataquest website, including Academic Performance Index, Adequate Yearly Performance, California English Language Development Test (CELDT), and California Standards Test Scores (STAR). The same data gathered for similar schools in ICS's neighborhood will be compared with that for ICS. Schools considered similar are those in the neighborhood that have predominantly low SES and high ELL populations. The demographic characteristics of the similar schools selected are shown in Table 1.

### Student Misconduct and Intervention

Records on student misconduct and intervention were also examined. All hear-ings related to such events are required to conform to the applicable state and federal laws regarding discipline, special education, confidentiality, access to records, and to provide due process for affected students and parents.

### Interviews

Twelve subjects were interviewed. A semi-structured interview was utilized and began with a friendly conversation relating to life in the United States, family life, and children's education. The interview subjects were randomly selected. All subjects spoke English and had some knowledge of ICS. In addition all participants spoke Somali and lived in the area.

## Findings

### Detailed Analysis of ICS Data and Data of Comparable Schools

Table 1 is a summary of schools similar to ICS that are located in the neighborhood and have similar demographic characteristics. ICS and Tubman are unique among these schools in that they teach students in grades K-8, so for the sake of comparison, two middle schools were included in the table. The lower socio-economic status of these schools is reflected in the fraction of students receiving free meals at school (the average for SDUSD is 64.6%) (California Department of Education Ed-Data, 2013).

Household size and income criteria are used to determine eligibility for free meals. For a family of four, an annual income of less than $40,793 qualifies children for free lunch and breakfast. For more than half of similar schools, the majority of students are English Language Learners (ELL) and, except for ICS, the majority of ELLs speak Spanish; at ICS, the majority speaks Somali.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (AESA) of 2001 requires that all schools annually meet Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) criteria. Schools that receive Title I, Part A funds will be identified for Program Improvement (PI) if they do not meet AYP criteria for two consecutive years in the same specific area. A school that begins the school year in PI and does not meet all AYP criteria for that school year will advance to the next year of PI. For example, a school that implemented Year 1 of PI during the 2009-2010 school year and did not meet all 2010 AYP criteria will advance to Year 2 of PI during 2010-2011 (California Department of Education, 2012).

A higher number (i.e., P5) implies a greater degree of intervention. It is apparent that most of the schools in the neighborhood of ICS have been identified as needing improvement, and, in fact, the entire San Diego Unified School District has been identified for "Program Improvement" (P3) (California Department of Education DataQuest, 2013).

Presently, the State of California does not have an accepted method for comparing student performance in different schools. Nevertheless, schools have been compared based on API scores. These data are summarized in Table 2.

It should be apparent from Table 2 that in 2012, ICS API scores are somewhat higher than the average of the other seven schools and that the variation for individual schools is too high to make a sensible comparison without further work as developed below.

For each school, a linear approximation has been calculated and the details are provided in Table 3. The scores for two schools, ICS and Euclid, are improving more rapidly than others (48.1 and 29.3 points per year, respectively). Some schools show a slower growth (about 12 points per year). ICS started low (2006 was its first year operation with only 66 students) but has now achieved mid-range, second only to Euclid. And Euclid Elementary significantly outperforms the others; Marshall

**Table 1**
*Descriptive Statistics of Similar Schools*

| School | Enrollment | Type | Socio-economically disadvantaged (%) | ELL (%) | Program improvement status | Somali (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ICS | 377 | K-8 | 87% | 80% | - | 86% |
| Tubman Charter | 299 | K-8 | 85% | 56% | P4 | 21% |
| Euclid Elementary | 654 | K-5 | 99% | 80% | P3 | 1% |
| Fay Elementary | 673 | K-5 | 98% | 72% | P3 | 2% |
| Ibarra Elementary | 538 | K-5 | 96% | 80% | P2 | 1% |
| Marshall Elementary | 536 | K-5 | 96% | 74% | P5 | 10% |
| Rolando Park | 209 | K-5 | 86% | 51% | P3 | 2% |
| Oak Park | 621 | K-5 | 62% | 33% | P4 | 9% |
| Mann Middle | 849 | 6-8 | 91% | 40% | P5 | 4% |
| Clark Middle | 1,201 | 6-8 | 99% | 39% | P5 | 2% |

