



Do Parents Really Want School Integration?

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Executive Summary

How can we create more and better racially and economically integrated schools in this country? The case for these schools is compelling. Thoughtful school integration may be our best hope over the long term for healing the racism and racial and class hostilities besetting our country. School integration is key to students developing competencies essential to work, life, and constructive citizenship in a diverse society and increasingly global economy. Integrated schools are a matter of basic equity—low-income students and students of color are far more likely to be segregated in under-funded, overcrowded schools with less qualified teachers and without access to important resources (Orfield & Lee, 2007). Integrated schools appear to have significant academic benefits both for low-income students (Coleman, 1966; Kahlenberg, 2012; Orfield & Lee, 2005) and for more advantaged students in key academic and social domains (The

"Despite parents' espoused support for integration, in districts where parents are actually given greater opportunities to choose schools, schools appear to become more segregated."

Century Foundation, 2019).

Yet despite some positive trends, American schools continue to be highly segregated. About 40% of Black and Latinx students, for example, attend hyper-segregated schools comprised of 90-100% students of color. White students are the least likely to attend

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schools with children from other racial groups (Roda and Wells, 2013). Creating more integrated schools will depend on many factors, including economic and housing policies and court decisions. But—particularly because the prospects of legal actions favoring integration now appear dim—the future of school integration will depend a great deal on whether parents choose to send their child to an integrated school.

But do parents really want school integration? If they do, why do so many schools remain segregated? And what might motivate more parents to send their children to integrated schools?

This report seeks to respond to these questions. Over the last few years, Making Caring Common has conducted a large-scale national survey of U.S. adults and conducted numerous individual interviews and focus groups with a wide array of American parents to explore whether and how much they value school integration and the factors that shape their thinking about sending their child to an integrated school (see Methods, page 24). Because middle- and upper-class parents tend to have more choice in schools than economically disadvantaged parents, who often can't

afford to enroll their children in independent schools or move to a more integrated district and may lack the time and resources to explore various school options, our focus groups and interviews were mainly conducted with middle- and upper-class parents and our recommendations mostly focus on affecting these parents' choices.

Much of what we found is encouraging:

- Our survey suggests that, unlike many politically divisive issues, parents of all backgrounds tend to agree that racial and economic integration is important—at least in principle—and state that they would prefer that their children attend schools that are substantially integrated both racially and economically. This preference is true for men and women, Democrats and Republicans, and people of all races, levels of education, and income levels. Other research similarly suggests that majorities of parents support racially diverse schools (Frankenberg & Jacobson, 2011).
- There is strong support expressed across these demographic groups for high levels of integration. When asked about their comfort with

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sending their children to schools with differing levels of socio-economic diversity (from 10% low-income students to 90% low-income students), parents, on average, expressed the highest levels of comfort with a school that is 50% low-income and 50% more affluent students and for schools that served an equal portion of White students and students of color.

- This in-principle support for integration may be on the rise: We conducted our survey immediately before and after Donald Trump was elected president, and respondents were more likely to indicate support for school integration after the election. When asked if the current cultural and political climate—including strong disagreements about immigration, racism, and police violence—influenced their thinking about the importance of sending their children to an integrated school, significantly more parents indicated that the current political climate had strengthened rather than reduced their support.

At the same time, it appears that much stands in the way of parents actually sending their children to integrated

schools. Despite parents' espoused support for integration, in districts where parents are actually given greater opportunities to choose schools, schools appear to become more segregated (Mead & Green, 2012; Mickelson et al., 2008; Orfield & Frankenberg, 2013; Sikkink & Emerson, 2007; Wells & Roda, 2008). Our research, along with other research, also suggests that while parents value integration, a complex mixture of legitimate concerns about school quality and various unacknowledged racial and class biases appear to deter many parents. For example, many White, advantaged parents appear to determine school quality by how many other White, advantaged parents send their child to a school, without doing the legwork to determine what schools in a district are actually high-quality and a good fit for their child (Bifulco, Ladd, & Ross, 2008; Billingham & Hunt, 2016; Saporito & Lareau, 1999).

What will motivate more parents to send their children to racially and economically integrated schools? Community and school district leaders have a large role to play. Parents may be more likely to send their children to integrated schools if districts provide more academically strong integrated

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schools and carefully craft school assignment policies, which some districts and counties have done. Thoughtful interdistrict busing partnerships and the consolidation of small districts into more diverse regional districts may prove fruitful as well in providing parents with more and better integrated school options.

"...many White, advantaged parents appear to determine school quality by how many other White, advantaged parents send their child to a school..."

Integration also provides opportunities for White, advantaged parents to do what is in the best interest of their child and to exercise fundamental moral responsibilities, and it's vital for communities and districts to engage in the kind of public education and organizing activities that prompt parents to carefully consider these interests and responsibilities. Any parent who purports to care for all Americans, who believes that each one

of us is responsible for all of us, who recognizes the deep division in our society and the fragility of our democracy, or who understands the brutal history of racism in this country, should be asked to think very carefully about how their school choices affect families who might not be in a position to choose, and how opting out of diverse public schools can harm education and the country more broadly.

