

How Desegregation Changed Us:
The Effects of Racially Mixed Schools on Students and Society

A Study of Desegregated High Schools and Their Class of 1980 Graduates
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Executive Summary

As we approach the 50th anniversary of the landmark Supreme Court ruling, *Brown v. Board of Education*, many in the United States are contemplating the value of public policies that flowed from that decision, especially the desegregation of public schools. Over the last half-century we have received mixed messages about whether such efforts were worth the trouble.

From the popular press we have heard of more failures than successes – of lingering black-white test score gaps and white flight from urban school districts. Meanwhile, much of the social science research on school desegregation has been more optimistic, showing mixed test score results but a positive trend toward higher African American student achievement during the peak years of desegregation, as well as long-term academic and professional gains for African American adults who had attended racially mixed schools.

Still, much of this research consists of statistical analyses of test scores or graduation rates. It tells us little about students' actual experience in desegregated schools or what it meant to them later in life.

On a more personal level, there are books written by or about individuals who attended desegregated schools. Many of these stories, especially those from the 1950s, are inspiring. But none is conclusive in terms of the value of a public policy that affected so many lives.

What has been missing is a study that connects personal perspectives about school desegregation across different towns and schools in a systematic way. Ideally, such a study would make those perspectives relevant to a question on the minds of many Americans: Were efforts to desegregate the public schools worthwhile?

This report answers that question and others through the voices of more than 500 graduates, educators, advocates, and local policy makers who were directly involved in racially mixed public high schools in different communities 25 years ago. For the last five years we have studied six such high schools¹ and documented what they were like in the late 1970s – some of the peak years of school desegregation in this country. To complement the rich data on these schools, we have tracked down and interviewed members of the Class of 1980 from each site.

Our central finding is that school desegregation fundamentally changed the people who lived through it, yet had a more limited impact on the larger society. Public schools faced enormous challenges during the late 1970s as educators tried to facilitate racial integration amid a society that remained segregated in terms of housing, social institutions, and often employment. Nonetheless, desegregation made the vast majority of the students who attended these schools less racially prejudiced and more comfortable around people of different backgrounds. After high school, however, their lives have been far more segregated as they re-entered a more racially divided society.

We want to emphasize two points in particular:

First, racially diverse public schools of the late 1970s were doing more than all other major institutions in our society – except perhaps the military – to bring people of different racial/ethnic backgrounds together and foster equal opportunity. But they could not, on their own, fulfill the promise of Brown. Despite the different contexts and racial demographics of the six schools we studied, they shared a significant characteristic. Namely, the schools too often reflected the racial inequality of the larger society, as re-segregation within the schools – largely through unequal access to the most challenging courses – became the norm.

In addition, the goal of most educators during this time was to teach students to be “colorblind” by ignoring issues of race. In fact, race was often a “taboo” subject in these schools. Graduates of Topeka High School do not remember any discussions in classes or assemblies about the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* case that had originated just down the road from their school. As one white Topeka High graduate noted, “I probably didn’t know a lot about [Brown] until I went to law school.”

This lack of dialogue is ironic, since many of the students were the first in their communities to attend school with people of other races. An African American graduate of Austin High School recalled that his teachers did not allow discussions of race in their classrooms because back in the ’70s everyone was “still walking on eggshells” and they wanted everyone to “just get along.”

All that notwithstanding – and this is our second main point – the vast majority of graduates across racial and ethnic lines greatly valued the daily cross-racial interaction in their high schools. They found it to be one of the most meaningful experiences of their lives, the best – and sometimes the only – opportunity to meet and interact regularly with people of different backgrounds.

That’s not to imply that the graduates were always satisfied with the way their schools implemented desegregation. Indeed, quite a few regretted that more was not done to promote greater racial integration and equality. They recalled re-segregation across classrooms and social groups, and many – mostly African Americans and Latinos, but some whites as well – said they were sometimes treated unfairly because of the color of their skin.

Still, in nearly every interview, blacks, whites, Latinos, and Asians discussed the value of school desegregation in shaping their views about race and helping them overcome fear and distrust of people who were different. *This is, by far, the strongest finding in our data and thus it is difficult to represent with just one quote.* But a white Austin High School graduate who came from an upper-middle-class family was representative when he said:

...Growing up in a racially integrated school, I think, was invaluable for me. I just feel... it helped my people skills. It gave me the ability to relate to just about any person and feel good... and to be sincere, not putting on an act... I can’t put enough value on it.

