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FOLLOW-UP TO RESPONSE BY DR. BENJAMIN SCAFIDI TO A REVIEW OF  
“THE INTEGRATION ANOMALY.”

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## Introduction

We welcome the debate sparked by our review of *The Integration Anomaly* and appreciate the ensuing dialogue around ways to address school segregation, which we all agree is extremely consequential for children. Below we engage with Dr. Scafidi’s response to our review. The format of his response is to first summarize a claim made in our review and to then set forth his reply; this response includes a dozen such claim/response sections. We keep this format, organizing our discussion under his framing of nine of our claims, but attempting to cover all twelve either directly or indirectly.

**Scafidi’s Statement of Our Claims, #1: “The anomaly to which the title of my report alludes isn’t backed up by the raw data or supported by other researchers.” and “The Dissimilarity Index is not an appropriate way to define segregation and contributes to biased results.”**

Dr. Scafidi’s original report, as we read it, asserts an “integration anomaly” in the sense that there is increased neighborhood integration without corresponding school integration. We respond to the above two issues together because we read them as

questioning our critique of the strength or existence of the “integration anomaly” that is the basis of his report.

According to some broad measures, neighborhood segregation has declined from incredibly high levels several decades ago. But it still remains very intense—amid previously cited worries about 1) the stability of integration in the suburbs, 2) the durability of virtually all-black neighborhoods, 3) the growing link between racial segregation and neighborhoods of concentrated poverty, and 4) non-black minority group avoidance of neighborhoods with concentrations of black residents. Given these trends, along with the fact that nearly three-quarters of U.S. schoolchildren still attend their nearby, assigned school, it seems unwise to rule out housing policy as an important pathway toward greater school integration—which all of us agree is a fundamental goal.

As mentioned in our review, the report’s author, Dr. Scafidi, overlooks several factors that may relate to why neighborhood and school segregation trends diverge. One crucial explanation for the divergence is the proliferation of choice—between public and private schools, between different types of public schools and between public school districts. Another reason is that the different legal, demographic, and jurisdictional structures of school districts in metropolitan areas are connected to varying relationships between residential and school segregation (e.g., school and residential segregation are more tightly coupled in metros that either abandoned or never attempted school desegregation). Such factors are not discussed in either the original report or the author’s response.

Dr. Scafidi claims that the dissimilarity index is easy to interpret and commonly used. We do not disagree, but this claim is overly broad and ignores key methodological issues raised in our review. These include the use of the index as a single measure of segregation, the black-nonblack definition of racial groups, the focus on third graders and the report’s seemingly arbitrary definition of similar and divergent trends. The author made these important methodological choices without adequate—or, in many cases, any—explanation, thereby raising doubt about the validity of his findings. The most significant implication flowing from the report’s methodological limitations was that metropolitan area divergence in school and housing segregation trends may not be nearly as extensive as *The Integration Anomaly* would lead the reader to believe. Even using the author’s own metrics, school-housing divergence was only present in about one-third of the examined metros (not all metros were included because of low numbers of black third graders). Like Scafidi, we are interested in how to ameliorate school segregation. Yet this flawed analysis hardly seems an appropriate basis for recommending sweeping changes like universal choice to our public educational system.

**Scafidi’s Statement of Our Claims, #2: “My report ignores research literature on the effect of charter schools on segregation.”**

In our critique of *The Integration Anomaly*, we argue that the author should not have ignored extensive evidence that one of the most rapidly expanding forms of choice—charter schools—is linked to increased school segregation. This is a crucial oversight because charter schools are one of the most widely used contemporary forms of choice and because they are characterized by many of the elements attached to universal school choice, the report’s central policy recommendation. The research on charter schools covers a variety of stratification issues, including students with special needs and students for whom English is a second language. Regarding racial stratification in particular, we read the research consensus as concluding that in most contexts charter schools are associated with heightened school segregation. We pointed to research using a national dataset (Renzulli & Evans, 2005) as well as studies from Texas, Pennsylvania, and Arizona. We also mentioned two studies that the author did cite (Bifulco & Ladd, 2007; and Zimmer et al, 2009, published by RAND and referred to as such below).

Scafidi’s response does not address the studies documenting segregative patterns in Texas, Pennsylvania, and Arizona, even though each of these high-quality analyses uses student-level transfer data to examine how moves to charter schools affect the isolation of white students—and each finds that white students (only urban in the case of Pennsylvania) make segregative transfers.

