



THE NEW PROMISE OF SCHOOL  
INTEGRATION AND THE OLD  
PROBLEM OF EXTREME  
SEGREGATION  
AN ACTION PLAN FOR NEW JERSEY TO  
ADDRESS BOTH

ACTION PLAN

May 2018

PAUL L. TRACTENBERG AND RYAN W. COUGHLAN  
THE CENTER FOR DIVERSITY AND EQUALITY IN EDUCATION  
NEW JERSEY

## **An Introduction to the Action Plan for Addressing both New Jersey's New Promise of School Integration and Old Problem of Extreme Segregation**

In a report on New Jersey school integration released on May 1, 2018, we stressed that the state now presents a sort of bell-shaped curve. Thanks to substantial demographic shifts affecting the state and nation, approximately 25% of New Jersey's school districts are characterized by a relatively significant level of diversity at the district-level. At the same time, however, about 25% of the state's students are in districts with an extreme level of segregation. The remaining 50% range between being relatively diverse and extremely segregated. The report presents detailed demographic and educational outcome data that describes this statewide picture in Sections 1 and 2.

The positive opportunities for extending the benefits of diversity to the school and classroom level are relatively new, and until our report highlighted them, little noticed. The daunting problem of extreme segregation, mostly affecting poor black and Hispanic students isolated in urban school districts, is, tragically, a very old problem and one that we have recognized, but not really dealt with, for many decades.

It should be obvious that this variegated landscape does not lend itself to a single solution, even a magic bullet. Rather, there has to be a coordinated set of solutions with each matched to a particular situation on the ground. That is a main thrust of the report, and especially its detailed Section 3.

The culmination of the report in Section 4 is an action plan for the state, and especially for its new governor, his administration and the state legislature. Section 4 starts by sketching out the context for the action plan and by discussing a series of important threshold questions such as:

- What goals should the action plan seek to achieve and how can we build a critical mass of support for them?
- How comprehensive should the action plan be?
- How bold should it be?
- How immediate should its implementation be?
- To what extent should it be mandatory?

Then it presents the proposed action plan, which follows in full:

## ***An Action Plan to Diversify New Jersey's Schools***

1. **A clear, definitive and strong policy statement from the governor** making it a state priority to:
  - a. Actually achieve residential and educational diversity wherever feasible and as soon as possible;
  - b. Define educational diversity in a manner that comports to the state's current demography and establish the state's diversity goals based on that definition;
  - c. Develop and implement an operational plan for achieving diversity that recognizes the state's varied circumstances;
  - d. In those definitions and that plan, emphasize that the required educational diversity does not stop at the district or even school level, but applies to classrooms, courses and programs and the achievement of "true integration," thereby necessitating that educators throughout the state and at every level evaluate and improve all relevant policies and practices, including those that relate to tracking and ability grouping, student discipline, special education classification, curricular development and pedagogy;
  - e. Require all districts to develop and implement plans to diversify their teaching, administrative and support staffs with CJ PRIDE (Central Jersey Program for the Recruitment of Diverse Educators), a program being implemented by 17 school districts, as a possible model;
  - f. Rationalize the structure of the education system (bringing it into harmony with the state constitutional mandate of an "efficient system of free public schools") and ensure that it gives priority to promoting diversity;
  - g. Develop and fully fund a school financing law that assures adequate resources to every district, that is adjusted regularly to reflect changing enrollments and demographics, that provides incentives for districts to maintain or increase their diversity, and that reduces reliance on disparate local property tax rates; and
  - h. Charge relevant state agencies and officials with responsibility for: implementing the elements of this Action Plan; reviewing all existing

statutes, regulations, policies and practices that potentially impact housing and educational diversity and proposing changes that would enhance the prospect of their promoting diversity; and proposing new statutes, regulations and policies for that purpose.

2. **A new blue-ribbon commission, with a broad but specific mandate and a relatively short time-line**, to study and recommend the best means of achieving and sustaining educational diversity over the long-term, including by studying linkages between educational diversity and:
  - a. school district and municipal structures;
  - b. the state and local tax structure;
  - c. residential segregation;
  - d. the availability of jobs; and
  - e. real and perceived issues regarding community safety.
  
3. **A re-established highly visible and well-staffed office in the state department of education** to monitor the status of educational diversity and to require districts to take actions to promote educational diversity, including to extend district-wide diversity to the school and classroom, course and program levels.
  
4. **Support for districts that already are diverse** by choice or by demographic happenstance, or are seeking to reach that status, to enable them to maintain or extend their diversity. This could include financial support for student transportation necessary to diversify all of the districts' schools, and financial support and technical assistance for training district and school staff to deal effectively with an increasingly diverse student population.
  
5. **Increase the number of diverse school districts** by:
  - a. Supporting judicial efforts under Mount Laurel to assure the construction of more affordable housing units and promoting other measures to integrate housing throughout the state;
  - b. Enforcing the 2007 statutory mandate of the CORE Act to require all districts to move to K-12 status, but with a specific requirement that

this be done in a manner that increases educational diversity to the maximum extent feasible;

- c. Identifying clusters of districts whose consolidation can feasibly enhance educational diversity and inducing them to consolidate (or, if need be, requiring them to do so); and
  - d. Establishing pilot projects to test the effectiveness of county-wide or other regional school districts as a vehicle for increased educational diversity, as well as greater efficiency and overall student achievement.
6. **Promote diverse schools in districts not yet diverse** by:
- a. Supporting and promoting residential integration efforts, including neighborhood integration efforts;
  - b. Modifying the Interdistrict Public School Choice law to require that increasing student diversity be a priority purpose;
  - c. Establishing inter-district magnet schools modeled after the *Sheff* magnet schools in Connecticut or the longstanding magnet programs in Massachusetts; and
  - d. Modifying the charter school law to encourage or require more multi-district charter schools with a specific mandate to enhance diversity.
7. **Encourage districts where day-to-day diversity is not a realistic prospect in the near term to develop other ways to provide their students with an exposure to diversity and its benefits** through extra-curricular or co-curricular means, periodic cross-district programming with districts different in pupil population than theirs (as, for example, by using immersive educational technology and Holodeck classrooms).
8. **Establish high-quality professional development programs** for teachers and administrators to enhance their ability to effectively educate diverse student bodies.
9. **Require that, as a condition of New Jersey school districts purchasing textbooks, other instructional materials and educational technology, those**

**items must be sensitive and responsive to the racial, ethnic, cultural and economic diversity of the state's students.**

10. **Foster or support citizen coalitions** to promote greater educational and residential diversity by all appropriate means including political action, legislative lobbying, policy development and, if necessary, litigation.