Perhaps surprisingly, today as adults in their early 40s, many Class of ’80 graduates, especially the white graduates, for the most part find themselves leading racially segregated lives. Most of them – e.g. 75 percent of white graduates and about 60 percent of all the graduates – reside in racially segregated neighborhoods. Virtually all of them attend one-race churches or temples and share their closest friends’ ethnic or racial backgrounds. And while their workplaces tend to be their most integrated settings, many of these graduates, especially the white graduates, still work in environments in which they have little contact with people of other races. A white Shaker Heights High School alumna who went to desegregated schools from kindergarten through 12th grade echoed a common sentiment among the adult graduates. About his public school experience, he said: “I’ve never had as diverse a daily experience.”

Echoing national opinion poll data, virtually all the graduates we interviewed wanted their own children to have similarly diverse school experiences. Unfortunately, they have

difficulty finding desegregated schools. Moreover, they worry that, in the current, more competitive environment, they need to put academic rigor – as measured mostly by standardized tests – ahead of diversity.

Of the white interviewees who had school-aged children, only about half had them enrolled in racially diverse schools. While more of the black and Latino graduates' children were in diverse schools – about two-thirds – many noted that these schools were becoming less diverse, as desegregation plans ended and their communities experienced white flight.

A white graduate of West Charlotte High School noted, “It’s amazing to me that...my parents went through segregation, I went through integration, and potentially my daughter might go back to segregation.”

In this way, we found, public schools that brought people of different racial backgrounds together for even a short period of time were swimming against a tide of racial segregation in this society. As an African American graduate of John Muir High School explained, integration made her high school unique. “When you look at the yearbook page by page, there’s blacks, whites, Asians, Mexicans on every...single page, and that’s rare. It was rare then, and it’s rare today.”

National statistics and our data indicate that it is *even rarer* today than 25 years ago, although graduates of desegregation say it was one of the most valuable experiences of their lives. If we want to honor these experiences, we might consider the ways in which current education policies could be rewritten to facilitate more diversity in public schools and reverse the current trend toward greater segregation.

Based on our findings, we make the following policy recommendations:

1. *Broaden definitions of school quality and accountability to include measures other than just standardized test scores – for instance, racial diversity could be considered one measure of a “good” public school in a diverse society.*
2. *Amend current public school choice policies, including charter school laws, to make them more supportive of parents and educators who want to start and maintain racially diverse schools.*
3. *Expand federal and state support for school districts that are still trying to maintain desegregation through magnet schools and student transfer plans.*
4. *Pursue non-education policies, such as housing integration and the diversification of suburbs, that will lead to increasingly diverse public schools.*

A white graduate of Dwight Morrow summed it up best when he said that school desegregation had been important, but not sufficient. He argued that the movement for a more integrated society needed to be taken to the next level. “It would have had to be...a national priority.”

Many of our interviewees have struggled to maintain some degree of diversity in their lives and say that in their hearts they are open to such diversity when the opportunity presents itself. In their sense of loss about the desegregation they once enjoyed in school, there is hope that our segregated society is not the way it has to be.

Description of the Study: Filling a Gap in the School Desegregation Research

For the last 50 years, social scientists and journalists have played a critical role in helping us understand the challenges, setbacks, and accomplishments in efforts to bring students of different races and ethnicities together under one school roof. We now have a large body of research on various “outcomes” of school desegregation – e.g. the racial makeup of schools over time; achievement test scores, especially those of African American students; and the long-term impact of desegregation on African Americans’ mobility, including college-attendance rates, employment, and housing.²

The bulk of the research on school desegregation comprises quantitative studies on the short-term effects of desegregation – namely the racial makeup of schools and the exposure of students to peers of different races. Also, many studies look at African American student achievement as measured by test scores after sometimes just one or two years of desegregation.³

Meanwhile, journalists and other writers have related touching personal stories of survivors of school desegregation in the United States, particularly black students who withstood some of the fiercest opposition to integration.⁴

This material is important and helpful. It has often failed, however, to provide the full context of what was happening in the communities surrounding desegregated schools. Nor has it shown how that context related to circumstances within racially mixed schools, and what it meant for educators and students to live through a policy era that seems quite radical given our tradition of local control of education.

Missing has been a thorough examination of adults of different races who attended racially mixed schools in various settings. It is surprising that, 50 years after the *Brown* decision, few researchers have asked graduates of desegregated schools, or the educators who taught them, to define their experiences. And while African American graduates of desegregation have been studied in a limited fashion, *no researchers before us have interviewed large numbers of white graduates of racially mixed schools*. This is ironic in a country in which whites still hold so much economic and political power.

Why the Class of 1980?

In the fall of 1967, when Lyndon B. Johnson occupied the White House and Martin Luther King, Jr., still lived, a new crop of kindergartners entered public schools across the country. Full of the hope and promise that marked the era into which they were born, these children would travel through the educational system at a time of tremendous change. On their first day of school, the federal government was on the verge of finally forcing hundreds of school districts to implement the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Thirteen years later, they would graduate from public schools that were, on average, far more desegregated than those they had entered.