Yet to say that White, advantaged parents should consider other children is not, emphatically, to say that these parents should consider their decision to send their child to an integrated school as a service to low-income children and children of color, or frame their decision in these terms with their children. That thinking and framing perpetuates stereotypes and deficit-minded prejudices, and it mischaracterizes integration. In fact, research suggests that integration has key social, emotional, and ethical as well as academic benefits for White, advantaged children (The Century Foundation, 2019). Integration is most accurately characterized as a collective act that is likely to benefit one's own children, other people's children, and the country as a whole.

Do Parents Really Want School Integration?

What is important that the strongest pressures against the continuation of segregation . . . be continually and constantly manifested. Probably, as much as anything else, this is the key in the elimination of discrimination in the United States.” —Thurgood Marshall¹

The rejection of legal segregation is a central American moral parable. It is part of a story we tell ourselves about our country’s fight against prejudice and inequality, the renunciation of a core tenet of the Jim Crow era, and a step towards the embrace of a transcendent American creed. It’s the story of the Little Rock Nine—the Black students who waded through angry mobs to attend a newly integrated school in Arkansas, and in so doing became the face of a movement—and the many families whose stories are unrecorded

but who, like the Little Rock Nine, decided to risk violence and censure in the name of a more fair, just, and unified society.

"Across the country, students of different races and ethnicities commonly remain isolated from one another."

And yet the moral vision and hopes of this movement have collided with hard realities in the last decades. Though Supreme Court rulings in the middle of the last century established that states and districts could not intentionally or explicitly separate children into different

1. Carter, R. & Marshall, T. (1955, Summer). The Meaning and Significance of the Supreme Court Decree. *Journal of Negro Education*. V. 24

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schools on the basis of their race, schools in America remain highly segregated. While complex changes in our country's racial and ethnic makeup have contributed to valuable debate about whether or not racial segregation is getting worse, and though definitions of segregation and integration may appropriately vary based on how the notion is conceived of and measured², the general state of affairs is nevertheless clear: Across the country, students of different races and ethnicities commonly remain isolated from one another. About 40% of Black and Latinx students, for example, attend hyper-segregated schools comprised of 90-100% students of color. White students are the least likely to attend schools with children from other racial groups (Roda and Wells, 2013).

The persistence of this phenomenon should be deeply troubling to us all. As a result of, among many factors, red-lining and restrictive zoning (Quick &

& Kahlenberg, 2019), recent court decisions disfavoring integration³, and economic policies favoring wealthier districts, low-income students and students of color are far more likely to be stuck in under-funded, overcrowded schools with less qualified teachers, higher teacher turnover, and less challenging curriculum and without access to important networks and resources, including academic, social, and emotional enrichment activities, and professional development support for teachers (Orfield & Lee, 2007).

In this state of segregation, all students are less likely to develop the cultural competencies essential to work, life, and constructive citizenship in a diverse society and increasingly global economy. The racism and racial hostilities besetting our country are less likely to be healed, and large numbers of students are denied what can be a profound and life-shaping experience: Learning and living with those from richly different backgrounds, with

2. In this paper, we primarily focus on the segregation of White from Black and Latinx students and high-SES from low-SES students due to the historical salience and ongoing impact of these divisions. We also acknowledge that as the country's demographics change, and in light of regional and local demographic and zoning variability, the notion of "integration" ought to be a flexible one, guided by the principle of bringing students together. See Reardon & Owens (2014) for a more detailed and technical discussion of different notions of integration and means of measuring it in contemporary scholarship.

3. Twenty years after *Brown*, in the 1974 *Milliken v. Bradley* decision, the court ruled that schools had no obligation to address segregation between districts, enabling White families to avoid mandatory desegregation plans by moving out of mixed districts (Ryan, 2004). As many White families fled the cities in the wake of desegregation efforts, interdistrict segregation became entrenched, while urban desegregation plans were left to integrate schools with dwindling numbers of White and middle-class students (Billingham, 2019; Reardon & Owens, 2014). More recent Supreme Court decisions have further chipped away at the federal government's authority to mandate school district integration (Ryan, 2007).

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varying histories and traditions, who may have different ways of making sense of a life. While the research on whether integration improves academic outcomes for all students is mixed and complex (e.g., Reardon & Owens, 2014; Rumberger & Palardy, 2005; Wells, Fox, & Cordovo-Cobo, 2016), a large body of work indicates that integrated schools have significant academic benefits for low-income students (Coleman, 1966; Kahlenberg, 2012; Orfield & Lee, 2005) and have benefits for all students in certain academic and social domains (Carter, 2010; The Century Foundation, 2019). To live up to the integrationist parable, to become the caring and egalitarian nation we aspire to be, we have a great deal of work to do.