(California Department of Education Ed-Data, 2013)

**Table 2**
*API scores for Selected K-5 Schools*

| Year | ICSK-5 | Oak Park | Euclid | Fay | Ibarra | Marshall | Rolando Park | Tubman K-5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2007 | 558 | 766 | 732 | 702 | 685 | 635 | 747 | 782 |
| 2008 | 679 | 775 | 686 | 748 | 710 | 627 | 731 | 781 |
| 2009 | 654 | 757 | 799 | 746 | 745 | 689 | 712 | 741 |
| 2010 | 715 | 765 | 827 | 759 | 745 | 677 | 758 | 773 |
| 2011 | 765 | 758 | 808 | 727 | 749 | 679 | 750 | 792 |
| 2012 | 756 | 752 | 765 | 752 | 749 | 701 | 736 | 809 |

(California Department of Education DataQuest, 2013)

significantly underperforms in relation to the others.

The regression analysis also calculates an estimate of the predicted 2012 API value and standard deviation for each school (Dillon & Goldstein, 1984). These data are presented in Table 3 and are used in the analysis of variance.

The predicted API means and standard deviations for each school are used in an analysis of variance (ANOVA) to test the null hypothesis that all means are equal. The results of the ANOVA are shown in Table 4. Since the calculated F statistic is greater than the critical value, the null hypothesis must be rejected and the researcher concludes that there are significant differences in the mean API scores. Effect size is large ($\eta^2$=0.616).

A post-hoc analysis is used to deter-mine that the API scores fall into two homogenous groups as illustrated in Table 5. Because the variances are not homogeneous, Dunnett's test is used to compare the schools with ICS's mean used as a control. Welch's t-test is used to calculate $t_{critical}$ (Myers, Wells, & Lorch, 2010). Within these categories, the means are statistically indistinguishable at the $\alpha$=0.05 level of significance. ICS's API score is not significantly different than the API scores in Group 1, but is significantly different for the schools in Group 2.

California English Language Development Test (CELDT) scores for ICS, Tubman, and similar schools (grades K-8) and SDUSD K-8 students are shown in Table 6. The data presented represents the annual assessment scores for the 2010-2011 school year. Table 6 shows the distribution of performance levels among the English Language Learners (not the student body as a whole).

It is interesting to note that there is a significant difference in the distribution of performance levels. ICS is significantly different in having a relatively large percentage of advanced students as well as a smaller percentage of intermediate students than the others. There are anecdotal reports that ICS students transit through the various levels at a faster rate than other schools. The higher percentage of advanced students seems to support this, but the evidence is far from conclusive.

In order to investigate this claim, the CELDT scores were analyzed using a Markov chain model. In the absence of other data, all students are assumed to enter the chain at the beginning level, to depart only at the advanced level without skipping steps and all students are evaluated annually. The mean times at each level were calculated and those data are presented in Table 7. It is apparent that the time through the ESL system is slightly faster at ICS, but the difference is not large and may not be significant given the assumptions previously mentioned.

### Student Misconduct and Intervention

The inclination of students to perform academically is, of course, related to the social climate of the school. Data for truancy and suspensions are presented in Table 8. It is apparent that ICS maintains an orderly social environment. ICS had no suspensions in 2010-2011 and that environment presumably contributes to the API performance. For the seven elementary schools, the API is correlated with suspensions at about a negative 65%. This, in itself, does not mean a great deal except to support what most educators and parents would expect. On the other hand, the suspension rate for the middle schools is truly alarming.