Thus, we chose to study the history of six high schools and the members of the Class of '80 who attended them during the late 1970s because their era was the beginning of the peak in American school desegregation. By 1988, efforts by the Reagan and Bush administrations to dismantle school desegregation policies had begun to pay off, and re-segregation was on the rise.⁵ National data show that members of the Class of 1980, therefore, were, on average, more

likely to have classmates of other races than were students in any class before them or in classes of the last 15 years.⁶

Our research suggests that the late 1970s was a particularly pivotal moment in the history of school desegregation policy across the country. By this time in many towns, the initial protests and racial conflict that occurred when students were first reassigned to desegregated schools in the early 1970s had subsided to some degree. According to many people we interviewed, the late-'70s era was a relatively sedate time when strong and vocal opposition to desegregation had died down. The promise of a new more racially integrated society was still alive, at least in school districts that had not already lost most of their white students.⁷

At the same time, this was a transitional period, following Watergate and the Vietnam War. A conservative political movement would soon change the policy agenda in education and other public policy arenas. By the time the Class of 1980 graduated from high school, in the midst of the Iranian hostage crisis, a major recession, and a severe oil shortage, Ronald Reagan's presidential campaign was already fueling a powerful backlash against the Great Society policies of the 1960s and '70s.⁸

Thus, the Class of 1980 was born at the tail end of the Baby Boom and during the Civil Rights Movement, but came of age during the Reagan years. Over the nearly 25 years following their high school graduation, many in this cohort sought jobs and a college education, married, bought homes, had children, met new friends, and joined new organizations. Meanwhile, the public schools gradually became more racially segregated and little progress was made in reducing the level of segregation in other realms of society.

Members of the Class of 1980 tell powerful stories of cross-racial friendships, racial inequality, and missed opportunities within their racially mixed schools and the larger society. Their words – until now undocumented – are especially relevant in light of the pending *Brown* anniversary.

Methodology

In 1999, we set out to conduct in-depth case studies of six high schools in the context of six school districts that had undergone some form of desegregation by the late 1970s. We planned to examine these schools in light of political and historical trends and to conduct lengthy interviews with at least 40 Class of 1980 graduates from each site.

Sampling

In conducting such case studies, researchers employ “purposive” or “purposeful” sampling.⁹ Our constant theme was “sampling for diversity” because common themes that emerge across diverse samples are especially meaningful.

Thus we sought school districts that varied in terms of size, region, racial/ethnic makeup of the general population and the students, the social class of residents, and the policies by which they were desegregated. In choosing which high schools within these districts to study, we looked at the racial and social-class composition of their enrollments and at the role they played in the desegregation programs within each district. We wanted the schools to be as different from one another as possible.

When it came to which members of the Class of 1980 we would interview at each school, we sought a range of graduates that reflected the racial makeup of each school back in the late

1970s. Within each racial or ethnic group, we sought interviewees who differed in achievement level in high school, socio-economic status in high school, involvement in school activities, post-secondary education, and current residence. We attended the Class of '80's 20-year reunion at five of the six schools and tracked down graduates who had skipped the reunions.

Data Collection

Our data collection occurred in three overlapping stages or “tiers”:

Tier One (1999-2001) – Schools and districts as cases; document collection; context interviews with local policy makers, lawyers, advocates, and educators involved with the six districts and schools in the 1970s.

Tier Two (2000-02) – In-depth interviews with 40-50 African American, Latino, and white graduates of the Class of 1980 from each of the schools.

Tier Three (2002-03) – “Portrait” interviews or detailed second interviews with 4-6 of the graduates from each of the six schools.

Overview of data: A total of 540 interviews; among them, 268 graduate interviews (242 initial interviews, 26 portrait interviews). Our open-ended interviews with policy makers, activists, school officials, lawyers, educators, and graduates focused, for the most part, on the effect of school desegregation on their communities, schools, and lives. We wanted to know whether desegregation had changed people and society – and, if so, how.

Materials collected: yearbooks, newspaper clips, district documents, and historical documents in libraries and schools.

Data Analysis

After each taped interview was transcribed verbatim, we read all of the transcripts and “coded” or labeled the data according to the central themes and issues that were most important in each interview. The major findings emerged from the data after we read through the coded material and identified the themes and issues that were most prevalent to the people we interviewed.

Schools Studied

For more complete descriptions, please refer to Appendix B of this report.

Austin High School, Austin, Texas (Austin Independent School District)

- Desegregated via majority-to-minority transfers from several attendance areas.
- Racial makeup during the 1970s: 15% African American, 19% Hispanic, 66% white.