Whether our schools become more integrated will clearly depend on many factors—e.g., federal, state, and district education policies; court rulings; and public and private actions that affect residential segregation—but parents' decisions about where to send their children to school play a critical role. To be sure, the impact of individual parents is limited. Because of residential segregation, for example, many families do not have the option to send their children to integrated schools in their local district. Still, there are parents

who could choose to move to districts where integrated schools are an option. Further, racial and ethnic diversity in urban and suburban areas rose substantially in the last decade—people of color now make up nearly one-third of suburban populations and almost two-thirds of urban areas (Pew Research Center, 2018). As of 2012, 44% of suburbanites lived in racially and ethnically diverse suburbs with between 20% and 60% people of color (Orfield & Luce, 2012). A *Washington Post* analysis of U.S. Department of Education data indicated, "Nearly 4 in 10 school districts, educating two-thirds of all public school students, had enough diversity to make integration possible, assuming the political will" (Meckler & Rabinowitz, 2019). Further, many rural areas and small towns in the country have become more integrated chiefly because of an influx of Latinx Americans (Lichter, 2012). These hubs of diversity provide important opportunities for bringing different groups together.

Finally, thanks to the increasing number of districts across the country where enrollments are determined by systems that take family choice into account (Davis, 2013; U.S. Department of Education, 2018), parents' ability to

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promote integration has grown, and, if the trend continues, is likely to keep growing. In part because the prospects for advancing integration through legal action are dim—the courts have tended to undermine integration efforts over the last half century (Ryan, 2007) and the Supreme Court has recently become more conservative—whether we go backward or forward on school integration will depend in significant measure on parents' decisions.

PARENTS WANT SCHOOL INTEGRATION—IN PRINCIPLE

Over the last few years, we at Making Caring Common have conducted a large-scale national survey of U.S. adults and held numerous individual interviews and focus groups with a wide array of Americans to explore whether and how much parents value school integration and the factors that shape their thinking about sending their child to an integrated school (see Methods, page 24). At the core of our work at Making Caring Common is raising children who care about other people—including people different from them in background and character—and who are committed to justice. We view school integration as at the heart of achieving our goals.

Because middle- and upper-class parents tend to have more choice in schools than economically disadvantaged parents, who often can't afford to enroll their children in independent schools or move to another district and may lack the time and resources to explore various school options, our focus groups and interviews were mainly conducted with parents who have at least moderate financial resources, and the recommendations in this report mostly focus on ways these parents can leverage their position to make choices

"...parents of all backgrounds tend to agree that racial and economic integration are important, at least in principle, and state that they would prefer that their children attend schools that are substantially integrated both racially and economically."

Parents Want School Integration—in Principle

that support integration.

There's good and bad news. Our survey, along with other research, suggests that, unlike many of the issues that have riven America along party lines, parents of all backgrounds tend to agree that racial and economic integration are important, at least in principle, and state that they would prefer that their children attend schools that are substantially integrated both racially and economically. This preference is true for men and women, Democrats and Republicans, and people of all races, levels of education, and income levels. There is also strong, expressed support across these demographic groups for high levels of integration. When asked about their comfort with sending their children to schools with differing levels of socioeconomic diversity (from 10% low-income students to 90% low-income students), parents, on average, expressed the highest levels of comfort with a school that is 50% low-income and 50% more affluent students. We observed the same pattern when we asked about racial/ethnic diversity: Parents expressed the highest levels of comfort with schools that served an equal portion of White students and students of color. Other research similarly suggests that majorities of

parents in general support racially diverse schools (see Frankenberg & Jacobson, 2011, for an overview of the complex history of public opinion polls on integration). What's more, this in-principle support for integration may be on the rise: We conducted our survey immediately before and after Donald Trump was elected president, and respondents were more likely to indicate support for school integration after the election. When asked if the current cultural and political climate, including debates about immigration, racism, and police violence, influenced their thinking about the importance of sending their children to an integrated school, significantly more parents indicated that the current political climate had strengthened rather than reduced their support.

Here's the bad news: Despite parents' espoused support for integration, in districts where parents are actually given greater opportunities to choose schools for their children, schools appear to become more segregated. Research on so-called "color-blind" choice metrics (that is, systems that give parents choice about where to send their children to school but don't employ mechanisms to encourage integration) shows that many White parents and parents of means choose

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Whiter, more segregated schools under such circumstances (Mead & Green, 2012; Mickelson et al., 2008; Orfield & Frankenberg, 2013; Sikkink & Emerson, 2008; Wells & Roda, 2008). So, while parents may value integration, our research and that of others suggests that they either don't value it very much or that other considerations and biases overpower their commitment to integration. What, more specifically, is the degree and nature of American parents' support for economic and racial integration across various demographic groups? What beliefs and biases might be deterring advantaged, White parents from sending their children to integrated schools? How might these beliefs and biases be overcome?

SUPPORT ACROSS DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS

Of all participants in our survey, 81% agreed that it was important for students of different races to go to school together. There is some demographic variation in levels of support, but that variation between groups is eclipsed by the degree to which this support is shared: 85% of women, 77% of men, 85% of Democrats, and 76% of Republicans affirmed support for integration by race.

Parents of all races, education levels, and income levels expressed support for racial integration (support by racial group was no lower than 77%, support by education level was no lower than 75%, and support by income level was no lower than 65%). Levels of support were also similar across geographic areas, with 83% of people living in rural contexts, 80% of suburbanites, and 81% of urbanites affirming the importance of integration by race.

