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Research Brief

School Integration and K-12 Educational Outcomes: A Quick Synthesis of Social Science Evidence

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Teachers, curricula, and pedagogy are essential components of opportunities to learn, but they are not the only important ones. The social organization of schools and classrooms also contributes to the quality of educational experiences.¹ Whether a school is racially and socioeconomically (SES) diverse or segregated makes a critical difference for K-12 achievement across the curriculum: The

preponderance of high quality social science research published since the late 1980s is clear and consistent regarding these effects of school racial and SES composition on K-12 educational outcomes.² Students who attend racially and socioeconomically diverse schools are more likely:

- To achieve higher test scores and better grades,³

- 1 The research reported in this essay is supported by grants from the American Sociological Association, the National Science Foundation, and the Poverty & Race Research Action Council. This essay reports the results of a comprehensive investigation and review of the social, educational, and behavioral science literatures regarding the relationship of school racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic composition to school outcomes across the life course. Detailed abstracts of the research synthesized in this document are archived in a searchable database at: <http://spivack.org> Direct all correspondence to RoslynMickelson@unc.edu.
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- To graduate from high school⁴, and
- To attend and graduate from college⁵

compared with their otherwise comparable peers who attend schools with high concentrations of low income and/or disadvantaged minority youth.

Other specific findings from the research include:

- Attending a diverse school promotes achievement across the curriculum in

mathematics, science, language and reading.⁶

- Benefits accrue to students in all grades, but most markedly those in middle and high schools.⁷
- Students from all racial and SES backgrounds can benefit from diverse schools—including middle-class whites—although low-income disadvantaged minority youth benefit the most from attending diverse schools.⁸

note 3 continued

science research on school diversity and educational outcomes. *Ohio State Law Journal*, 69, 1173–1228; Mickelson, R. A., Bottia, M., & Lambert, R. (2013). "A meta-regression analysis of the effects of school and classroom composition on mathematics outcomes," *Review of Educational Research*, 83: 121-158; Mickelson, R. A., Bottia, M., Larimore, S., & Lambert, R. (2015). Does school racial composition matter for achievement: findings from metaregression analyses of the effects of school racial and ethnic composition on K-12 reading and mathematics test scores since 1990." In Erica Frankenberg, (Ed). *Education and Civil Rights: Obstacles and Opportunities for Supporting Racial Diversity and Equity across the Educational Pipeline* (forthcoming); Mickelson, R., & Bottia, M. (2010). Integrated education and mathematics outcomes: A synthesis of social science research. *North Carolina Law Review*, 87, 993–1089; Mickelson, R., & Nkomo, M. (2012). Integrated schooling, life course outcomes, and social cohesion in multi-ethnic democratic societies. *Review of Research in Education*, 36, 197–238; Muller, C., Riegle-Crumb, C., Schiller, K., Wilkinson, L., & Frank, K. (2010). Race and academic achievement in racially diverse high schools: Opportunity and stratification. *Teachers College Record*, 112(4): 1038–1063; Palardy, G. J. (2013). High school socioeconomic segregation and student attainment. *American Educational Research Journal*, 50(4), 714–754; Rumberger, R., & Palardy, G. (2005). Does segregation still matter? The impact of student composition on academic achievement in high school. *Teachers College Record*, 107, 1999–2045; Ryabov, I., & Van Hook, J. (2007). School segregation and academic achievement among Hispanic children. *Social Science Research*, 36, 767–788; Vigdor, J., & Ludwig, J. (2008). Segregation and the test score gap. In K. Magnuson, & J. Waldfogel (Eds.), *Steady Gains and Stalled Progress* (pp. 181–211). New York, NY: Russell Sage.

- 4 Ibid, footnote 3; Saatcioglu, A. (2010). The hidden value of school desegregation: Disentangling school- and student-level effects of desegregation and resegregation on the dropout problem in urban high schools: Evidence from the Cleveland Municipal School District, 1977-1998. *Teachers College Record*, 112, 1391–1442; Swanson, C. (2005). Who graduates in the South? Retrieved from <http://www.urban.org/publications/900817.html>
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- 6 Ibid, footnote 3
- 7 Ibid, footnote 3
- 8 Brown-Jeffy, 1997, *ibid*; Garda, R. (2011). White interest in school integration. *Florida Law Review*, 63, 605. Brief of 553, 2007; Clayton, J. (2011). Changing diversity in schools: The impact on elementary student performance and achievement. *Education and Urban Society*. 43(6), 671-695; Mickelson & Nkomo, 2012 *ibid*; Page, S. (2008). *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools and Societies*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; Siegel-Hawley, G. (2013). How non-minority students also benefit from racially diverse schools. Research Brief No. 8. The National Coalition on School Diversity. www.school-diversity.org.