Dwight Morrow High School, Englewood, N.J. (Englewood Public Schools)

- Desegregated by receiving white students from Englewood Cliffs High School via a sending-receiving plan. It was already somewhat integrated as the only public high school serving the racially diverse town of Englewood. Busing and reassignment began at the elementary level.
- Racial makeup during the 1970s: 57% African American, 7% Hispanic, 36% white.

John Muir High School, Pasadena, California (Pasadena Unified School District)

- Desegregated originally by drawing from several diverse attendance areas – and in the 70s, via mandatory busing.
- Racial makeup during the 1970s: 50% African American, 11% Hispanic, 34% white, 5% Asian/Pacific Islander.

Shaker Heights High School, Shaker Heights, Ohio (Shaker Heights City School District)

- Desegregated as the only high school in a district experiencing an influx of African American students from Cleveland. Efforts were made in Shaker Heights to integrate neighborhoods, and student reassignment began at the elementary level.
- Racial makeup during the 1970s: 39% “minority” (mostly African American) and 61% white.

Topeka High School, Topeka, Kansas (501 School District)

- Desegregated via assigned attendance areas; student reassignment began at the elementary and junior high levels.
- Racial makeup during the 1970s: 20% African American, 8% Hispanic, 69% white, 1.4% American Indian, 1.4% Asian.

West Charlotte High School, Charlotte, N.C. (Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools)

- Desegregated via court order to reassign students from white high schools to this historically black high school.
- Racial makeup during the 1970s: 50% African American and 50% white.

Graduate Interviews by Race

White	African American	Latino	Asian	Mixed Race	<u>TOTAL</u>
136	79	21	2	4	242 + 26 second interviews

Findings from Desegregated Schools and Their 1980 Graduates

Our data and analysis demonstrate that, despite different social and political contexts as well as divergent racial demographics, the six schools were alike in several ways.

Our two central and overlapping sets of findings challenge any simple assumptions about the success or failure of school desegregation:

- The first set speaks to the theme of desegregated public schools swimming against a tide of racial segregation that was, and still is, prevalent in society.
- The second set illustrates that students who lived through desegregation consider it one of the most valuable experiences of their lives. They find that their adult worlds tend to be far more segregated than their schools were.

Embedded in each set of findings are smaller findings with details that speak to specific experiences in these desegregated schools and the graduates' adult lives.

Swimming Against the Tide

Public schools could only achieve limited integration and racial equality in the midst of a segregated and unequal society. They were strongly affected by the fact that whites in the local communities had, in general, far more political clout than African Americans or Latinos, and thus far greater influence over how school desegregation policies were carried out.

In each of the six communities and schools in our study, officials and educators tried to make desegregation as palatable as possible for middle-class white parents and students. On a political level, this made perfect sense – the idea was to stave off white and middle-class flight, which would leave the public schools politically and economically vulnerable. But the needs of students of color and the poor were too often ignored.

Efforts to please white and more affluent parents manifested themselves in similar practices across the six communities. For example, more of the burden of desegregating the schools fell on black and Latino children. They were the students most likely to be bused, and schools in their communities were the most likely to be closed down. This occurred in slightly different degrees depending on the size of the school district, but in five of the six districts at least one historically black school had been closed. Perhaps even more pervasive was the consistent re-segregation of students across classrooms in desegregated high schools.

Same Schools, Different Classes

One of the most common practices in desegregated schools was the creation of high-track or gifted classes. These tracks were promoted simply as the classes in which the most advanced students could be challenged academically. But the racial overtones and implications cannot be ignored, as in school after school these top-level classes were almost entirely white.¹⁰

We recognize that many factors affected the re-segregation of students within desegregated schools, such as the unequal schooling that black and Latino students had received prior to desegregation, and the higher poverty rates of their families. But our data also suggest that white students were given more information about and easier access to honors, A.P., and other advanced classes.

Some practices labeled students as “gifted” as early as kindergarten, then channeled them through the grade levels in the “appropriate” classes. More subtle forms of sorting students entailed teacher recommendations and support to get into the best classes. Whatever the method, all six of the schools and districts managed to create incredible and consistent levels of within-school segregation.

A white 1980 graduate of Shaker Heights High School who was in all high-level classes said that “this A.P. thing...was actually also like a school within a school.” This graduate noted that, while it was not always the exact same 20 students in every class, “it would be very unusual to see somebody, like a new face, in one class that you didn’t see in any other class.”

At Dwight Morrow High School, which was only 36 percent white by the time the Class of 1980 arrived, the more “academically stringent” the class, the fewer the black students enrolled, said a white graduate who had been in all high-level classes. He noted that in his A.P. biology class, there were one or two black students, and in calculus there was only one – in a school that was almost 60 percent black. He recalled there were “two societies going on at the academic level.”

At Dwight Morrow, even when African Americans did well in regular-level classes, teachers and counselors were sometimes reluctant to promote them to the high-track classes. According to one such African American graduate, “Dwight Morrow, in terms of academics, it was integrated, but it was segregated. And what happened was, once you got labeled that was pretty much it.”