We found similar, albeit less-pronounced levels of support for economically integrated schools. Sixty-three percent of all respondents said that low-income and high-income kids going to school together was important, with 69% of Democrats, 63% of Republicans, 61% of women, and 66% of men agreeing. At least 56% of people of all racial groups and education levels also supported integration by income. Support by parents' income levels was uneven and did not follow a clear trend, but only one bracket expressed less than 50% support (48% of parents reporting an annual income between \$160,000 and \$200,000 supported economically integrated schools). Support for economic integration was also consistent across geographic areas with 66% of urbanites, 57% of suburbanites, and 62%

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of those living in rural areas in favor.

Not only did we find support for the principle of children going to school with diverse peers, we also found parents expressed the most support for high levels of integration. When parents were asked how comfortable they would be sending their own children to a school with different levels of integration (either 10%, 30%, 50%, 70%, or 90% White), a large majority of parents expressed the highest levels of comfort with a school that was 50% White and 50% students of color. Specifically, 81% of parents reported being either “somewhat” (27%) or “very” (54%) comfortable with a school composed of 50% White students and 50% students of color. Meanwhile, only 49% of parents expressed being either “very” or “somewhat” comfortable with a school composed of 10% White students, while 68% of parents expressed being either “very” or “somewhat” comfortable with a school composed of 10% students of color. These trends were generally consistent across respondent race, though Black and Latinx parents tended to be slightly more comfortable with a lower percent of White students than White and Asian American parents.

When asked about economic class, 81%

of parents expressed being either “very” or “somewhat” comfortable with a school composed of 50% low-income students and 50% middle-/upper-income students, while only 66% and 56% of parents, respectively, expressed being “very” or “somewhat” comfortable with schools composed of 10% and 90% low-income students. These trends—with larger proportions of parents expressing some degree of comfort with more even distributions of low- and middle-/upper-income students—were for the most part consistent across participant income levels.

Further, parents tended to support school and district efforts to achieve racial integration, though they were divided about actions to achieve income integration. When asked if states and districts should take action to make sure that schools are integrated by race and income, 60% of people supported racial integration efforts, while 50% supported income integration efforts. These patterns were generally consistent across demographic categories, though Black parents tended to be somewhat more supportive of action on racial integration (68% in favor) than Asian American (58%), White (59%), and Latinx parents (61%). Furthermore, 70% of respondents said they would feel either “comfortable” (46%) or “very

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comfortable" (24%) sending their own child to a different school as part of a district-level effort to achieve racial integration, with similar response patterns for people of all races. Sixty-nine percent expressed comfort with an identical scenario regarding income integration.

Parents across demographic groups also tend to think that racial and economic integration is good for all students: 63% of respondents thought that integrating a hypothetical segregated school would be good for White students, while 62% thought it would be good for students of color. Meanwhile, 53% thought integrating by income would be good for kids from high-income backgrounds. The same proportion thought it would be good for kids from low-income backgrounds.

To be sure, credible research has found that these parents may overstate their support for integration in order to avoid expressing socially undesirable opinions (Berinsky, 1999). Further, parents who report being "somewhat comfortable" with integration are also suggesting they are somewhat uncomfortable. Yet substantial percentages of parents

report being "very comfortable" with integration and, as we describe below, parents tended to be quite forthright in our surveys and interviews about factors that are more important to them than integration, suggesting that parents were not simply seeking to express desirable opinions. In our interviews, focus groups, and informal conversations, parents also tended to express what appeared to be authentic support for integration.

Parents we spoke with expressed support for integration for various, often intertwined reasons⁴. When we asked if integration by socioeconomic status was important, our participants consistently referred to the many benefits of going to school with people from a range of backgrounds, including developing empathy for those different from oneself and learning "what's important," e.g., that it's not about "big houses and stuff" but about the "glue every family has. It's about love." Parents spoke about the high educational value of learning deeply about other cultures not abstractly, but in everyday interactions and relationships, and about the importance of wealthy children developing gratitude.

4. As we noted above, our interview and focus group sample represents a narrower cross-section of parents than our survey. Specifically, they tended to be Whiter, wealthier, and more liberal than our survey sample. See Methods (page 24) for a more detailed description of the samples and data collection protocol.

Support Across Demographic Groups • Are Parents Saying One Thing But Doing Another?

"For the privileged kids, it's absolutely very important for them to see how lucky they are. You know, I mean it is harmful when you just think this is how things are. You know your parents make money and spend and it's easy come, easy go. And [then] you see someone who's struggled, who doesn't have this kind of thing." A Chicago parent whose children attend an economically and racially integrated school said that he and his children have learned about the complex challenges of true fairness and equity, about "how to make a school work for everyone, rich and poor, with a limited budget."

ARE PARENTS SAYING ONE THING BUT DOING ANOTHER?

But if sizable majorities think that integration by race and class is important, why, on average, are White and economically advantaged parents tending to pick Whiter, more affluent schools, resulting in more segregation, not less (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014; Sikkink & Emerson, 2008)?