- Importantly, there is no evidence that integrated schooling harms any student group.⁹

Moreover, diverse K-12 schools foster other positive outcomes that are integral links in the adult life-course trajectory. In addition to achievement, the positive short-term nonacademic outcomes of diverse K-12 schooling include:

- A reduction in prejudice and fears.¹⁰

- Increases in cross-racial trust and friendships.¹¹
- Enhanced capacity for multicultural navigation.¹²
- Avoidance of the juvenile justice system.¹³

These benefits foster highly desirable long-term outcomes for adults such as:

- Greater educational and occupational attainment.¹⁴

- 9 Ibid, footnote 8. The evidence of academic benefits is weakest for Asian and Latino immigrant students who appear to benefit from attending school with their coethnics, most likely because of concentrations of ESL youth trigger language services that, in turn, support achievement.
- 10 Braddock, J. H., III, & Gonzales, A. D. C. (2010). Social isolation and social cohesion: The effects of K-12 neighborhood and school segregation on intergroup orientations. *Teachers College Record*, 12, 1631-1653.; Davies, K., Tropp, L. R., Aron, A., Pettigrew, T. F., & Wright, S. C. (2011). Cross-group friendships and intergroup attitudes: A meta-analytic review. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 15, 332-351; Pettigrew, T. F., & Tropp, L. R. (2006). A meta-analytic test of intergroup contact theory. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 90, 751-783.; Tropp, L. R., & Prenovost, M. (2008). The role of intergroup contact in predicting children's interethnic attitudes: Evidence from meta-analytic and field studies. In S. R. Levy & M. Killen (Eds.), *Intergroup Attitudes and Relations in Childhood Through Adulthood* (pp. 236-248). New York, NY: Oxford University Press; Stearns, E. (2010). Long-term correlates of high school racial composition: Perpetuation theory reexamined. *Teachers College Record*, 112, 1654-1678.
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- 12 Carter, P. (2005). *Keepin' It Real*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press; Carter, P. (2012). *Stubborn Roots. Race, Culture, and Inequality in U.S. and South African Schools*. New York: Oxford University Press; Wells, A. S., Holmes, J. J., Revilla, A. T., & Atanda, K. (2009). *Both Sides Now: The Story of School Desegregation's Graduates*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- 13 Billings, S., Deming, D., & Rockoff, J. (2013). School segregation, educational attainment and crime: Evidence from the end of busing in Charlotte-Mecklenburg. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* (2013)doi: 10.1093/qje/qjt026; Consolidated brief of Joseph E. Brann, Daniel J. Coulombe, Edward F. David, Ronald Davis, and Darrel Stephens as amici curiae in support of respondents *Parents involved in community schools v. Seattle School District No. 1*, 551 U.S. 701 (2007); Jencks, C., & Mayer, S. (1990). The social consequences of growing up in a poor neighborhood. In L. E. Lynn Jr. & M. McGeary (Eds.), *Inner-city Poverty in the United States* (pp.111-186). Washington, DC: National Academies Press; Johnson, 2011; LaFree, G., & Arum, R. (2006). The impact of racially inclusive schooling on adult incarceration rates among U.S. cohorts of African Americans and Whites since 1930. *Criminology*, 44, 73-103; Weiner, D., Lutz, B., & Ludwig, J. (2009). The effects of school desegregation on crime (NBER Working Paper No. 15380). Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.
- 14 Ashenfelter, O., Collins, W., & Yoon, A. (2006). Evaluating the role of Brown v. Board of Education in school equalization, desegregation, and the income of African Americans. *American Law and Economics Review*, 8, 213-248; Boozer, M., Krueger, A. B., & Wolkon, S. (1992). Race and school quality since Brown v. Board of Education (Working Paper No. 4109). Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research; Card, D., & Krueger, A. (1996). School resources and student outcomes: An overview of the literature and new evidence from North and South Carolina. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 10, 31-50; Card, D., & Krueger, A. (1992). School quality and black-white relative earnings: A direct assessment. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 107, 151-200. Gamoran, A., Co Guryan, J. (2004). Desegregation and black dropout rates. *American Economic Review*, 94, 919-914.; Johnson, R.C. (2011). Long-run impacts of school desegregation & school quality on adult attainments. National Bureau of Economic Research. Working Paper 16664.

- Workplace readiness for the global economy.¹⁵
- Adult cross-racial friendships.¹⁶
- Choice of integrated neighborhoods¹⁷
- Democratic values and attitudes¹⁸
- Avoidance of the adult criminal justice system.¹⁹

These long-term outcomes help build civic capacity in communities and are essential building

blocks of social cohesion, a quality increasingly vital to a vigorous, just, multiethnic, democratic society.

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- 19 *Ibid*, footnote 13

For more information on the National Coalition on School Diversity, go to www.school-diversity.org