Contents

Kahlenberg.indb ix 2/3/12 4:57 PM

1

Introduction:

Socioeconomic School Integration

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Almost fifty years ago, the federally authorized Coleman Report—which is "widely regarded as the most important educational study of the twentieth century"[1]—found that the most powerful predictor of academic achievement is the socioeconomic status of a child's family, and the second most important predictor is the socioeconomic status of the classmates in her school. In other words, being born poor imposes a disadvantage; but attending a school with large numbers of low-income classmates presents a second, independent, challenge.

Until very recently, the second finding, about the importance of reducing concentrations of school poverty, has been consciously ignored by policymakers, despite publication of study after study that confirmed Coleman's findings.[2] And in Washington, D.C., to this day, the education debate has centered on trying to "fix" high-poverty schools by investing greater resources into them, paying educators more to teach in them, or turning them into charter schools.

But in recent years, across the country, a number of local school districts have quietly begun pursuing a promising strategy to reduce the proportion of

Kahlenberg.indb 1 2/3/12 4:57 PM

high-poverty schools altogether by integrating students from rich and poor families. These efforts at socioeconomic school integration seek to avoid the problems associated with compulsory busing from the 1970s by relying primarily on voluntary choice, using integration incentives such as magnet schools. The number of such districts employing socioeconomic integration has risen from just a few a decade ago to more than eighty today, educating some four million students. The districts are large (Chicago, Illinois) and small (Burlington, Vermont); northeastern (Amherst, Massachusetts), southern (Jefferson County, Kentucky), western (San Diego, California), and midwestern (Omaha, Nebraska). (See the Appendix for a full list.) Districts measure socioeconomic status by looking at a student's eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch, or by examining census data, including such factors as parental education, single-parent household status, and median income.

Four forces appear to be driving the socioeconomic integration movement. First, as a matter of law, integrating by socioeconomic status offers substantial advantages over integrating by race. In 2007, the U.S. Supreme Court restricted the ability of school districts to use race as a factor in student assignment in the cases of *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1* and *Meredith v. Jefferson County Board of Education*.[3] When the Supreme Court struck down racial integration plans in Seattle and Louisville, many districts seeking to preserve racial diversity turned to socioeconomic plans as a legally bulletproof way of achieving diversity without using race per se. In 2008, the *New York Times Magazine* called socioeconomic plans "The Next Kind of Integration."[4]

Second, districts, under increasing pressure to raise the achievement of low-income and minority students, are beginning to heed the evidence suggesting that one of the most effective ways to do so is to give low-income and working-class students a chance to attend predominantly middle-class schools. Although the media shower tremendous attention on high-poverty public schools or charter schools that have positive results (such as KIPP), the fact remains that it is extremely difficult to make high-poverty schools work on a system-wide basis. According to research by the University of Wisconsin's Douglas Harris, middle-class schools are twenty-two times as likely to be high performing as high-poverty schools.[5] Likewise, on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, low-income fourth grade students given the chance to attend more-affluent schools in math are two years ahead of low-income students stuck in high-poverty schools.[6]

Kahlenberg.indb 2 2/3/12 4:57 PM

The reasons for better performance are straightforward. Low-income students in middle-class schools are, on average, surrounded by peers who are more academically engaged and less likely to act out than those in high-poverty schools; a community of parents who are able to be more actively involved in school affairs and know how to hold school officials accountable; and stronger teachers who have high expectations for students.[7]

Third, in an era of tight budgets, some school districts appear to be attracted to socioeconomic integration as a more cost-effective means of raising student achievement than pouring additional dollars into high-poverty schools. As is outlined below in further detail, socioeconomic integration is highly cost-effective.[8] In North Carolina, for example, Charlotte-Mecklenburg has sought to raise achievement through an innovative Pre-K program and extra expenditures in high-poverty schools; by contrast, Wake County, North Carolina, has sought to raise achievement through socioeconomic integration. Both had measures of success, but according to a study by the Center for American Progress, Wake County's integration approach was more cost effective.[9]

Fourth, the problem of poverty concentrations is growing, and the type of district grappling with the issue is no longer confined to those in urban areas. According to the U.S. Department of Education's *Condition of Education,* 47 percent of elementary school students now attend majority low-income schools, and the proportion of high-poverty schools has grown from 34 percent in 1999 to 47 percent in 2008.[10] A 2010 Brookings Institution report, "The Suburbanization of Poverty," found that in the nation's largest metropolitan areas, more poor people live in large suburbs than in their primary cities.[11]

With the number of school districts integrating by socioeconomic status growing, The Century Foundation thought it would be appropriate to assemble leading scholars to analyze in further detail this new approach to narrowing the achievement gap.[12] In particular, this volume seeks to analyze the benefits, costs, logistics, and politics of socioeconomic school integration, as well as its relevance to ongoing policy debates about turnaround schools and charters.

Part I of this volume asks: Do students learn more in socioeconomically integrated schools—and Pre-K programs—than in high-poverty institutions? What are the financial costs of integration programs, and do the benefits outweigh the expense? If so, by how much?

In Part II, we ask: Is socioeconomic integration logistically and politically feasible? What proportion of high-poverty schools (those with more

than 50 percent of students receiving subsidized lunch) could be reduced through intradistrict integration? What proportion through interdistrict integration? Are there more affluent, higher-performing public schools within reasonable driving distance that have space to accept low-income transfer students? If logistically feasible, is socioeconomic integration politically viable? Do some approaches make integration more politically palatable than others?

Finally, in Part III, we examine the relevance of socioeconomic integration strategies being pursued by states and localities to ongoing policy debates in Washington, D.C., where the issue of integration remains largely off the table. Should the effort to turn around the nation's lowest-performing schools incorporate the lessons of socioeconomic integration programs? Would the burgeoning charter school movement benefit from taking affirmative steps to promote economic diversity?