Our interviews, informal conversations, and focus groups indicated that parents have many different, often overlapping concerns about integration. When

asked about the challenges of integration, some parents described how hard it is to bridge differences, how children become acutely, painfully aware of wealth differences, and the challenges of teaching diverse students: "[You have] kids coming from various perspectives and maybe having a hard time relating to each other depending on their age and teachers not being equipped to know how to manage a wide spread. I taught in [a wealthy town on the West Coast] and we had kids from [a poorer area nearby] also. And . . . the kids from [the wealthy town] would talk about going skiing for the weekend and the kids from [the poorer area] like didn't have enough money to eat. So it just led to a lot of hurt feelings . . . the unfairness was very stark." Other parents spoke about more students having problems that consume teachers' attention in schools with large numbers of low-income students. Complex school assignment and choice policies can also mean that significant numbers of parents have limited options: They're not able to send their children to a school that they both think is a good fit for their child and that is substantially integrated.

Yet perhaps most commonly parents appear to pick Whiter and more

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affluent schools because they value school quality more than integration and view integrated schools as educationally inferior. In our recent survey, when parents were asked to select the three features of a school that were most important to their decision about where to send their children—including academic quality, discipline rates, being part of a close-knit parent community, safety, and ease of transportation—academic quality and school safety were at the top of the list, with 81% of parents including academic quality and 70% of parents including safety in their top three, while just under 10% included racial and economic diversity in their top three. Other research also suggests that parents, in part driven by economic anxiety, are highly focused on the “best” school, commonly defining “best” academically (Roda and Wells, 2013).

Concerns about school quality may be grounded in reality. As we’ve noted, economically and racially segregated schools serving primarily low-income students and students of color tend to have fewer resources and less qualified

and supported teachers. Schools serving primarily low-income students often experience higher incidences of behavioral issues (Duncan & Magnuson, 2011), in part because low-income students are more likely to experience untreated health problems, hunger, and family stress, among other adversities (Weissbourd, 1996). Other concerns may also reasonably deter parents: While thoughtful multiculturalism may offer a vision of both unity and diversity (Ladson-Billings, 1992), schools may be unattractive to a wide range of parents in the many cases where racial and economic integration is handled poorly and few efforts are made to create strong, inclusive communities (Teitel, in press) and where racial and class antagonisms may thus fester.⁵

Yet there is also much that can distort parents’ assessments of integrated schools. For one, while the issues cited above exist, it’s not fair to assume that they affect any given individual school. And in the absence of holistic understandings of a given school, parents often rely on narrow measures of quality. For example, parents often look to “school report cards” (grades

5. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1962) argued for distinguishing between merely desegregated and truly integrated schools, where the former represents a shallow co-presence of White and Black students, while the latter reflects a deeper, more meaningful togetherness. For criteria for true integration, as opposed to simple desegregation, see Harvard RIDES project <https://rides.gse.harvard.edu/> and the youth-led IntegrateNYC project: <https://www.integratenyc.org/>.

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given to schools based on a set of metrics, often emphasizing academic and test performance) in making both school and residential decisions (Figlio & Lucas, 2004; Kane, Steiger, & Samms, 2003), but these scorecards are simplistic and shouldn't be used as the only way of determining school quality (Howe & Murray, 2015). Standardized test scores are commonly featured in these scorecards, for example, and parents often rely heavily on these test scores. Yet average test scores can provide parents with a narrow, distorted, and inappropriately negative picture of school quality (Roda and Wells, 2013), in part because they fail to capture the many forms of meaningful academic and peer learning in diverse schools that are not captured by standardized tests. Average test scores may also be skewed by the poor performance of a relatively small number of students.

Various forms of implicit bias can also affect parents. Simply the presence of substantial numbers of Black children in a residential area appears to affect White parents' assessment of school quality. As Sikkink and Emerson note, "as the percent of [African Americans] in a residential area increases, Whites are more likely to select alternative, higher percentage [W]hite schooling for

their children" (2008). Furthermore, some evidence indicates that White, advantaged parents use the number of other White, advantaged parents at a school as an indicator of school quality and that White, educated parents are more likely to eschew schools with high numbers of Black students, even controlling for other factors that parents claim influence their decision, such as economic class, discipline rates, and school resources (Bifulco, Ladd, & Ross, 2008; Billingham & Hunt, 2016; Saporito & Lareau, 1999). Research has also found that talk among parent social circles about school quality often influences individual parents' evaluations of which schools they perceive to be high quality, but that this talk is sometimes uninformed and may be suffused with biases, rumors, and fears (Roda & Wells, 2013). Researchers note that advantaged parents are also often in information bubbles, sharing information—and biases and misinformation—with only parents in their immediate circle of similarly advantaged peers (Roda and Wells, 2013). And biases may affect how parents interpret information. Even a single episode of violence or bullying in schools with high percentages of students of color, for example, may be interpreted differently than in other schools, triggering racist

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and classist stereotypes and inflating parents' concerns about safety.