Maybe the most revealing memory of tracking and race came from a former English teacher at West Charlotte High School. This now-retired instructor told us about her first year at West Charlotte, when it was still an all-black school. She recalled that the students in the all-black honors classes were some of the brightest students she ever taught. She did not think at the time the school desegregated that the black high-level students were less talented than the high-level white students who came in and quickly filled most of the seats in those classes. She said that today she often wonders, “What did happen to [those high-achieving black students] when the school became integrated and the high-level classes [became] predominately white?”

Interestingly enough, a reform movement to “de-track” schools and create more access to high-level curricula came along in the 1990s, well after the Class of 1980 had graduated and after the schools in this country were already becoming more racially segregated.¹¹

“Colorblindness” as a Goal

Against the backdrop of racial inequality described above, the educators, administrators, and graduates in the six schools we studied said that they rarely talked about issues of race in the late 1970s. Overall, the goal of the era – to be totally “colorblind”¹² – was especially important in the eyes of the educators. It was a rare exception to find a teacher in one of these schools in the late ’70s who did not espouse this colorblind ideology.

Two central themes ran through explanations of *why* colorblindness was crucial. The first had to do with teachers’ prior experiences, particularly in the early ’70s, when several of the districts and schools we studied had seen a great deal of racial tension and even “rioting.” By the late ’70s, a degree of calm had returned; not talking about race seemed the best way to “keep the peace” and to “keep a lid on things.”

The second major rationale for the colorblind perspective was the well-meaning argument that “people are people” no matter what color they are. Therefore, teachers and students needed to treat one another as individuals, not as members of a particular racial/ethnic group. That appeared the best way to emphasize personal connections across racial and ethnic groups – even as racial inequality significantly shaped school policy.

A white graduate of Dwight Morrow, which was predominantly African American, called race a “terrible topic” he could not discuss in school. When asked why, he said, “ Because you didn’t want to offend people. You didn’t want to say something stupid. You didn’t want to get into fights.... In the U.S., it’s kind of like a topic you don’t talk about very much.”

Thus, many graduates said they believed that ignoring race was the “right” thing to do. Although teachers and administrators never actually instructed them to do so, they did it by example.

Yet underneath lay the graduates’ own sense that talking more about race would have been helpful. Clearly, they were living with issues of race everyday, even if they were not talking about it. Some graduates remembered their school experiences as racially tense or chaotic and would have liked more educators to help them work through such feelings.

Others spoke of greatly valuing the few teachers who did address race. Still others noted that the colorblind ideology has contributed to the uncertainty and contradictory emotions about race that trouble many of the graduates, especially the white graduates, today.

According to an African American alumnus of Austin High, educators should have tried to break down the racial barriers the students had grown up with. “You got to build a bridge to...be able to meet in the middle to get along, and that just wasn’t presented back then.”

A white graduate of West Charlotte High said, “[We] knew our mission was to make us all colorblind. That was the objective...in the late ’70’s, early ’80’s, [for] everyone [to] be the same. That has since changed to embracing the differences through diversity.... It was [a] very different time and different objective.”

Moving Closer, Staying Apart

In spite of the obstacles, the majority of Class of 1980 interviewees recalled becoming friends or at least acquaintances with one or more people of another racial group while in high school. These relationships developed primarily through extra-curricular activities – athletics in particular, especially among the boys. But student government, drama, band, and chorus, for example, also brought boys and girls together across racial lines.

Furthermore, in a few of the schools, as the Class of ’80 neared graduation, racial barriers seemed to diminish. Social cliques once extremely segregated by race became slightly less so.

Still, although the graduates recalled learning a great deal from their interactions with students of other racial/ethnic groups, their closest friends tended to be of the same race, and the social cliques remained racially identifiable even as more students crossed their boundaries.

It was at the two schools where whites were in the minority – Dwight Morrow and John Muir – that social integration grew most pronounced over the years the students were together. Many white students found a refuge from the more cliquish and socially exclusive predominantly white schools they attended before or after high school.

By senior year, one white graduate of Dwight Morrow noted, students had transcended many racial barriers; a “growing togetherness” led to more racial mixing inside and outside of

school – for instance, black and white students going to parties at each other’s houses. If such social mixing could have continued, he said, “you may have actually had the creation of a truly integrated society.”

On-going segregation across racial and ethnic lines resulted partly from logistical and historical facts – e.g. who grew up with whom, who had attended elementary school and junior high with whom, and who lived near whom. “Close” friendships tended to be same race, even in the schools in which “everyone got along” fairly well.