Part I: The Benefits and Costs of Socioeconomic Integration

The volume begins with a chapter by Heather Schwartz of the RAND Corporation, which analyzes the educational outcomes of low-income elementary school students who had access to a wide variety of neighborhoods and schools in Montgomery County, Maryland, a diverse and high-achieving district outside of Washington, D.C. The study, when first released in October 2010, was featured on the front page of the *Washington Post,* and later in a column in the *New York Times*.[13]

Schwartz's research takes advantage of a rare opportunity to compare two education approaches.[14] On the one hand, the Montgomery County school district has invested substantial extra resources in its lowest-income schools to employ a number of innovative educational approaches. On the other hand, the county also has a longstanding inclusionary housing policy that allows low-income students to live in middle- and upper-middle-class communities and attend fairly affluent schools.

Thus, Montgomery County offers an interesting experiment: Do low-income students perform better in higher-poverty schools that receive greater resources, or in more-affluent schools with fewer resources? Which matters more for low-income students: extended learning time, lower class size, and intensive teacher development programs—all made available in Montgomery County's higher-poverty schools—or the types of advantages usually associated with wealthier schools, such as positive peer role models, active parental communities, and strong teachers?

Schwartz's results are unmistakable: low-income students attending lower-poverty elementary schools (and living in lower-poverty neighborhoods) significantly outperformed low-income elementary students who attend higher-poverty schools with state of the art educational interventions. By the end of elementary school, Schwartz finds, students living in public housing who attended the lower-poverty schools cut their initial, sizable math achievement gap with non-poor students in the district by half. For reading, it was cut by one-third. In math, students in public housing achieved at 0.4 of a standard deviation higher in more affluent schools than less-affluent ones, which is substantially larger than the 0.1 effects size often found for educational interventions. The study did not specifically measure the effect of the inclusionary housing program on the achievement of middle-class students, but Montgomery County's non-poor students are among the highest-achieving in the state and the nation.

What is particularly remarkable about the comparative success of students in public housing attending Montgomery County's more-affluent schools is they were not besting students stuck in lousy schools but rather students in schools that saw improvement. Indeed, the school system's interventions in its less-affluent schools, have been generally effective, and widely lauded. Under the leadership of then-Superintendent Jerry Weast, school officials divided county schools in two roughly equal groups—more-affluent "green zone" elementary schools and less-affluent "red zone schools"—and then poured an extra $2,000 per student into red zone schools, much to the chagrin of many wealthy parents. As Stacey Childress, Denis Doyle, and David Thomas write in their 2009 book, *Leading for Equity,* Weast's strategies helped decrease the achievement gap with whites in third grade reading from 35 percentage points in 2003 to 19 points in 2008 for African Americans, and from 43 points to 17 points for Hispanics. "Improvements of this magnitude in a district of this size in so little time are rare in public education," they wrote.[15] Schwartz's research confirms that students in Montgomery County's red zone schools had higher performance on state tests than students in demographically similar schools statewide.

The success of this red zone/green zone intervention deserves acclaim. But it was Montgomery County's "inclusionary zoning" policy, long advocated by researchers such as David Rusk, that had a far more pronounced positive educational effect. Under a policy adopted in the early 1970s, developers of large subdivisions are required to set aside between 12 percent and 15 percent of units for low-income and working-class

families. The housing authority purchases up to one-third of the inclusionary zoning homes to operate as public housing apartments that are scattered throughout the county. Families eligible for public housing enter a lottery and are randomly assigned to public housing apartments.

Schwartz's study traces the academic progress of 850 students in public housing in red zone and green zone elementary schools between 2001 and 2007. The average family income of these students was $21,047, and 87 percent were from female-headed households. By race, the student population was 72 percent African American, 16 percent Hispanic, 6 percent Asian, and 6 percent white.

The study has national significance not only because it found a very large longitudinal effect from economic integration, but also because it helps answer a question about whether the superior performance of low-income students in more-affluent schools nationwide is simply an artifact of self-selection. We know that low-income students in more-affluent schools routinely outperform low-income students in high-poverty schools, but researchers wondered: Might the result reflect the high level of motivation among families who scrape to get their children into good schools? Schwartz's study controls for that factor by comparing students whose families were assigned by lottery into red zone and green zone schools. (And, unlike research based on charter school lotteries, the attrition rate in Montgomery County public housing is extremely low.) Professors Jeffrey Henig and Henry Levin, who advised Schwartz in her research as part of a dissertation at Columbia University, applaud her "rigorous" analysis of "a unique and original data set."[16]

On the surface, Schwartz's study would seem to contradict results from a federal housing income integration program known as Moving to Opportunity (MTO), which saw few academic gains for children. But MTO involved students who moved to schools that were mostly still high poverty, with an average free and reduced-price lunch population of 67.5 percent (compared to a control group attending schools with 73.9 percent of students receiving subsidized lunches). The Montgomery County experiment allowed low-income students to attend some very-low-poverty schools, similar to the wildly successful Gautreaux program in Chicago.[17] Schwartz found the achievement benefits extended to students in public housing attending schools with up to 30 percent low-income student populations.

Does this research suggest that 30 percent is a "tipping point," after which low-income students generally will cease to benefit from

economically integrated schooling? Schwartz concludes that it does not. The vast majority of the schools in Schwartz's sample had low-income populations of between 0 percent and 60 percent. Because other research has found that the negative effects of concentrated poverty are compounded in very-high-poverty schools, it may well be that low-income students in, say, 30 percent to 50 percent low-income schools perform better than students in 60 percent to 100 percent low-income schools, but Montgomery County does not have enough truly high-poverty schools to test the hypothesis.[18]

One interesting question raised by the study is to what extent students benefited from living in more-advantaged neighborhoods, compared with attending more-advantaged schools. Schwartz finds that roughly two-thirds of the benefit comes from the school, and one-third from the neighborhood.[19] This suggests there may considerable value in programs that integrate at the school level alone, though greater benefits clearly accrue from integration at both the neighborhood and school levels.