White, advantaged parents appear to specifically fear that their children will be a minority in a school (Roda and Wells, 2013). Many White parents favoring integration don't seem to think twice about expecting Black and Latinx parents to send their children to schools where they are the minority, but they don't have that expectation of themselves. Yet some group almost always has to be a minority to achieve integration. Making matters worse, because White, advantaged parents may use the number of White, advantaged parents at a school as a measure of its quality and avoid schools with large numbers of children of color, their choices become self-fulfilling (Bifulco, Ladd, & Ross, 2008). These parents add to the number of White, advantaged parents at these schools, which simply attracts more White, advantaged parents (and on and on).

In short, while integration matters to White middle- and upper-class parents, a number of other factors, including academic concerns and various types of

biases, appear to have greater influence on their school choices. Further, these factors can mix in complex, harmful ways. For example, parents may have valid concerns about significant differences in academic quality between schools serving more and less advantaged populations. But these concerns mix with influential school rating systems which emphasize test performance, stereotypes, and cognitive biases about schools with large numbers of low-income children or children of color and social circles which may amplify those biases and propagate misinformation, among other factors.

THE ROLE OF ADVANTAGED PARENTS IN CLOSING THE GAP

Hard as it will be to shift the behavior of many parents, there is much that school districts, state governments, and the federal government can do to make it easier for all parents to send their children to integrated schools⁶. In addition, there are strategies and messages that community leaders, parent organizations, school district leaders, politicians, and others can

6. See Linda Darling-Hammond's (2018) brief "Education and the Path to One Nation, Indivisible" for the Learning Policy Institute for recommendations to drive integration at every level of government.

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regularly utilize with parents to both make integration a stronger priority for them and reduce the biases and barriers that undermine it. These strategies and messages should take into account local conditions and context, but there are nevertheless some key themes that are likely to hold widely.

For one, as we've noted, research suggests that many parents—particularly those with higher-achieving students, from higher-income families—are sensitive to improvements in school quality (Hastings, Kane, & Staiger, 2005; Hastings & Weinstein, 2008) and are presumably more likely to send their children to integrated schools if districts provide more academically strong integrated schools and carefully craft school assignment policies. Some cities and counties—including Hartford, CT; Jefferson County, KY; and Cambridge, MA—have strategically adopted school assignment plans and other policies that appear to have significantly increased the number of integrated schools while not compromising, and in some cases improving, academic achievement (see call-out boxes, pages 18-21). Thoughtful interdistrict busing partnerships, consolidating small

districts into a more diverse regional district, and strategic use of magnet schools (schools organized around a specialized curriculum that draw students from across the usual boundaries) also may prove fruitful in providing parents with more and better integrated school options. Improving transportation systems and providing more and better information about schools, including enabling parents to exchange information with parents outside their usual parenting circles, might also boost the number of advantaged parents selecting integrated schools.

School districts should also be thoughtful about how they use school data to advertise integrated schools. Some recent work suggests that sharing data about student academic growth (as opposed to just sharing demographic data or student achievement data) may encourage parents to choose more integrated schools (Houston & Hening, 2019).

Yet efforts to create better integrated school options for parents need to be joined with efforts to increase parents' motivation to send their children to integrated schools. This is a critical time for parents to consider both their moral

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obligations and the morality they are modeling for and seeking to cultivate in their children. White, advantaged parents should consider the moral, social, and emotional benefits to their own children of attending integrated schools. These schools not only create opportunities for their children to more deeply and concretely understand their advantages and the nature of inequity and unfairness in this country, but to learn from the social, emotional, and moral strengths of diverse cultures, including the importance placed on respect and collective responsibility in many communities of color (Weissbourd, 2009).

White, advantaged parents should model morality for their children in another sense. Even in those cases where integrated schools might not provide as many resources as segregated schools serving privileged populations, these parents should be willing to bear some risk or sacrifice in sending their child to these schools.

Any advantaged parent who purports to care for all Americans, who believes that each one of us is responsible for all of us, who recognizes the deep divisions in our society and the fragility of our democracy, or who understands

POSITIVE EXAMPLES OF INTEGRATED SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Across the country, in defiance of the status quo, motivated school districts are working proactively to achieve racial and socioeconomic integration. In light of the variability in local demographics, geography, history, politics, resources, and legal environments, no two integration efforts are exactly alike. While there exists no "one-size-fits-all" approach for the problems of segregation, and though even successful districts have their share of ongoing challenges, a variety of notable and successful efforts exist. These successes tend to be in small or mid-sized cities. Large scale success in big cities clearly presents complex challenges. We highlight a small selection of such efforts on the following pages.

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the brutal history of racism in this country, should think very carefully about how their school choices affect families who might not be in a position to choose, and how opting out of diverse public schools can harm education and the country more broadly. Though it might seem that schools are unaffected by individual enrollment decisions, the collective impact of these decisions has been a large factor in barricading millions of Americans into marginalization and poverty and deepening the country's cultural, racial, and economic fractures.