Percentages of ethnic diversity and ELLs are included in Table 8 and should be interpreted with some caution. As used here, ethnic diversity is calculated as percentage of non-White students. The populations of these schools (except Iftin Charter) are predominantly Latino-Hispanic (65%) with Asians (15%) and African Americans (14%) significantly represented. Further complicating the issue, African Americans cannot be distinguished from Somalis (or other Africans) in this data. Students designated Fluent-English-Proficient are distinguished from ELLs and are not included in Table 8.

**Table 3**
*Summary of Regression Analysis*

|  | Tubman K-5 | Euclid | ICS K-5 | Ibarra | Oak Park | Fay | Rolando Park | Marshall |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Slope | 12.63 | 5.71 | 37.40 | 14.89 | -3.26 | -2.83 | 5.09 | 12.00 |
| Intercept | -24598 | -10703 | -74467 | -29185 | 7312 | 6433 | -9485 | -23444 |
| API | 811 | 794 | 781 | 765 | 758 | 742 | 747 | 700 |
| s | 6.50 | 16.13 | 25.44 | 13.47 | 9.41 | 9.34 | 11.69 | 12.58 |
| $R^2$ | 0.90 | 0.22 | 0.83 | 0.74 | 0.22 | 0.17 | 0.30 | 0.68 |

**Table 4**
*Analysis of Variance*

|  | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Between Groups | 36740.62 | 7 | 5248.66 | 9.16 | <0.001 |
| Within Groups | 22922.20 | 40 | 573.06 |  |  |
| Total | 59662.82 | 47 |  |  |  |

**Table 5**
*Post Hoc Analysis*

| School | Subset for alpha = 0.05 | |
|---|---|---|
|  | Group 1 | Group 2 |
| Euclid Elementary | 805 |  |
| Tubman K-5 | 794 |  |
| Iftin K-5 | 781 |  |
| Ibarra Elementary | 765 |  |
| Oak Park |  | 758 |
| Rolando Park |  | 747 |
| Fay Elementary |  | 742 |
| Marshall Elementary |  | 700 |

**Table 6**
*Comparison of CELDT Scores for the 2010-2011 School Year*

| Performance Level | IFTIN K-8 | TUBMAN K-8 | SIMILAR SCHOOLS K-8 | SDUSD K-8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Advanced | 12.3% | 10.3% | 5.6% | 8.0% |
| Early Advanced | 23.1% | 27.0% | 21.8% | 27.8% |
| Intermediate | 25.8% | 30.2% | 32.0% | 34.8% |
| Early Intermediate | 17.7% | 16.7% | 19.1% | 16.7% |
| Beginning | 21.2% | 15.9% | 21.6% | 12.8% |

## Interviews with Parents and Community Members

The interviews were conducted at various public places where subjects could be randomly approached in a non-threatening way. The interviews were uniformly friendly and conversational, leading to the key questions: What do you think of ICS and why?

Women were more responsive than men, especially in the absence of their husbands and particularly when they had the opportunity to discuss their children. Notes were recorded. The purpose of these interviews was to gather anecdotal evidence. The narratives presented below demonstrate contrasting views and are summarized in Table 9.

Ms. A is the mother of an ICS student. She is very satisfied with ICS School. She believes that her daughter is doing well. Initially, she was somewhat fearful to send her child to her neighborhood school. She is somewhat frightened in her City Heights neighborhood because of the rough-looking Latino/Hispanic men standing about and because of the unruly behavior of the neighborhood children. Once, her window was smashed with a stone. Sometimes, she hears gunfire. She is troubled by the frequency that the police come to her neighborhood in the evening. She wishes she could move but cannot afford to live elsewhere. She has never visited the neighborhood school but she has heard stories from her friends, mothers of students there. Ms. A has visited her child's school and she is satisfied that it is a good learning environment, that the students are disciplined and that the school respects her religion.