If socioeconomic integration shows such promise at the elementary school level, would students in Pre-K programs also benefit from socioeconomic integration? Very little research has been conducted to date on the issue, but in chapter 3, Jeanne Reid outlines the findings of her important new study, which draws on her dissertation at Teachers College, Columbia University. She concludes that socioeconomic integration can improve learning for students in early childhood educational settings, a finding that should make policymakers rethink the way we currently educate many students.

Socioeconomic integration in preschool is not a new concept. Edward Zigler, one of the founding fathers of the federal Head Start program, originally hoped it would be socioeconomically integrated, but his view did not prevail.[20] Unfortunately, today many public Pre-K models, including the federal Head Start program, employ explicit means testing that effectively promotes concentrations of poverty, which actually may limit the effectiveness of these interventions.

As Reid notes, however, today's push for universal Pre-K programs provides a fresh opportunity to try a new socioeconomically integrated model. For example, one study of 169 state-sponsored Pre-K classrooms found that half had 38 percent or fewer students from households at or below 150 percent of the poverty line.[21]

In her study, Reid examines the performance of 2,966 four-year-old students in 704 Pre-K classrooms located in eleven states. After

carefully controlling for a number of factors, including the individual socioeconomic status of student families, and the racial composition of the classroom, Reid finds that being in a classroom with an above-average socioeconomic composition had a positive impact on achievement in three areas: receptive language, expressive language, and math learning. (In a fourth area, social skills learning, socioeconomic composition did not have an impact, perhaps because of the subjective nature of the evaluation.)

The positive impact of being in a socioeconomically integrated preschool on growth in receptive language, expressive language, and math learning was telling, Reid says, especially because children in her study spent relatively little time in the preschool classroom itself. The average time between the fall and spring assessments, she notes, was five months, and more than half of the children attended half-day programs. These part-time students spent an average of just 2.7 hours per day in preschool, of which only 32 minutes were spent on language and literacy, and just 10 minutes on math.[22]

"Despite this limited exposure," Reid finds, socioeconomic classroom composition had an effect on receptive language, expressive language, and math learning "comparable in size to two other aspects of children's learning that we know from other research are very important: children's own SES [socioeconomic status] and instructional quality."[23] The socioeconomic composition of a preschool classroom, she concludes "was a significant and positive predictor" of learning.[24] This was true even though low-SES classrooms were twice as likely to offer meals, 1.4 times more likely to offer family services, and 1.9 times more likely to offer health services than high SES classrooms.[25]

Why did schoolchildren tend to make larger gains in more-affluent preschool classrooms? Reid finds that higher instructional quality in higher SES classrooms cannot fully explain the gains, and concludes that the impact of peers is likely to be important.

Reid finds that children benefit from moving from a below-average SES classroom to an above-average SES classroom, but what happens to the students in the more-affluent classrooms? Up to a point, the increasing presence of low-SES students actually increases receptive language learning in Pre-K classrooms, she finds. However, the benefits of socioeconomic integration dissipate as the SES for the classroom approaches the mean SES for all classrooms, so as a policy matter, "middle- and high-SES children should represent a majority of the children in the

classroom."[26] (In Reid's study, "middle-SES children" come from families with a mean income of $27,868 and mothers with a mean of 12.6 years of education.)

Overall, Reid's research on socioeconomic integration of Pre-K programs shows strikingly similar results to those found at the K–12 level. Controlling for individual family socioeconomic status, children's learning is greater in more-affluent Pre-K programs, even though special support services may be less prevalent. Increased teacher quality cannot fully explain the gains; peer effects seem to be significant. And the optimal mix is one that involves a majority of students who are middle- and high-SES.

Chapter 4 takes up the important issue—particularly in times of tight budgets—of whether socioeconomic school integration provides substantial "bang for the buck." Opponents of integration have long claimed that money used to transport children to integrated schools should instead be devoted to classroom education. It is a nice political slogan, but as the Schwartz chapter demonstrates, integration can produce far better achievement gains than pouring extra funds into high-poverty schools. And, according to a new paper by Marco Basile, a former Century Foundation employee now pursuing a law degree and Ph.D. in history at Harvard University, the total public and private return on investment in socioeconomic integration appears to greatly exceed the costs.[27]

The McKinsey and Company consulting firm, as Basile notes, has found that "school spending in the United States is amongst the least cost-effective in the world,"[28] yet little attention has been paid to the question of whether our relatively high rates of economic school segregation play a role in this problem. Early in the tenure of the Obama administration, I met with a high-ranking education department official (who himself had worked at McKinsey), and he asked me whether anyone had performed a cost-benefit analysis on socioeconomic school integration. When I mentioned this question to some friends in the civil rights movement, they balked, suggesting that integration is a moral imperative that should not be subject to such analysis. But socioeconomic school integration is also an education reform strategy, which means its effectiveness needs to be gauged, and so Basile undertook what appears to be the first attempt nationally to quantify the costs and benefits of socioeconomic integration.

Given research findings that indicate most economic segregation occurs between districts rather than within them, Basile estimates the costs and benefits of a model in which two-way public school choice interdistrict

programs are enacted. Recognizing the political obstacles of integration under old-style compulsory busing plans, he examines the costs of programs that create incentives for middle-class families to participate voluntarily in integration: the creation of magnet schools in disadvantaged areas (which adopt special themes or pedagogical approaches) to attract middle-class students by choice; and a design for financial incentives to entice more-affluent schools to accept low-income transfer students voluntarily.