Parents' common reflex is to tell themselves: "I need to do what's best for my child." But as we've stated, attending an effectively integrated school is often what's best for their child, and any reasonable moral position needs to include deep consideration for other people's children and a willingness at times to sacrifice for the collective good. Nikole Hannah-Jones, in an article about school integration in *The New York Times*, writes that "Even Kenneth Clark, the psychologist whose research showed the debilitating effects of segregation on black children, chose not to enroll his children in the segregated schools he was fighting

MAGNET SCHOOLS IN HARTFORD, CT

While the overall state of school integration in Hartford is a mixed bag, one initiative that has proven popular and effective is the district's use of magnet schools. Magnets in Hartford have enrolled roughly equal proportions of White, Black, and Latinx students, produced high achievement (with small achievement gaps), and have been popular among attending families (Orfield & Ee, 2015). Though magnets alone may not achieve whole-district integration (and their outcomes may be in part attributable to attracting highly motivated and high performing children), they nevertheless offer a window into the possibilities of effectively integrated schools.

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against. 'My children,' he said, 'only have one life.'" But the problem with that position, Hannah-Jones points out, is that "so do the children relegated to this city's segregated schools. They have only one life, too" (2016).

To say that White, advantaged parents should consider other children is not, emphatically, to say that these parents should consider their decision to send their child to an integrated school as a service to low-income children and children of color or frame their decision in these terms with their children. That thinking and framing perpetuates stereotypes and deficit-minded prejudices, and it mischaracterizes integration. Integration is primarily a collective act that is likely to benefit one's own children and other people's children, and that is critical to the country as a whole.

As in making other moral decisions, White middle- and upper-class parents should adhere to certain guidelines. They should press themselves to carefully consider other perspectives. They should examine and discuss with respected loved ones and friends who will give them honest feedback whether any biases may be infecting their thinking. They should seek out these conversations with people

COMMUNITY-WIDE COMMITMENT IN JEFFERSON COUNTY, KY

Following a series of court mandates in the 1970s to desegregate, Jefferson County now voluntarily runs a popular, county-wide integration effort. The district uses socioeconomic and racial data of census blocks along with family choice to determine school enrollments. Though transportation times in the geographically expansive district have been a perennial challenge, recent efforts have helped to reduce long bus rides, and the effort has retained widespread support from parents (Bridges, 2016).

outside of their normal circles who they trust to be frank with them. Hearing different perspectives can help them identify shortsightedness, biases, or

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possibilities they hadn't considered.

Is the perception that an integrated school in the district is unsafe based on any evidence, for example, or is that perception contaminated by a racist or classist stereotype? Is there any evidence that curriculum or teaching is less rigorous because many students are of color? They should ask themselves what kind of precedent their decision is setting for others, adhering to Kant's famous moral injunction to act according to that maxim that you would want all others to follow. In making a decision, they should be willing to struggle, to put in effort commensurate with the stakes of their decision not only for their own child, but for their schools, communities, and country, and to recognize that the best moral decisions are typically hard-won, dug out of the mud of many competing interests and values, and sometimes requiring candid, challenging conversations with those with different values and views.

Crucially, parents should also be expected to systematically research the educational quality, safety, and other characteristics of available integrated schools. Research has found that when parents actually visited schools they were considering—as opposed to

CONTROLLED CHOICE IN CAMBRIDGE, MA

Starting in the 1980s, Cambridge has been using a "controlled choice" model that takes family preferences into account while also making sure that proportions of "free and reduced lunch" and "paid lunch" at given schools reflect the district proportions. Bucking trends towards re-segregation seen elsewhere, Cambridge districts became more economically and racially integrated (Potter, Quick, & Davies 2016). High school graduation rates (including for students of color) are substantially higher than national averages and the district performs as well as comparably composed districts in the state on other academic performance measures (Learned-Miller, 2016).

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relying on their intuition and the views of those in their social circles—they sometimes found themselves drawn to schools that they had previously dismissed (Bell, 2009). Parents should be expected to schedule a school visit, consult if possible with educators and others with education expertise in their community, reach out to parents outside their immediate circle on the school parent association or online, and gather data—and not just test scores—from school and district websites or other sources on school characteristics and student outcomes.

To be clear, we are not making the case that integration should be the sole or ultimate priority of all parents. Where parents have a choice in schools, they should clearly weigh many factors, including their child's specific needs and challenges. We're arguing, instead, that parents—particularly White middle- and upper-class parents—should feel compelled to determine whether a particular integrated school can work for their child, work to identify and manage their own biases, and consider the many academic, emotional, and moral benefits that their children may experience in integrated schools. We are also arguing that what's good for other people's children and the country as a whole should

weigh substantially in their decision. Further, just as White, middle- and upper-class parents' choices to send their child to a less integrated school can spur a self-fulfilling, troubling cycle, these parents, especially in groups, can spur positive cycles.