Ms. B is the mother of two grade-school students studying elsewhere in SDUSD. She is a college-educated Somali Muslim and she and her family have been in the city for about 10 years. She speaks English fluently. She does not want her children to attend ICS because "we are in America now and we will not ever return to Somalia. My children need to be Americans." She is not entirely comfortable with the ICS model where so many Somalis are concentrated together. Her children have not had any bad experiences in their neighborhood school and she is satisfied with the quality of their education. The family members are practicing Muslims. Her daughter wears a hijab to school along with many other Muslim girls and there has never been a problem.

Mr. C is the father of a grade-school student studying elsewhere in SDUSD. He does not send his child to ICS because "we are not Somali." Mr. C is a devout Muslim and strongly rejects the notion that the school might have any responsibility for his son's religious instruction. Mr. C expressed concerns similar to Ms. A about the neighborhood and he will move his family when he can afford it. In the meantime, an adult walks his son to and from school and the son is not allowed to play outside unsupervised.

Mr. D is a Somali student at SDSU. He is unmarried and has no children but one of his siblings is a student at ICS. He is a volunteer at ICS and tutors students in an afternoon program. He is a Muslim and speaks English and Somali fluently. He is very enthusiastic about ICS. He feels that ICS will help students retain Somali culture. Students will behave according to best Somali community standards. He attended SDUSD middle and high schools and has a negative attitude toward the behavior of the students there.

Ms. E is the mother of three present and former SDUSD students and the grandmother of two students in SDUSD.

**Table 7**
*Average Time (yrs.) at Level*

| Performance Level | Iftin K-8 | Tubman K-8 | Similar Schools K-8 | SDUSD K-8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Advanced | 1.06 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 |
| Early Advanced | 1.96 | 2.33 | 1.96 | 2.47 |
| Intermediate | 2.13 | 2.44 | 2.68 | 2.87 |
| Early Intermediate | 1.45 | 1.36 | 1.53 | 1.36 |
| Beginning | 2.69 | 2.28 | 2.77 | 2.04 |
| Total | 9.28 | 9.41 | 9.93 | 9.74 |

**Table 8**
*Student Discipline by School (2010-2011)*

| School | Number of Students | ELL | Truancy | Expulsions | Suspensions |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mann Middle | 827 | 41.4% | 49.5% | 1.0% | 25.2% |
| Clark Middle | 1,125 | 41.3% | 29.3% | 1.3% | 40.4% |
| Iftin Charter | 395 | 76.4% | 1.1% | 0.0% | 0.0% |
| Euclid Elementary | 658 | 80.3% | 36.3% | 0.0% | 3.0% |
| Fay Elementary | 695 | 69.6% | 26.9% | 0.0% | 3.2% |
| Ibarra Elementary | 576 | 74.3% | 37.5% | 0.0% | 1.0% |
| Marshall Elementary | 526 | 75.1% | 22.1% | 0.0% | 3.4% |
| Rolando Park Elementary | 205 | 52.2% | 25.9% | 0.0% | 3.4% |
| Oak Park | 699 | 40.3% | 11.9% | 0.0% | 5.9% |
| Tubman | 275 | 52.0% | 1.8% | 0.0% | 13.8% |
| SDUSD | 131,433 | 26.8% | 17.7% | 0.2% | 9.5% |

(California Department of Education DataQuest, 2013)

**Table 9**
*Summary of Selected Parent Responses*

| | Do you know about Iftin Charter? | Does anyone in your family attend? | Do you support this school? If yes, why? If no, why not? |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ms. A | Yes | Yes | Very satisfied. Somewhat fearful to send her child to neighborhood school. Frightened in her neighborhood because of the rough-looking Latino/Hispanic men standing about and because of the unruly behavior of the neighborhood children. Students are disciplined and that the school respects her religion. |
| Ms. B | Yes | No | No. "we are in America now … children need to be Americans." |
| Mr. C | Yes | No | No. "We are not Somali." |
| Mr. D | Yes | Yes | Yes. Very good school and well supported by Somali community. School respects religion. |
| Ms. E | Yes | No | No. School was responsive in the beginning but is now becoming "just another school". Children need to learn American ways to get ahead. Isolation is not good. |

She is a Somali Muslim and is active in the Somali community and she regularly volunteers her services to refugee resettlement efforts in City Heights. She speaks Somali and English fluently. She feels that it is not good for Somalis to isolate themselves. She feels that it is the duty of parents to be active in their children's education and to control their behavior even if the atmosphere at school is not good.