Rather than examining the effects of complete socioeconomic integration (which is probably unachievable), Basile's model looks at the effect of reducing socioeconomic segregation by one-half nationally—a level of integration enjoyed in many individual communities already.[29] He estimates that in order to cut economic segregation in half, one-fourth of low-income students would need to transfer to more affluent schools while one-fourth of more-affluent students would need to transfer to newly created magnet schools located in more-disadvantaged neighborhoods.[30]

Drawing upon a wide body of research, Basile estimates the costs of creating magnet programs with special themes and pedagogical approaches (transportation costs, special teacher training, and additional equipment) at roughly 10 percent greater than the costs of regular public school education.[31] Likewise, he estimates the cost of creating financial incentives to "magnetize" low-income students in order to make transfers attractive to middle-class schools at a 10 percent premium overall. (Because only one-fourth of low-income students would move to middle-class schools under the model, the effective funding bonus per low-income student is 40 percent, to be shared with all students in the receiving school.) This funding premium is far more generous than several existing metropolitan inter-district integration programs in places such as Boston and Hartford.[32] Averaged out over all pupils, Basile estimates the per pupil net present value of total costs over seven years of integrated schooling at $6,340.[33]

In measuring the benefits, Basile points to a comprehensive study of segregation and high school graduation rates, which suggests that decreasing socioeconomic segregation to one-half the national average is associated with a ten-percentage-point increase in high school graduation.[34] Basile examines the effects on increased high school graduation rates (as opposed, say, to increased academic achievement) because there is a much broader consensus among researchers about the economic benefits.[35] The net lifetime public benefits of having a student graduate high school are estimated at $209,200 in constant 2004 dollars, coming in the form of increased tax revenue due to greater earnings; decreased health

Kahlenberg.indb 10 2/3/12 4:57 PM

care spending, decreased criminal justice system costs, and decreased spending on welfare.[36]

Averaged out over all students, the public benefit per student is over $20,000, and the combined public and private benefits amount to about $33,000 per student, far exceeding the cost of $6,340 per student. Put differently, Basile estimates that the public return on investment in socioeconomic integration exceeds costs by a factor of 3.3 and the total return (public and private) exceeds costs by a factor of 5.2.[37] This type of return exceeds almost all other investments in education (private school vouchers, reduced class size, and improvements in teacher quality) with the exception of investments in very high quality early childhood education.[38]

Basile suggests his estimate probably undervalues the full benefits of socioeconomic integration, for a number of reasons. He uses a conservative estimate of the impact of socioeconomic integration on high school graduate rates; individual districts such as St. Louis and Hartford have seen larger rises in graduation than the ten-percentage-point increase Basile relies upon.[39] He employs conservative estimates of the economic benefits of high school graduation. He estimates only the benefits that magnet schools bring because of socioeconomic integration, excluding potential ancillary benefits from providing a closer fit between student interests and curriculum.[40] He does not count the civic benefits to our democracy of having more highly educated citizens; nor the benefits to the children of high school graduates in the form of improved life chances. And he does not count the benefits to the workplace of having employees who know how to get along with workers of different socioeconomic and racial backgrounds.[41]

In sum, rather than representing a diversion of funds to "busing" or transportation, spending that reduces socioeconomic school segregation, Basile concludes, is among the wisest possible investments in all of education.

Part II: The Logistics and Politics of Socioeconomic Integration

While socioeconomic integration is a good investment, is it logistically feasible, given the distances between rich and poor neighborhoods in America? And can socioeconomic integration be made politically palatable to middle-class Americans?

In chapter 5, educators Ann Mantil, Anne G. Perkins, and Stephanie Aberger address whether public policy can do much to reduce

socioeconomic segregation, asking the key logistical question: Is class segregation "an ugly but immutable reality," as some suggest?[42] They conclude it is not, though they acknowledge that the challenges are certainly significant. Today, Mantil, Perkins, and Aberger find, nearly 15 million American public elementary school students attend "high-poverty" schools, which they define as those in which a majority of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.[43] They point out that the percentage of high-poverty elementary schools has increased significantly, from 34 percent in 1999 to 47 percent in 2008. But in what appears to be the first national estimate of the viability of socioeconomic school integration, the authors conclude that "dramatic reductions in the number of high-poverty schools across the United States are within reach."[44]

The authors' study draws upon the National Center for Education Statistics' Common Core of Data from 2007–08 in forty-six states for which data are available. Their study focuses on students in public elementary schools, because subsidized lunch eligibility at that level is thought to be a more reliable indicator of true socioeconomic status than in middle and high schools, where students may avoid the program because they feel stigmatized when receiving free or reduced-price meals.[45] Mantil, Perkins, and Aberger draw several important conclusions.

First, they find there is "dramatic variation" in the presence of high-poverty schools by state, from just 4 percent of elementary schools in New Hampshire to 85 percent in Mississippi.[46] Significantly, the authors find a strong correlation between socioeconomic school segregation in a state and the size of the achievement gap between low-income and higher-income students. Examining achievement gaps on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) for math and reading in 2007 and 2009, the authors found "a strong positive relationship between the SES achievement gap and the degree of socioeconomic school segregation," ranging from a correlation of 0.64 to 0.74.[47]

Second, the authors find a strong relationship between race or ethnicity and attendance of high-poverty schools. Blacks and Latinos are twice as likely to attend high-poverty elementary schools as non-Hispanic whites. "While it is increasingly difficult in the United States to predict a family's income based on their race, more often than not one *can* predict whether a child attends a high-poverty school simply by knowing whether she is black, Latino, Asian, Native American, or white."[48]

Kahlenberg.indb 12 2/3/12 4:57 PM

Importantly, the authors found variation by state in the degree to which minority students were likely to attend high-poverty schools, and black and Latino students had smaller gaps with whites when they were less likely to be stuck in high-poverty school environments. Examining NAEP data, Mantil, Perkins, and Aberger find that "states with larger black-white and Latino-white gaps in high-poverty school enrollment tend to have larger achievement gaps," with "moderate to large correlations," ranging from 0.56 to 0.75.[49] While policymakers and analysts often point to different levels of performance of minority students in different states—and suggest that teacher practices and school leadership may be possible explanations[50]—variations in socioeconomic isolation, a factor not often mentioned, may play a significant role.