The response instead focuses on Renzulli & Evans (2005), arguing that the study has limitations because of the segregation measures they used. The response also points out that the original report cited two studies reaching different conclusions: one study showing the most “negative” segregation findings (Bifulco & Ladd, 2007) and one showing positive findings (RAND). That is, he appears to be contending that he was fair to the overall body of research because he sufficiently covered “contrary” sets of findings.

We again stress that the RAND study does not in fact support the conclusion that charter schools help to mitigate black segregation. The study’s conclusion regarding the effects of student transfers on racial composition is even addressed in the short passage that Dr. Scafidi himself quotes: black students’ transfers to charter schools result in enrollment at schools with higher black isolation. Thus, in both his report and in his response, Scafidi is ignoring what the RAND authors conclude and what they consider to be consistent with other literature.

While of course there is not room in his report, or in subsequent responses by him or us, to detail the entire body of literature dealing with charter school stratification, simply describing two studies with contrary findings misleadingly suggests a lack of consensus on segregation in charter schools. In fact, in our reading of the literature on this topic—specifically student-level studies of transfers from traditional public schools to charter schools that we all agree are most helpful to understanding how charter schools relate to segregation—we find that the majority (which we footnoted in our original critique) reach similar conclusions. Simply put, the consensus is that charter schools segregate, though

the magnitude may vary by context. Virtually across the board, black students make segregative moves to charter schools; evidence on white student moves is mixed, depending upon context; and where Latinos are included in the analyses, they also tend to make more segregative moves to charters.<sup>1</sup>

**Scafidi’s Statement of Our Claims, #3: “African American families freely choosing schools that have a disproportionate number of African American students should be considered a negative outcome.”**

We note here that the Duke study framing his discussion of black student segregation in North Carolina charter schools reveals deeply rooted concerns in the civil rights community about introducing charter schools to the state. “This opposition,” the Duke report’s authors write, “may have reflected the state’s historical experience with school choice during the 1960s when ‘freedom academies’ were established to provide a way for white students to avoid integrated schools.”<sup>2</sup> Centuries of discrimination in North Carolina and across the country should inform contemporary understanding of segregation in both charter schools and regular public schools. Families of all races make school choices within this broader context. Given that Dr. Scafidi introduces universal school choice as the solution to such segregation, it is important to fully examine the evidence on how existing forms of choice work to separate students in different ways.

**Scafidi’s Statement of Our Claims, #4: “I misleadingly omitted relevant research by ‘strangely’ curating the literature included in my report.”**

The author writes, “Readers will notice that, for undisclosed reasons, Siegel-Hawley and Frankenberg left one item off their list, “U.S. evidence on the impact of school choice programs on segregation.”

In his original report, he focused on a few studies of school choice programs,<sup>3</sup> while noting that newer voucher programs with wider eligibility criteria still needed to be studied—presumably because they might differ in outcomes from earlier, more restrictive voucher programs (p. 18 of original report).<sup>4</sup> This section of *The Integration Anomaly* primarily focuses on a 2006 review done by Greg Forster for the Friedman Foundation (the publisher of Scafidi’s report) that is characterized as concluding most voucher programs increase racial integration.<sup>5</sup> The only other research he cites is a brief analysis of the Louisiana voucher program, which draws conclusions based on only a fraction of voucher recipients in the state.

Of the empirical studies he alludes to in his response to our critique, none are published peer-reviewed articles. Many are working papers and several are reports also published by the Friedman Foundation. This summary does not account for other empirical work showing that vouchers are more likely to be used by families with higher levels of parental education, even with income restrictions for eligibility,<sup>6</sup> or that white students choosing

private schools tend to make segregative choices while black and Latino students make integrative moves.<sup>7</sup> Again, the logical conclusion is that universal choice will likely further segregation, not improve it.