But divisions also had roots in a powerful hierarchy separating students not only by race, but also by social class and other factors, including perceived physical attractiveness and athletic ability. For instance, athletes or cheerleaders of the minority racial background in any given school – usually African Americans or Latinos, but sometimes whites – were likeliest to win acceptance by the “popular crowd,” often making these popular cliques the most integrated.

An African American graduate of West Charlotte said, “The black students who were in the clubs, student council, cheerleaders’ [squad], and things like that, they did congregate and go out with the white students after school. Maybe they did things after practice...and you would see them talking more, or walking to class more, together.”

Yet even these popular “minority” students did not always feel fully accepted within these groups. They often found that these friendships only went “so far” – in many instances, students did not feel welcome or comfortable in the homes of students of different racial or ethnic backgrounds.

One white Austin High graduate recalled the first time she invited a Latina friend home with her after school:

I can remember bringing her to my house and asking her to stand outside for just a few minutes, and I went in and called my mother and asked if I could have a friend come in.... She said yes, and I said, “Well, she’s Mexican. Would that still be okay?” My mother said, “Rita only.” I mean...it wasn’t an open door policy.

And finally, in three of the six schools there was very little interracial dating; in the other three such dating was almost exclusively between the athletically successful African-American and Latino males and white females. For these students, the difficulty of crossing such sensitive racial boundaries after school and on the weekends reveals the impact of society on students struggling to overcome age-old taboos about race.

This first set of findings suggests the many ways in which broader societal inequalities – demarcated by race, class, and gender – are entrenched in the local communities surrounding these schools and easily permeated their walls. Nevertheless, students had cross-racial interactions that they could not have had in a one-race school and that changed them in fundamental ways.

That Was Then, This Is Now

Our second set of findings reveals how the graduates evaluated their desegregated school experiences 20-plus years later. Overwhelmingly, regardless of racial and ethnic background,

they were grateful that they had attended racially diverse high schools. They acknowledged, however, that their lives today are more segregated than in their high school days.

Learning Through Experience

All 242 graduates we interviewed expressed some gratitude for having attended desegregated schools. They said these schools provided them with one of their only opportunities – or their only opportunity – to mix with people of other racial or ethnic backgrounds. Although sometimes difficult and frustrating, this experience yielded a valuable social education not otherwise available through books, videos, or field trips – the types of “virtual” desegregation we often see used in segregated school today. The interviewees stressed the increased level of comfort they now have in racially diverse settings, especially when they are in the minority.

As a mixed-race graduate from John Muir High School noted, her high school taught her invaluable “life lessons” that could not be learned through books. She contrasts her experience with those of people who went to more segregated schools, some of whom may “test really well, but you put them out in the real world and...they can’t make it.”

Thus, graduates of all racial and ethnic backgrounds emphasized the importance of “living” through integration. Furthermore, they appreciate those lessons more than ever, because they have come to realize the uniqueness of their school experiences. It was only after graduating that they understood what they had gained vis-à-vis peers who had not attended diverse schools and who seemed more prejudiced.

Still, *what* the students learned about race, and how that has helped them as adults, differed across racial/ethnic groups.

White graduates said that they had gained a greater appreciation for other cultures in high school and were less likely to revert to stereotypical assumptions about others based on race. They also stressed their decreased fear of people of color. White spouses and friends who did not attend diverse schools, they said, are often frightened in racially diverse and predominantly black or Latino settings. As a white alumna of Austin High explained:

If you just hang out with a bunch of white people and...you do everything that you can to say I’m going to act like a nice, open-minded person when I get around these black folks and Mexican folks, you’re not going to be as good at it. You’re going to be more uptight. You’re going to be stressed out. It’s going to be a problem.

The graduates of color stressed that they were prepared to function in predominately white environments because they had learned how to cope with the prejudice they were likely to encounter in such situations. In addition, many graduates of color said they were more at ease in a white-dominated society because they had learned that not all whites were racist.

An African American alumna of West Charlotte High School said: “I know a lot of black people have only been around blacks and they really can’t see past being around anyone other than blacks.” Meanwhile, she noted that in part because of her desegregated school experience being in racially diverse settings “doesn’t bother me at all.”

A number of graduates of color also said they learned, through their daily interactions with whites in high school, that they could compete with whites academically. So they have confidence they would not have acquired in a segregated high school.

Prepared for the “Real World” – Except the Real World Is Segregated

One of the main impetuses for school desegregation policy was that it brought young people of different backgrounds together to prepare them for adult lives in our racially and ethnically diverse society and thus, it should help the next generation overcome segregation in the United States.

Attending racially mixed schools did, for the most part, help our interviewees learn to “get along” and feel more comfortable with people of different backgrounds. However, the adult world has remained highly segregated in terms of housing, employment, social interaction, and religious observance.