Third, the authors conclude that the potential for reducing the number of majority low-income schools through intradistrict solutions is relatively modest in most states. Overall, states could reduce the number of high-poverty schools by 5 percent with intradistrict strategies, benefitting 0.5 million students. Intradistrict efforts would have modest effects, the authors find, because most high-poverty schools are located in high-poverty districts. But in seven states—New Hampshire, Wyoming, Maryland, Utah, Nevada, North Dakota, and Virginia—intradistrict integration could reduce the number of high-poverty schools by more than 20 percent.[51]

Finally, the authors conclude that while intradistrict integration plans usually would have a modest effect, interdistrict integration efforts could have a very substantial impact in reducing the proportion of high-poverty schools in the United States. Inter-district racial or socioeconomic integration programs already exist in numerous jurisdictions, including Minneapolis, Omaha, Boston, Rochester, St. Louis, Hartford, Milwaukee, San Diego, and Bergen County, New Jersey, the authors note.[52]

To examine the potential impact of interdistrict integration plans, the authors examine six sample states—Massachusetts, Virginia, Colorado, Nebraska, Missouri, and Florida—that "represent a diverse cross-section in terms of enrollment, district size, population density, and student demographics."[53] In modeling the effects, they assume, rather conservatively, that transfers would be made only to contiguous school districts.[54] (In fact, many existing interdistrict integration plans, such as the Boston METCO program, involve students traveling farther distances to noncontiguous suburban districts.)

The authors conclude that the benefits of interdistrict programs range widely, from reducing the number of high-poverty schools by 7 percent in Florida to 52 percent in Nebraska. Virginia could see a 36 percent reduction, Colorado and Massachusetts a 34 percent reduction each, and Missouri a 17 percent reduction.[55] Taking intra- and interdistrict strategies together in these six states could result in substantial reductions of high-poverty schools in five of those states. While Florida could see a relatively modest 13 percent reduction, two states could see a reduction of more than one-third (37 percent each in Missouri and Massachusetts), and three states could see a reduction of more than one-half (52 percent in Colorado, 58 percent in Nebraska, and 60 percent in Virginia).[56]

In sum, the authors conclude, a great deal could be done to reduce the proportion of high-poverty public elementary schools in the United States. Socioeconomic integration strategies, particularly those that aim to reduce interdistrict segregation, could "dramatically reduce the national number of high-poverty schools."[57]

Chapter 6, written by Meredith P. Richards, Kori Stroub, and Jennifer Jellison Holme, all of the University of Texas at Austin, takes a look at the logistics of interdistrict choice through a related lens: the feasibility of interdistrict transfers out of failing high-poverty schools under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).[58] In important ways, the work by Richards, Stroub, and Holme complements the analysis of the Mantil, Perkins, and Aberger study by examining key additional issues, such as whether there is space at transfer schools within a reasonable driving distance.

The right of students to transfer from "failing" Title I schools to attend a better-performing public school within their district was originally one of the most talked about provisions of NCLB. Many conservatives supported the provision as a way of promoting competition among schools. Meanwhile, some liberals supported the idea as a way of liberating low-income students from segregated high-poverty schools.

Today, the existing public school choice provision is widely seen as an example of one of the ways in which NCLB is "broken." Very few eligible students—fewer than 2 percent—take advantage of public school choice under NCLB, and the rates are lower among black and Hispanic students than white students.[59] Some believe that low transfer rates suggest that parents want neighborhood schools, even if those schools are weak. Education Secretary Arne Duncan has criticized "federally dictated . . .

school-transfer options" as doing little good.[60] But research by Richards, Stroub, and Holme suggests that low-income parents may fail to utilize transfer rights not because they are necessarily satisfied with their local school but because other schools within the district are not much better.

Using comprehensive data from the 2004–05 school year (the most recent year available), the authors examined 61,000 schools in forty-five states, educating 65 percent of the nation's students. They find that under current intradistrict choice policies, students in 94.5 percent of failing schools have "no meaningful access to higher-performing schools," because other schools in the district either do not perform better, or have no capacity for transfers.

One obvious solution—to allow students to cross school district lines to attend better-performing public schools—raises an empirical question: Is there space in suburban schools within a reasonable driving distance? A 2008 study published by Education Sector, a think tank that advocates charter schools and online learning, suggested that interdistrict choice would not help many students because of space and distance constraints.[61] But Richards, Stroub, and Holme point out that the study was deeply flawed by arbitrarily assuming that receiving schools could expand student populations by no more than 10 percent and that driving distances could not exceed twenty minutes. The latter assumption was undermined by evidence from existing programs in Boston, Hartford, and elsewhere that suggest that students are willing to travel substantially farther if what is at the end of the bus ride is sufficiently attractive. The 10 percent capacity assumption, Richards, Stroub, and Holme note, had no empirical basis whatsoever.