### Conclusions and Implications

Interviews with parents and community members revealed several themes. Parents are concerned about order and discipline in other neighborhood schools. They do not want their children exposed to bad influences they see in their neighborhoods and they suppose that these same influences will be found in schools. They worry that their children will be kidnapped. They worry that boys will adopt gang behavior, which they associate with drugs and guns. They worry that their daughters will become pregnant. Many parents see ICS as a place where their children will be shielded from these influences and where their children will retain more of the traditional Somali values.

Many parents see ICS as a place where their religion is respected. While ICS staff stoutly maintains that ICS is entirely secular, the majority of the students are clearly Muslim. This is also true of the non-Somali newcomers who tend to be Arab and Central Asian. These parents seek out ICS based on its reputation inside the Muslim community.

Despite the strong assertions by the staff that ICS is not a Somali school, it is clearly seen to be so in the community. While this is attractive to some Somali families, it may be a decided disadvantage to others. Among non-Somali East African Muslims, consigning one's children to a Somali school is not particularly attractive. Even in San Diego, many unfairly draw parallels between Somalis here and the chaotic and dangerous situation that exists in Africa.

Other families, some perhaps better educated, regard their presence in San Diego to be permanent and want their children to learn American language and customs to be successful. They see ICS as an attempt by some to isolate themselves. In their minds, this is unhealthy and they want a mainstream education for their children.

### Recommendations

The issue of school segregation has risen to the forefront of education policy since U.S. Supreme Court declared that the *de jure* segregation of schools was unconstitutional (U.S. Supreme Court, 1954). Lately, desegregation efforts have been partially abandoned because of lack of interest by the federal government and because of the growing concentration of minorities in urban schools.

Increasing concern about the quality of public education has led many states to enact a variety of choice programs, including charter schools. One concern about charter school programs is that they may increase socioeconomic segregation because research suggests that better educated and more motivated parents are the most likely to participate in choice programs. Charter school enrollments differ substantially from traditional public schools. They isolate, on average, economically distinct (either more advantaged or less) students in minority-segregated schools that serve fewer students with disabilities (Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Wang, 2010).

#### *The Benefits of Integration*

Segregated schooling limits the prospects of both minority and White students and points to the benefits that flow from integrated education. Students in integrated schools are more likely to be exposed to challenging advanced courses and, as a result, are more likely to have higher test scores, graduate, and succeed in college (Mickelson, 2001).

White children benefit from a deeper understanding of others. Surveys have found White students in integrated schools better prepared to live and work in the interracial society their generation will experience (Yun & Kurlaender, 2004). Further, students with high achievement and motivation levels can help create a culture of success in school can have a positive affect on otherwise low-achieving students (Jencks & Mayer, 1990).

#### *But ICS Is Different*

Despite the strong assertions by the staff that ICS is not a Somali school, it is clearly seen to be so in the community. Nevertheless, ICS performs as well or better than comparable schools. The school is not in "program improvement" status. Its annual performance indicators are strong and its English language learners are

progressing faster (perhaps) than those in comparable schools. The rate of misconduct is lower at ICS than similar middle schools and is a significant factor in having parents keep their students at the charter school.

Parents are concerned about order and discipline in other neighborhood schools and many see ICS as a place where their children will be shielded from bad influences and where their children will retain more of the traditional Somali values. They are pleased that ICS office staff and a few of the teachers speak the Somali language and that they are able to freely visit the school and participate in their children's education.

