



FURTHERING INTEGRATION IN AN ERA OF RESEGREGATION



Schools are resegregating in the wake of multiple Supreme Court decisions, making it more and more difficult to further racial diversity at the preK-12 and college levels. Yet even in this current legal and political environment, there are steps that elementary and secondary school leaders can take to support integration, according to a new [study](#) by [Virginia Palencia](#) and NEPC Fellow [Genevieve Siegel-Hawley](#), both of Virginia Commonwealth University.

The study, published earlier this year in the peer-reviewed journal *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, was based on case studies of four schools (a preschool, an elementary school, a middle school, and a high school). These schools were selected because they reflect the demographic makeup of the communities they serve and have consistently met diversity goals.

The lessons from these schools point to six steps school and district leaders can take to further the goals of school integration—which has [repeatedly been associated](#) with benefits including higher levels of student achievement and lower levels of prejudice.

- 1. Identify and implement the programming the school's community values most:** This means the entire community—not just the most vocal or well-connected parents. For the preschool included in the study, this meant adopting the Reggio-Emilia approach. The elementary school emphasized social-emotional learning. The middle school integrated the arts into instruction. The high school offered course-work focused on coding.

- 2. Communicate the investment in integration:** It goes without saying that a school will not be diverse unless it enrolls a diverse set of students. Successful leaders took steps to attract diverse students that included communicating about unique programming and about the fact that integration goals were a top priority. These steps helped attract and maintain a diverse student population.
- 3. Add equity guardrails to enrollment policies:** Even when leaders truly value integration, enrollment policies can scuttle their best efforts. The leaders interviewed for the study implemented admissions (and other) practices intended to further the integration goals. For instance, the preschool that participated in the study furthered economic integration by maintaining separate waitlists for families that did and did not require subsidies. The high school ensured every student had transportation.
- 4. Create strong community partnerships:** Community partnerships can enhance nearly every aspect of the integration process, from identifying parents' needs and wants, to supporting special programming. For example, the middle school's partnership with a local university led to a community engagement grant that funded trips to a nearby museum. The elementary school created a one-stop site where families could access community services such as a food bank and social-emotional learning classes for parents.
- 5. Exercise agility with resources:** In a segregation-friendly era, fewer funding sources are available for integration efforts. Successful leaders were agile and creative with resources—combining multiple sources of funding to support their efforts. For instance, pre-k leaders braided together tuition, federal Head Start funds, and state preschool funding to support the school. The high school obtained state innovation funding and federal magnet school grants.
- 6. Advocate for policies that advance integration:** For example, school choice policies—which are increasingly expansive and ubiquitous—can be harnessed to further integration if they're structured as so-called managed choice. When choice is thoughtfully designed to advanced integration, students rank their top selections and are then admitted to a school in their choice set where their presence will further goals of economic diversity. (Because of the Supreme Court decisions, policies that consider the race of individual students are not recommended.)

Palencia and Siegel-Hawley conclude, “We often discuss the need for equity and diversity and **why** it matters, but there is little to offer in regard to **how** to make such change happen.” They continue:

School leaders can help transform their schools through collaborative leadership and fostering partnerships with community, family, and schools to build a more diverse and powerful space. Such collaboration can engender authentic dialogs across racial lines, and allow for genuine and meaningful interaction, as well as buy-in. Ultimately, leaders who leverage specialized programming as a vehicle for choice have an opportunity to transform their school communities into more equitable systems for all students.

NEPC Resources on School Segregation

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