Richards and colleagues have produced a far more sophisticated analysis, drawing upon a "gravity model" used to predict traveling behavior and to model accessibility to such resources as grocery stores, bus stops, and health clinics. The gravity model considers both distance and the attractiveness of the destination. In the case of schools, the model suggests that families will be willing to travel farther for very high performing schools than those that are only marginally better than a sending school. In contrast to the earlier Education Sector study, Richards, Stroub, and Holme calculate school capacity not by assuming an arbitrary amount of space but by examining the actual student-teacher ratio in schools and considering a facility full when it reaches the seventy-fifth percentile student-teacher ratios for the state.[62]

Kahlenberg.indb 15 2/3/12 4:57 PM

Using this more sophisticated model, they find that interdistrict choice would vastly expand options for students in failing schools. Richards, Stroub, and Holme conclude: "Contrary to the findings of previous research, the current study finds than an NCLB interdistrict choice policy, if implemented nationally, has the potential to meaningfully expand access to higher-performing schools for students in over 80 percent of eligible sending schools."[63] The average number of slots available to students in struggling schools would increase by 128 percent. Most importantly, the average sending school's "accessibility value," a measure that incorporates both increased access to receiving schools and the comparative quality of those schools, would increase five-fold.[64]

Moreover, interdistrict choice would disproportionately benefit students in schools with high proportions of low-income and minority students, their research finds. For example, a school with a low-income population of 95 percent would see gain in access under interdistrict choice "more than twice as large" as a school in which 45 percent of students were low-income.[65] This finding obviously has important implications for socioeconomic school integration.

Of course, just because interdistrict choice is logistically feasible and educationally sound does not make it politically palatable. Upper-middle-class families, who have considerable political power, often purchase homes in a certain neighborhood with the idea of having their children attend the neighborhood school. Can integration be made politically palatable? What sort of incentives can be offered to encourage all families to see socioeconomic integration as beneficial?

Politics is the subject of chapter 7, written by Sheneka Williams of the University of Georgia. Williams conducted in-depth interviews in three communities that have pursued socioeconomic integration plans: Wake County (Raleigh), North Carolina; Jefferson County (Louisville), Kentucky; and Champaign, Illinois. While acknowledging the tough political challenges associated with integration policies, she draws important lessons about how the particular mechanics of integration plans can significantly enhance the political attractiveness of socioeconomic diversity policies.

The Wake County School District, which encompasses the city of Raleigh and the surrounding suburban areas, has received a great deal of media attention in recent years for the political controversy surrounding its socioeconomic integration plan. The eighteenth-largest school district nationally, Wake is the largest district in North Carolina, with more than 140,000 students. The 800-square-mile district was created in 1976 by

the merger of the Raleigh and suburban Wake school districts.[66] The district's student population is 50 percent white, 25 percent African American, 15 percent Latino, and 6 percent Asian, with 32 percent of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.[67]

In the early 1980s, Wake County adopted a voluntary racial integration plan with the goal that all schools should be between 15 percent and 45 percent black. In order to achieve integration largely through choice, almost all of the Raleigh schools were turned into magnets. In 2000, given legal concerns about the use of race, and a sense among school researchers that poverty concentrations were of great educational concern, Wake County shifted to a socioeconomic diversity plan, with a goal that all schools should not exceed student populations that were more than 40 percent low income.[68]

For many years, academic achievement rose, the program drew wide support, and pro-integration candidates continued to be elected to the school board.[69] But over time, Wake County became, in a sense, the victim of its own success. In part because the schools were highly regarded, Wake County's business climate thrived, new families moved to the area, and large numbers of students were added each year. In order to accommodate skyrocketing growth, increasing numbers of students were reassigned to fill new schools, generating anger among parents. Moreover, increasing numbers of families relocated from other areas of the country, and the newcomers did not fully understand the county's history of integration and its importance as an educational strategy. District officials, Williams notes, were "playing to a parade, and not a crowd."[70]

At the same time, the booming economy attracted a large influx of Latino students, many of them low-income. A relatively small presence in 2000, Latinos made up 15 percent of the student population by 2010, creating new challenges to maintaining the 40 percent low-income student cap in any given school.[71] Parental anger at the school district peaked when exploding growth led some families to have their children mandatorily assigned to schools with a staggered year-round calendar (rather than a traditional schedule with summers off) in order to make better use of building capacity.

In October 2009, with an influx of funding from the Koch brothers and other conservative interests, including the Tea Party, opponents of the socioeconomic integration plan gained a 5–4 majority on the school board and vowed to establish a system of neighborhood schools.[72] The majority did succeed in officially eliminating the 40 percent low-income

cap for schools, but it ran into major community resistance in efforts to establish a system of de facto segregated neighborhood schools.

Resistance to re-segregation, Williams notes, came from an interesting coalition of civil rights groups and teachers on the one hand, and white magnet school parents and business leaders on the other. Furthermore, critical centrist voters became disillusioned with the conservative school board majority following a series of events.

First was the resignation of superintendent Del Burns, who said that he could not, in good conscience, play a part in re-segregating Wake County schools. Then, when the school board moved to immediately reassign a small number of low-income and minority students, the NAACP filed a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights. An accreditation agency also began reviewing Wake County's status.

Civil rights groups organized protests at board meetings, which drew national attention, including a front page *Washington Post* story highlighting the turmoil. As Williams notes, television comedian Stephen Colbert ridiculed Wake County's board, suggesting, "What's the use of living in a gated community if my kids go to school and get poor all over them?" By 2011, a survey of local residents found that 51 percent of local residents viewed the school board unfavorably, compared with just 29 percent who viewed it favorably.[73]

The Chamber of Commerce, which supported integration as a way of strengthening schools and preparing employees to work with a diverse set of colleagues, commissioned a plan, released in February 2011, to use public school choice to accommodate growth and also produce diversity. The plan tweaked the earlier socioeconomic goal to employ, instead, diversity measured by academic achievement, a very close cousin of socioeconomic status. It was clear that business leaders did not appreciate national publicity suggesting that a world-class community was planning to consciously re-segregate its schools.

In the fall 2011 school board elections, Democrats swept into office, ousting the Republican school board chair who had led the effort for neighborhood schools. As of this writing, the Wake County situation is still in flux, but it appears that the school district is likely to embrace a third way. Eschewing both a continuation of integration by mandatory assignment and proposals to re-segregate through neighborhood schools, policymakers appear ready to pursue a hybrid: integration by achievement levels through school choice.[74]

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In contrast to Wake County, Williams writes, in Jefferson County (Louisville), Kentucky, a coalition of civil rights groups, teachers, and the business community organized early to support integration and thus avoid a conservative school board takeover.