**Scafidi’s Statement of Our Claims, #5: “The conclusion of *The Integration Anomaly* makes recommendations ‘without supporting material’ and exclude some options ‘backed by research.’”**

In our review we noted that the author’s simplistic list of the “do’s” and “don’ts” of school choice either ignored or misread evidence surrounding the importance of essential civil rights considerations necessary for choice to promote integration. One of the author’s “don’ts” cautioned readers not to employ “controlled choice” approaches. Controlled choice is a system-wide policy that asks families to rank order a certain set of schools, which usually includes a neighborhood option, and to submit those preferences to the district. The final student assignment decision is left in the hands of the district’s central office, whose personnel can take into account any number of factors, including capacity, sibling preference, proximity, and diversity. Civil rights dimensions like outreach, free transportation and diversity goals are typically embedded if desegregation is an emphasis of the controlled choice policy. Research examining the popularity and effectiveness of controlled choice as a desegregation policy has found largely positive impacts on furthering integration.<sup>8</sup>

In his response to our review, the author cites a 2015 article in *The Atlantic* about metropolitan Louisville’s controlled choice system. He relies on this single news article, particularly its comments from parents on *Yelp*, to conclude that controlled choice has unintended consequences segregation. Once again, the writer is focusing on outcomes other than the effect of a policy (this time, controlled choice) on segregation. Jefferson County Public Schools (Louisville) has operated under a controlled choice policy for decades, and empirical evidence demonstrates that it has consistently been one of the nation’s most integrated school districts despite high levels of residential segregation.<sup>9</sup> Though Scafidi holds up research conducted by Siegel-Hawley to indicate that school segregation in Louisville has increased slightly in recent years, his statements ignore the broader context for her conclusions. Siegel-Hawley’s article explicitly links Louisville’s metro-wide controlled choice plan to long-term, meaningful school desegregation, as well as declines in housing segregation.<sup>10</sup> The uptick in school segregation occurred in the aftermath of a Supreme Court decision limiting the way the district could consider race in student assignment, which resulted in considerable modifications to the controlled choice policy. Louisville now operates under a geography-based controlled choice plan. While research on the effectiveness of the new geography-based controlled choice plans is limited, one study found that they can help to maintain racially diverse schools, just not quite as much as a race-conscious plan that focused on the individual race of a student would.<sup>11</sup>

The upshot here is that controlled choice embedded with civil rights considerations has often been a successful tool for desegregation, in contrast to Dr. Scafidi's claims that such approaches would undermine desegregation.<sup>12</sup> Relatedly, his claims that "mandating equality" exacerbates segregation ignores the fact that few if any contemporary school integration programs, including controlled choice, "mandate equality."<sup>13</sup> School integration today is largely a choice-based affair designed to incentivize integration, rather than to reassign large numbers of students as "mandatory desegregation" plans did during the civil rights era. His claims must also be set alongside research showing that mandatory desegregation plans extending across city-suburban areas have been linked to more stable diversity, lower levels of school segregation and more rapid declines in housing segregation than mandatory plans limited to central cities.<sup>14</sup> In other words, the more far-reaching and comprehensive the plan, the more stable and lasting the school integration.

**Scafidi's Statement of Our Claims, #6: "*The Integration Anomaly* ignores the role of transportation in promoting school integration under school choice programs."**

The author writes in his response, "A better solution to promote integration and other outcomes would be to give every parent the agency and means to choose the schools that best meet their children's needs. Parents would be able to choose among public and private schools. Schools would be allowed to differentiate their offerings—giving parents a reason other than peer quality for which to sort among schools."

Obviously, a key part of providing agency to all parents is to offer free transportation. Without it, many families with one or no car and/or working difficult hours will not be able to access a school of choice. Dr. Scafidi raises the issue of cost as a barrier to providing free transportation to schools of choice, which we find interesting given his unqualified support for voucher programs that would necessarily be very expensive if they were to give parents a choice among all of a community's private schools.

It is also worth noting that the latter part of the above quote comes very close to describing magnet schools, choice programs originally designed to further integration.<sup>15</sup> The relationship between integration and magnet schools is strengthened by the presence of diversity goals, the provision of free transportation and extensive outreach.<sup>16</sup> Here again, the author fails to consider evidence about the importance of including civil rights considerations in the design of choice.