Even when the graduates of the six schools have sought more racially diverse environments – truer for the men and women of color than for whites – options have been limited. Racial segregation proved more powerful than the good intentions of this cohort of graduates, who carried high hopes that adulthood would be more like high school.

Three-fourths of the whites we interviewed described their current neighborhoods as predominantly white. Only about 25 percent lived in communities that they considered diverse or in which they were in the minority.

Meanwhile, 56 percent of the African Americans and about two-thirds of the Latinos said they lived in neighborhoods that were either racially diverse or predominantly white. But about 20 percent of the African Americans living in diverse communities said that their white neighbors were moving out and their neighborhoods were becoming more segregated.

These numbers suggest that graduates of desegregated schools do not face segregated conditions more than the rest of the society; indeed, overall, African American and Latino graduates in particular are more likely to reside in diverse neighborhoods than the average American. But they find themselves in a housing market with limited choices of diverse and stable communities.

Meanwhile, white graduates of desegregated schools have strong economic incentives to maintain the status quo and seek out less diverse neighborhoods – even as they voice frustration about how racially segregated their adult lives are. The 2000 Census data show that, even as the country becomes more racially and ethnically diverse, residential segregation – especially among whites – remains high.¹³

When asked why he was not in contact with any of his black friends from high school, a white alumnus of Dwight Morrow said, “I think I went off with my white world, and...people live lives for the most part along color [lines].” Sitting on his back porch in a mostly white upper-middle-class suburb, he grew more frustrated as he compared his current life to the days when he was close to many of his black classmates:

We went to school with each other..., we got along nice, we all threw our hats up together, and then we don’t talk [to] or see each other anymore, so I think we failed.... We didn’t make the world an integrated place, it’s just not. They forced people to go to school

together, but they don't force you to live together, so other than that – the races, where do they commingle? Tell me.

We learned that the graduates are most likely to interact with members of other racial and ethnic groups at work. But even there, people of color are more likely to be in subservient roles and whites are more likely to be in leadership or management positions. That dynamic mirrors the tracking in desegregated high schools and challenges meaningful cross-racial interactions on equal terms.

The increased segregation appears to have begun immediately after graduation. For instance, the graduates who went on to college talked about the social milieu being far more segregated than that of their high schools. Students of different racial/ethnic groups occupied different areas of the campus, with few opportunities to interact as they had in high school through extra-curricular activities and common spaces.

Yet even for those graduates – more often men and women of color than white – who have sought and found housing in integrated neighborhoods, their social circles, including their churches, and most of their close friends tend to be of the same race. As an African American graduate of Topeka High School (see the second vignette in Appendix A) noted, even though he lives in a predominantly white neighborhood and works in a predominantly white office, he spends most of his free time with his family and people from his predominantly African American church, where he runs a youth group. He said of his church, which is segregated like so many churches in the United States: “I think that has a lot to do with, you know, just who I spend most of... the social time with.”

“That Was a Different Time” – Struggling with Choices for Their Kids

Findings related to where the graduates send their own children to school speak directly to the contrast between the current social, political, and economic context and that of 25 years ago. Mostly gone are the days when political leaders focused on equity and equal educational opportunities as well as racial harmony. The current political climate stresses accountability and high-stakes testing.

The graduates discuss the political and social differences between then and now and how the focus today is much more on individual gains and less on changing society for the better. A white alumna of West Charlotte said, “Things seem a lot more materialistic to me now.... We were all coming off the '60s and '70s.... There was still a lot about women's rights and...people were still looking for equality and their place in the world, and that seemed to be more what was important.”

Interestingly enough, our data and public opinion poll data suggest that for many parents diversity in public schools is still a very high priority. For instance, an overwhelming majority of whites – 96 percent – agree that black and white children should attend the same schools. Another 66 percent of white parents say that it is “very” or “somewhat” important for their children to attend a diverse school. Only 16 percent of white parents say that racial integration is “not important at all.” Meanwhile, polls show that at least 80 percent of African American parents believe it is either “very” or “somewhat” important for their child's school to be racially diverse. Only 10 percent of black parents say it is “not important at all.”

But since the Class of 1980 left their diverse schools, income inequality has grown, leaving the “haves” – primarily upper-middle- and upper-class professionals and business owners – more focused than ever on maintaining their status by giving their children educational opportunities that other children lack. Today, the most successful graduates feel a lot of pressure to enroll their own children in the “best” schools – as defined almost exclusively by state tests and rankings – and they recounted how much less pressure their parents felt about getting them into the “right” school. Furthermore, what the graduates valued most when looking back reflected a broader understanding of “good” schools – everything from creative teachers to strong theatre and music programs to winning sports teams to the racial diversity of the student body.

But as parents in this “different time,” many interviewees said they feel compelled to put test scores before diversity when choosing a school for their daughters and sons.