Like Wake County schools, the Jefferson County schools, which educate 96,000 students, were created by a merger of city and suburban schools in the mid-1970s. After a period of court-ordered mandatory busing for racial desegregation, Jefferson County schools adopted a plan, in the mid-1990s, using magnet schools to create racial integration, with the goal that all schools should be between 15 percent and 50 percent black. In 2002, Williams notes, white parents sued, charging that the use of race in student assignment violated the Fourteenth Amendment's Equal Protection Clause; in 2007, the U.S. Supreme Court agreed.[75]

Jefferson County leaders did not give up on integration, however, and in 2008, the county adopted a new plan that emphasizes socioeconomic status, along with race, in student assignment. Instead of looking at the individual race or socioeconomic status of students, the county's plan looks at the geographic areas in which students live and labels them as either Area A (having a below-average income and education level, and above-average minority population) or Area B (the converse). In the plan, students choose the schools they want to attend, and county officials honor choices with an eye to having Area A students constitute between 15 percent and 50 percent of the student body.

In the 2010 school board elections, supporters of diversity feared they might face the same upheaval that Wake felt in its 2009 elections, but in fact a pro-integration school board majority remained in power. How was Jefferson County able to avoid most of the political turmoil associated with the Wake County plan? Williams suggests that teachers and the business community, cognizant of what had happened in Wake County, aggressively supported pro-diversity candidates with strong financial contributions. By emphasizing the choice mechanism, Jefferson County also avoided large-scale redistricting that so angered many Wake County parents. According to Williams, 80 percent of parents in Jefferson County favor retaining a diversity component in the student assignment plan.[76]

The third district studied by Williams—Champaign Unit 4 Schools in central Illinois—has seen the least amount of political resistance of all. Located in a college community that is sharply divided between blacks in

the north end and whites in the south end, Champaign educates 10,000 students. District-wide, 42 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.[77]

The district originally adopted a "controlled choice" plan for race, in which parents ranked their preferences among a variety of magnet schools and were assigned in compliance with fairness guidelines to ensure racial integration. In 2009, after a consent decree for racial integration was lifted, district officials shifted to a program of controlled choice based on socioeconomic status. Parents are now asked about such factors as family income, parental education, number of parents in the household, and number of children in the household. The goal is for schools to be within fifteen percentage points of the district-wide average for low-income students.[78] Significantly, Williams notes, "Champaign faced fewer political tensions than did Wake County or Jefferson County."[79] The use of choice, combined with magnet programs that give middle-class families an incentive to integrate, may have been particularly critical.

Looking broadly at the experience in Wake County, Jefferson County, and Champaign, Williams draws four lessons about how to make socioeconomic integration politically sustainable. First, public school choice is a far more popular way to promote integration than compulsory assignment. Choice gives parents a feeling of "ownership," and magnet school offerings provide students with special themes or pedagogical approaches to match their particular interests. As illustrated in Wake County, choice can also provide a much better way to accommodate rapid growth in student populations because schools can be filled through election rather than reassignment.

Choice and incentives can also make interdistrict integration more politically palatable. Strong financial incentives could encourage middle-class students to accept more low-income transfers. Just as the right kind of magnet themes or pedagogical approaches have successfully drawn affluent students into schools in tougher neighborhoods, programs that "magnetize" low-income students can overcome opposition to interdistrict choice. In the St. Louis area, for example, Republican suburban state legislators were among those who backed an interdistrict choice program that allowed substantial numbers of African-American students to attend suburban schools—bringing school funds with them in the bargain.[80]

Second, Williams suggests that constant communication on the part of school officials regarding the rationale for integration policies is critical, particularly in communities such as Wake County, which have seen

large increases in new families. Third, to be effective, civil rights groups should build strong alliances with other groups that support integration, including the business community, teachers, and magnet school parents. Finally, national leadership matters. Support from U.S. secretary of education Arne Duncan, and even the comedian Stephen Colbert, may have helped make a difference in turning the Wake County public against a school board seeking to re-segregate the public schools.

Part III: Socioeconomic Integration and the Washington, D.C., Policy Debate over Turnarounds and Charters

Finally, chapter 8 takes up the issue of how socioeconomic integration strategies might be used to address two current policy debates in Washington, D.C.: how to turnaround persistently failing schools, and how to increase the performance of charter schools.

Early in the Obama administration, Education Secretary Arne Duncan courageously took on the most important—and most difficult—problem in American education: turning around America's lowest-performing schools.[81] Duncan noted that for years districts allowed failing schools to slide, and he has called, instead, for "far-reaching reforms" that fundamentally change the culture in the country's worst five thousand schools.[82] Ironically, Duncan's approach, which focused almost entirely on changing the faculty and school governance, was itself too timid.

Duncan wrote in an *Education Week* piece, that in Chicago, "we moved the adults out of the building, kept the children there, and brought in new adults."[83] But the exclusive focus on changing the principal and teachers misses two-thirds of the larger school community—which also includes students and parents. This partial turnaround approach in Chicago was met with "mixed" results, education consultant Bryan Hassel told the *New York Times*.[84] The Civic Committee of the Commercial Club of Chicago noted in a 2009 report that "most students in Chicago Public Schools continue to fail."[85]

Changing the principal and teachers in a school is not enough, in part because it ignores the effects of socioeconomic segregation. As chapter 8 details, in high-poverty schools, a child is surrounded by classmates who are less likely to have big dreams, and, accordingly, are less academically engaged and more likely to act out and cut class. Classmates in high-poverty schools are more likely to move during the school year, creating disruption in the classroom; and less likely to have large vocabularies,

which in turn limits the ability of peers on the playground and in the classroom to learn new words.