**Scafidi's Statement of Our Claims, #7-9: "Those interested in promoting integration should first focus on improving integration across neighborhoods through housing reforms." "My report will "prompt the reader to incorrectly assume that housing integration policies will have little**

**bearing on school segregation.” and “*The Integration Anomaly* ignores how and why parents choose schools.”**

First, we did not advocate for any particular order in which school and housing integration policy should be implemented. Instead, we suggested that they should be considered together. Second, we based our concern on the single lever—universal school choice—that Dr. Scafidi identified as a prescription for remedying school segregation, but which the relevant literature suggests will only further school segregation patterns. School segregation will be most effectively tackled through coordinated efforts between the school and housing sectors. Third, and finally, we contend that universal school choice is not an appropriate tool for addressing school segregation, given the extensive literature, reviewed here, in our response, and elsewhere on choice, segregation and how and why parents choose schools.

For this reason, in addition to serious concerns about the methodology used to justify the introduction of universal school choice, we stand by our original conclusion: *The Integration Anomaly* relies on arguments driven by ideology, not evidence.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> In addition to the RAND, Bifulco & Ladd, and Renzulli & Evans studies that Scafidi cited—all of which find charters to be segregative—other literature analyzing student-level transfers to charter schools support this conclusion. See Garcia, D. R. (2008). The impact of school choice on racial segregation in charter schools. *Educational Policy*, 22, 805-829.

Weiher, G. R., & Tedin, K. L. (2002). Does choice lead to racially distinctive schools? Charter schools and household preferences. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 21(1), 79-92.

Ni, Y. (2012). The sorting effect of charter schools on student composition in traditional public schools. *Educational Policy*, 26, 215-242.

Kotok, S., Frankenberg, E., Schafft, K., Mann, B., & Fuller, E. (2015, online first). School choice, racial segregation, and poverty concentration: Evidence from Pennsylvania charter school transfers. *Educational Policy*.

Stein, M. L. (2015). Public school choice and racial sorting: An examination of charter schools in Indianapolis. *American Journal of Education*, 121(4), 597-627.

For a summary, see Rotberg, I., (2014). Charter schools and the risk of increased segregation. *Phi Delta Kappan* 95(5), 26-31.

<sup>2</sup> Ladd, H., Clotfelter, C. & Holberin, J. (2015). The growing segmentation of the charter school sector in North Carolina. NBER Working Paper No. 21078, accessed 1/23/16 at <http://www.nber.org/papers/w21078>.

<sup>3</sup> It is unclear why he seemingly only focused on vouchers as school choice programs. Not only would charter schools be part of this discussion but so too would open enrollment policies that permit choice within or across districts. Although both allow only choice of public schools, they are more universal in nature and have been around longer than voucher programs.

<sup>4</sup> There are relatively few voucher programs in existence, particularly for an extended period, making it very difficult to ascertain effects on segregation, and most have had tight eligibility guidelines that make inferences to a larger universal type of school choice program a bit dubious. For this reason, we focused on his analysis of the charter school literature since that seemed to be a more apt comparison.

<sup>5</sup> He also describes voucher programs' effects on political tolerance, which as we noted, is not the focus of the report.

<sup>6</sup> Chakrabarti, R. (n.d.). *Do vouchers lead to sorting under random private school selection? Evidence from the Milwaukee voucher program*, accessed 1/20/16 at: [http://www.vanderbilt.edu/schoolchoice/documents/vouchers\\_sorting.pdf](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/schoolchoice/documents/vouchers_sorting.pdf).

A recent analysis of Louisiana Scholarship Program found that those using their voucher were less disadvantaged than all voucher applicants. See Abdulkadiroglu, A., Pathak, P. & Walters, C. (2015). *School vouchers and student achievement: First-year evidence from the Louisiana scholarship program*, NBER Working Paper 21839, accessed 1/21/16 at: <http://papers.nber.org/tmp/68865-w21839.pdf>. The analysis also found that private schools receiving voucher students in Louisiana had significantly higher percentages of black students and declining enrollments. Since the vast majority of voucher recipients are black, this may not help to mitigate segregation.

<sup>7</sup> Fairlie, R. (2006). Racial segregation and private/public school choice, *NCPE Working Research Publication Series*, accessed 1/21/16 at: [http://www.ncspe.org/publications\\_files/OP124.pdf](http://www.ncspe.org/publications_files/OP124.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> Alves, M. & Willie, C. (1987). Controlled choice assignments: A new approach to desegregation," *Urban Review* 19, 67-86.

Rossell, C. (1995). Controlled-choice desegregation plans: Not enough choice, too much control? *Urban Affairs Review*, 31, 43-76.