While the school may be *de facto* segregated, no real discrimination seems to be practiced. However, the study uncovered some non-Somali community members holding misconceptions about Somalis. ICS is not operating at capacity and admission is open to any student. In fact, the non-Somali population is growing.

Education Code Section 47605(b)(5)(G) requires that a charter petition describe the means by which the school will achieve a racial and ethnic balance among its pupils that is reflective of the general population residing within the school district. By implication, the school could be closed for failure to achieve a racial and ethnic balance despite its best efforts to comply and despite the fact that no discrimination exists. It is recommended that the Education Code be modified to eliminate the requirement to achieve racial balance insofar as the racial imbalance is not maintained by discriminatory methods.

From the data taken from state sources, students at ICS, the only predominantly Somali school in the district, show increasingly high achievement and few behavioral problems. Although some educators would fault the school for having disproportionately high numbers of a single ethnic community, this school is serving the needs of a refugee population and showing important success.

### References

Abdi, A. (1998). Education in Somalia: History, destruction, and calls for reconstruction. *Comparative Education, 34*(3), 327-340.

Abdi, C. (2007). Convergence of civil war and the religious right: Reimagining Somali women. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 33*(1), 183-207.

Abdullahi, M. (2001). *Culture and customs of Somalia*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Bigelow, M. (2010). Orality and literacy within the Somali diaspora. *Language Learning, Supplement, 60*, 25-57.

Bigelow, M. (2008). Somali adolescents' negotiation of religious and racial bias in and out of school. *Theory Into Practice*.

California Department of Education. (2012). *AYP information guide 2012—adequate yearly progress*. Sacramento, CA: Author..

*California Department of Education DataQuest*. (2013). Retrieved from http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/

*California Department of Education Ed-Data*. (2013). Retrieved 2013, from http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us/Pages/Home.aspx

Castel, A. F., & Kurata, S. (2004). *NASP Communiqué*, *33*(3). Retrieved 2010 from http://www.nasponline.org/publications/cq/cq333somali.aspx

De Voe, P. A. (2002). Symbolic action: Religion's role in the changing environment of young Somali women. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, *15*(2), 234-246.

Dillon, W., & Goldstein, M. (1984). *Multivariate analysis—methods and applications*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Frankenberg, E., Siegel-Hawley, G., & Wang, J. (2010). *Choice without equity: Charter school segregation and the need for civil rights standards*. Los Angeles: The Civil Rights Project/*Proyecto Derechos Civiles* at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Hanley, G. (1993). *Warriors: Life and death among the Somalis*. London, UK: Eland Publishing.

Hirsch, J., & Oakley, R. (1995). *Somalia and Operation Restore Hope*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace.

Jencks, C., & Mayer, S. (1990). The social consequences of growing up in a poor neighborhood. In L. Lynn, & G. McGeary (Eds.), *Inner-city poverty in the United States* (pp. 111-186). Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Mickelson, R. (2001). Subverting Swann. *American Educational Research Journal*, *38*(2), 215-252.

*What's up with the hijab?* (2004). [Motion Picture].

Myers, J., Wells, A., & Lorch, R. (2010). *Research design and statistical analysis* (3rd ed.). New York: Routledge.

Peterson, S. (2000). *Me against my brother*. London, UK: Routledge.

Schmidt, R. (2002). Racialization and language policy: The case of the U.S.A. *Multilingua*, *21*(2), 141-163.

Sens, A. G. (1997). *Somalia and the changing nature of peacekeeping*. Ottawa, Ontario, Canada: Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada.

Shah, S. (2006). Leading multiethnic schools: A new understanding of Muslim youth identity. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, *34*, 215-247.

Yun, J., & Kurlaender, M. (2004). School racial composition and student educational aspirations. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, *9*(2), 143-168.