As chapter 8 outlines, parents are also an important part of a school community. Students benefit when parents regularly volunteer in the classroom and know how to hold school officials accountable when things go wrong. Low-income parents, who may be working several jobs, may not own a car, and may have had a bad experience themselves as students, are four times less likely to be members of a PTA, and are only half as likely to volunteer.

The student and parent makeup of a school, in turn, profoundly affects the type of teachers who can be recruited. Polls consistently find that teachers care more about "work environment" than they do about salary. They care about school safety, whether they will have to spend large portions of their time on classroom management, and whether parents will make sure kids do their homework. That is why it is so difficult to attract and keep great teachers in high-poverty schools, even when bonuses are offered.

Chapter 8 outlines evidence that the most promising "turnaround" model is one that recognizes these realities and seeks to turn high-poverty schools into magnet schools that change not only the faculty but also the student and parent mix in the school. Failing schools can be shuttered and reopened with new themes and pedagogical approaches that attract new teachers and a mix of middle-class and low-income students. Meanwhile, some low-income students from the old school will be given the opportunity to fill the spots vacated by middle-income children who had been attending more-affluent schools.

A leading example comes, as noted earlier, from Wake County, North Carolina. As Gerald Grant notes in his important book, *Hope and Despair in the American City: Why There Are No Bad Schools in Raleigh,* Wake County provided virtually every Raleigh school with a special theme such as science and technology, arts and theater, and International Baccalaureate. Raleigh's inner-city schools, which had been marked by white flight, were soon filled with economically and racially diverse student bodies. Many of the schools had waiting lists.[86] To prevent the creation of enclaves of privilege, the Raleigh magnets are nonselective. The results have been very promising. Wake County, writes Grant, "reduced the gap between rich and poor, black and white, more than any other large urban educational system in America."[87]

Of course, there are plenty of examples of places where magnet schools have failed to attract middle-class families. The most famous is probably

the Kansas City high school that featured a $5 million swimming pool, an indoor track, and a model United Nations wired for language translation, yet failed to draw white middle-class students. But well-designed plans poll parents ahead of time and find out what sort of programs would be attractive to them. For example, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, which has a system of universal choice and seeks an economic balance among schools, officials turned the struggling, predominantly low-income Tobin school, located near a large low-income housing complex, into a Montessori school, which emphasizes student-directed learning in mixed-age classrooms. In the 2006–07 school year, Tobin had attracted only twelve first-choice applicants to fill sixty Pre-K and kindergarten seats. The next year, when it reopened as a Montessori, Tobin attracted 145 applicants, with twice as many middle-class as low-income students applying, says Michael Alves, who administers the student lottery.[88]

These types of successful magnet school turnaround efforts appear, finally, to have caught the attention of Washington policymakers. In October 2011, a major proposal in the U.S. Senate would include magnet schools as a turnaround school option.[89]

Using magnet themes to turn around failing high-poverty schools will not work everywhere. Some schools located in extremely dangerous neighborhoods may be unable to attract middle-class children. In those cases, efforts should be made to improve high-poverty schools. But the socioeconomic integration option can be pursued far more often than it currently is, and simply accepting segregation should be a last resort, not the first.

Likewise, the data on the damaging effects of socioeconomic segregation have direct relevance to the future of charter schools. While many educators stand in awe of the impressive efforts of a few efforts—like the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP)—to make high-poverty schools work, the fact is that the vast majority of high-poverty charters fail. While in theory charter schools, as schools of choice, could be more socioeconomically integrated than traditional public schools, in fact, they are more segregated. In the 2007–08 school year, 54 percent of charter school students were in high-poverty schools, compared with 39 percent of public school students. Meanwhile, 28 percent of charter school students were in extremely high-poverty schools (more than 75 percent low income) compared with 16 percent of regular public school students.[90] High concentrations of poverty may help explain why the most comprehensive study of charter schools, by the Stanford Center for Research on

Education Outcomes, found that only 17 percent of charter schools outperformed comparable traditional public schools in math, while 46 percent performed the same, and 37 percent performed worse.[91]

Even KIPP schools have succeeded only with self-selected groups of students who apply to, and persist in, a rigorous program. (In San Francisco-area KIPP schools, 60 percent dropped out.) The one time KIPP tried to educate every student in a public school catchment area—in Denver, Colorado—it failed, and got out of the business.[92]

Fundamentally, we need to rethink the basic theory of both charter schools and turnaround schools. The unspoken assumption of current approaches is that teachers in high-poverty schools (and their union protectors) are to blame for academic failure, and that if we could fire those teachers and bring in union-free charter schools, we can fix the problem. Mountains of research, however, suggest that the reason high-poverty schools fail so often is that economic segregation drives failure: it congregates the kids with the smallest dreams, the parents who are most pressed, and burnt out teachers who often cannot get hired elsewhere. How have we come to the point where creating high-quality integrated schools is hardly even part of the charter and turnaround discussions?

Conclusion

Fifty years of research suggests that high-poverty public schools—like high-poverty housing projects—more often than not create negative environments for children. There is ample evidence to suggest that poor kids—given the right environment and the right supports—can achieve at high levels, but an increasing number are stuck in high-poverty schools.

Most public policies today are willfully ignorant of these findings, which are a matter of consensus among social scientists. Our public education system is supposed to provide genuine equal opportunity to students of all walks of life. It is supposed to be the American answer to the European social welfare state. As the evidence in this volume amply demonstrates, socioeconomic integration has substantial benefits that far outweigh the costs; is logistically and politically feasible, if done right; and is directly relevant to some of the key policy debates in Washington. For how long will we continue to ignore the evidence and provide good educations to one set of children while subjecting another set to separate schools of concentrated poverty that simply compound the disadvantages of poverty itself?