Kahlenberg, K. (2011). Socioeconomic school integration: Preliminary lessons from more than 80 districts," in Frankenberg, E. & DeBray, E., eds., *Integrating Schools in a Changing Society: New Policies and Legal Options for a Multiracial Generation*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 167-86; Chavez, L. & Frankenberg, E. (2009). *Integration Defended* (Los Angeles: UCLA Civil Rights Project).

<sup>9</sup> See Rowley, K., & McNeill, S. (2015). *The reciprocal relationship associated with school & residential diversity: A new test of perpetuation theory*. Chicago, IL: AERA annual meeting. The paper provides a description of integration levels in JCPS. In Frankenberg's analysis of JCPS's new controlled choice policy (forthcoming) she finds high levels of residential segregation using multiple measures to analyze segregation of children in the county. In fact, in this analysis, using students' application data, she illustrates that JCPS assignments under controlled choice are more integrative than would be

assignments if every student's first choice of school were granted (assuming no limitations due to capacity).

<sup>10</sup> Siegel-Hawley, G. (2013). City lines, county lines, color lines: An analysis of school and housing segregation in four southern metros, 1990–2010, *Teachers College Record*, 115, 1–45.

<sup>11</sup> Richards, R., Stroub, K., J. Vasquez Heilig & Voloninno, M. (2012). Achieving diversity in the *Parents Involved* era: Evidence for geographic plans in metropolitan areas, *Berkeley Journal of African American Law and Policy*, 14, 65–94.

<sup>12</sup> Additionally, Scafidi cites two places in his report to indicate that controlled choice leads to more segregation. In footnote 81, he references a study examining the segregation of low-achieving students in NYC, finding that these students tended to be matched to lower-performing schools—a conclusion the authors say was driven in part by the fact that low-achieving students selected schools with lower student performance. (See Nathanson, L., Corcoran, S. & Baker-Smith, C. (2013). High school choice in NYC: A report on the school choices and placements of low-achieving students. *The Research Alliance for New York City Schools*. Accessed 1/22/16 at:

[http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/research\\_alliance/publications/hs\\_choice\\_low\\_achieving\\_students](http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/research_alliance/publications/hs_choice_low_achieving_students)). This suggests that expanding choice and eliminating any type of control may only exacerbate segregation by achievement even though the report does not examine whether findings for achievement hold for student race. The authors of the report also note that although there is “universal” choice within the district, as a practical matter, students’ choices reflect geographic constraints.

<sup>13</sup> Moreover, one of the two articles Scafidi cites as support, by Sarah Reber, found that white declines mitigated approximately only 1/3 of the desegregations—or, a minority of the overall impact. As Scafidi himself admits, and as Gary Orfield also shows, these white declines were happening everywhere. See Orfield, G. (2001). Metropolitan school desegregation: Impacts on metropolitan society. In Powell, J. & Kay, J. (Ed.), *In pursuit of a dream deferred: Linking housing and education policy*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.

<sup>14</sup> Orfield, G. (2001). Metropolitan school desegregation: Impacts on metropolitan society. In Powell, J. & Kay, J. (Ed.), *In pursuit of a dream deferred: Linking housing and education policy*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Orfield, M. (2015). *Milliken, Meredith and Metropolitan Segregation*. *UCLA Law Review* 364.

<sup>15</sup> Steele, L. & Levine, R. (1994). Educational innovations in multiracial contexts: the growth of magnet schools in American education” (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education); Steele, L. & Eaton, M. (1996). *Reducing, eliminating, and preventing minority isolation in American schools: The impact of the Magnet Schools Assistance Program* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education); Christenson, B., Eaton, M. Garet, L. Miller, H. Hikowa & P. DuBois, (2003). *Evaluation of the Magnet Schools Assistance Program*. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education); Frankenberg, E. & Le, C. (2009). The post-Seattle/Louisville Challenge: Extra-legal obstacles to integration,” *Ohio State Law Journal*, 69, 1015–72.

<sup>16</sup> Siegel-Hawley, G. & Frankenberg, E. (2013). Designing choice: Magnet school structures and racial diversity, In Orfield, G. & Frankenberg, E., *Educational delusions?: Why choice can deepen inequality and how to make schools fair* (Berkeley, CA: UC Press).