While our main focus here has been on White parents with at least moderate financial resources, there are, of course, many different types of values, interests, and beliefs that shape the decisions of other parents, and our recommendations have different implications for these parents. Low-income parents, for example, often struggle to determine their options in systems that can be hard to navigate for even well-resourced parents who are not dealing with the many stresses of poverty. Given that their children may face overt and subtle racism in integrated schools, many parents of color see advantages in sending their children to schools that are predominantly or solely students of color, one reason some Black parents have advocated for all-Black charter schools (Shapiro, 2019). School district policies should be closely attuned to these differences. Motivating more parents of color to select integrated schools also means not just creating more integrated school options but

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Conclusion

creating thoughtfully and truly integrated schools, schools where diversity is routinely celebrated, where there is attention to equity and inclusion in all aspects of schooling, and where various forms of racism and classism are addressed and dismantled (Powell, 2001; Teitel, forthcoming).

CONCLUSION

That large majorities of Americans across the political spectrum support integration in principle is encouraging and suggests that political and community leaders may be more successful than they imagine in mobilizing support for integration initiatives. And Americans are likely to become more positive about

integration over time: Young people in this country appear to value diversity more than older Americans (Pew Research Center, 2019). But our political and community leaders will need to be aggressive, persistent, and strategic to counter the many forces pushing parents to segregate their children.

The idea of motivating more White, advantaged parents to send their children to integrated schools may seem like a tall order. But parenting trends have fluctuated throughout history, sometimes dramatically (Hulbert, 2003; Mintz, 2004). The question is not whether parenting priorities can change, it's whether we can summon the wisdom and discipline to direct that change, and how soon.

Appendix A

METHODS

Our large-scale, computer-based survey sampled 2,644 American parents from urban, suburban, and rural areas across the country (see Table on page 25 for sample demographics). Most of the participants' children, 60%, were currently enrolled in a district public school, while 6% attended public charters, 21% attended non-denominational private schools, and 7% attended religious private schools. We asked parents whether and how much they value economic and racial integration, whether they prefer that their children attend economically and racially integrated schools, and about the worries and barriers that may affect their decisions, among other related questions. We also conducted 39 phone interviews and five focus groups with a selection of parents of school-age children across the country in order to dig deeper into parent thinking. We spoke with participants about their perceptions of inequality, how they talk with their children about inequality, and key considerations related to their own children's schooling. Participants in the phone interviews hailed from all over the country, while the focus groups consisted of a convenience sample of Boston-area parents. The sample for conversations drew from a narrower population than our large-scale survey, skewing wealthy (only 18% of respondents identified as middle-

income or lower-income), educated (66% reported having a college or professional degree), White (73% identified as White, 11% as Asian or Pacific Islander, 9% as Black, 5% as Latinx), liberal (68% identifying as Democratic or Leaning Democratic, while 23% identified as Republican or Leaning Republican), and female (82%).

While the patterns we've observed in our large-scale sample are plausibly representative of the average attitudes of American parents, the data we've gathered about how parents are thinking about issues related to inequality and schooling in our interviews and focus groups are representative of a more liberal, privileged, and female subset of American parents. This subset is an important population for the effort to achieve greater integration—not least of all because they are often those with means to choose between diverse district schools and more affluent, White, private schools—but their priorities and understandings of schooling may tend to differ markedly from various other constituencies of parents. Similarly, the female skew of our qualitative sample reflects the finding that, where school choice is concerned, mothers are often the decision-makers (Reay & Ball, 1998).

Appendix B

ONLINE SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

Online Survey Demographics (n=2,664)

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	1,107	41.9%
Female	1,527	57.8%
Neither	4	0.2%
Choose not to Identify	6	0.2%

Age	Frequency	Percent
18-24	8	0.3%
25-34	72	2.7%
35-44	1,878	71%
45-54	666	25.2%
55-64	6	0.2%
65-74	4	0.2%
75+	4	0.2%
Choose not to respond	6	0.2%

Race	Frequency	Percent
Asian/Asian-American/Pacific Islander	131	5%
Black/African-American	468	17.7%
Hispanic/Latino/a/x	426	16.1%
Native American/Alaskan Native	34	1.3%
White	1,542	58.3%
Another way	31	1.2%
Choose not to respond	12	0.5%

Political Affiliation	Frequency	Percent
Democrat	1,155	43.7%
Independent, lean Democrat	475	18%
Republican	548	20.7%
Independent, lean Republican	344	13%
Choose not to respond	122	4.6%

Appendix B

ONLINE SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

Annual Household Income	Frequency	Percent
<\$50,000	696	26.3%
\$50,001-\$70,000	429	16.2%
\$70,001-\$90,000	415	15.7%
\$90,001-\$100,000	318	12%
\$110,001-\$160,000	279	10.6%
\$160,001-\$200,000	63	2.4%
\$200,001-\$400,000	253	9.6%
\$400,001-\$800,000	86	3.3%
>\$800,000	73	2.8%
Choose not to respond	32	1.2%

Highest Educational Attainment	Frequency	Percent
Less than high school	33	1.3%
High school or GED	352	13.3%
Some college	503	19%
2 year college degree	258	9.8%
4 year college degree	764	28.9%
Master's/Professional degree	526	19.9%
Doctorate	200	7.6%
Choose not to respond	8	0.3%

Residential Urbanicity	Frequency	Percent
Suburban	795	30.1%
Rural	396	15%
Urban	1,441	54.5%
Choose not to respond	12	0.5%

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