A white Topeka High graduate, who did not finish college himself and lives in a predominantly white middle-class community, noted that more and more decent-paying occupations require college degrees, placing a premium on entrance to highly ranked schools. “From my perspective and being a parent now, it would be good, but being racially diverse isn’t going to get you a job.”

Whites are most often the people with the resources to buy the homes or pay the tuition that will get their children into high-scoring schools, which are often predominantly white and/or Asian and affluent. Sixty percent of our white interviewees with school-age or almost-school-age children have enrolled or plan to enroll them in public or private schools that fit this description, even as they lament that their children will miss the racial diversity they had in their own schools.

A white alumnus of Austin High has struggled, he said, to come to terms with his children’s enrollment in a “very white, disgustingly affluent” private school. He thinks they are getting an excellent education, but their lack of exposure to students of different racial and cultural backgrounds – what he said was an important part of his own education – is a real “down side.” He added, “So this is ironic. I’m not giving my children the opportunity I had. I mean, they have a different opportunity..., [but] they don’t have those cross cultural friendships.”

Chasing higher tests scores has also affected the choices of the African American and Latino graduates, with three-fourths of those with school-age children doing whatever is necessary to get their children into predominantly – or significantly – white high-scoring schools as well. An African American alumna of Muir High said, “It ain’t no joke now!” She added that unlike when she went to high school, if her children do not go to college, they “won’t have a chance in hell!”

And yet, these graduates are finding it increasingly difficult to enroll their children in diverse schools, and several commented on white flight occurring in their communities and schools. Others now cling to what is left of school desegregation plans, including magnet schools. These graduates, more savvy about the role that race plays in educational opportunity than most of their white peers, talk about avoiding all-black or black-and-Latino schools if possible. As a black alumna of Dwight Morrow said, “whenever a school system turns [out] to be 98 percent black, people don’t care anymore and the money stops going into the schools.”

Furthermore, according to some of the graduates interviewed, over the last 25 years public schools, especially those perceived to be more urban and more diverse, have been given a bad and often undeserved rap. A white graduate of Muir High who put his son in Pasadena

public schools noted, “When he was in nursery school, we heard nothing but bad things about the Pasadena schools. And we’ve been pleasantly surprised... much of that is not true.”

This last set of findings speaks to the power of social trends, and of the fear they foster, to overpower the life experiences of these parents and their desire for their own children to have similar cross-racial relationships. It highlights the difficulty, given our racially unequal society, in creating diverse schools that are good enough for those with other choices – especially today, when the public policy tools to create such schools are being eliminated.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

By the late 1970s, much of the hard work to get black, white, and Latino students together under one school roof had been done. The struggle for desegregation and greater racial equality needed to go to the “next level,” which would have included not just the public schools, but also policies such as housing integration. Unfortunately, the schools were left, in essence, holding the bag as the country abandoned broader social change.

Once these graduates left their racially diverse high schools, desegregation and greater racial equality were not national priorities. In fact, dismantling school desegregation became a much higher priority. And there was the Class of 1980, more prepared for racial integration than any cohort before them, in the midst of a society that was in many ways moving in the other direction.

It is important to contrast the experiences of these graduates in racially diverse public schools with the political agenda of the last 25 years. Public schools that have managed to bring people of different racial backgrounds together for even short periods of time have been working against the prevailing trends.

The graduates of these schools have not changed the world – in fact, many have (sometimes unwittingly) done their part as adults to perpetuate our segregated society. Still, in their sense of loss about the racial diversity they once enjoyed, there is the hope that our society need not always be so segregated.

In the U.S. Supreme Court’s recent ruling in *Grutter v. Bollinger*, the majority found that “student-body diversity is a compelling state interest.” Although this ruling applied to a law school admissions’ policy, it has major implications for K-12 education, where it can be argued that the state interest is even more compelling.

Meanwhile, as we noted above, polls show that the vast majority of parents – black or white – support the *concept* of racially mixed public schools, but they strongly prefer voluntary or choice-based desegregation policies to mandatory reassignments.

In this era of school choice policy proliferation, it should be fairly easy to give the parents what they want. Indeed, when we combine the legal argument of a state interest in diverse educational settings with the opinion poll data and the voices of people who lived through school desegregation, we begin to see the demand for public policies to support, not dismantle desegregated schools. How would we get there? The answer seems to be voluntary school desegregation and greater housing integration, which policy makers could facilitate in several ways.

1. *Broaden measures of school quality and accountability to include indicators other than standardized test scores. For instance, racial diversity could be considered one measure of a “good” public school in an increasingly diverse society.*

Growing public frustration with President Bush’s education policy, the No Child Left Behind Act, shows that Americans are tiring of testing and retesting students as the single instrument of enforcing school, teacher, and student accountability. In the collective wisdom of the American public, and in the voices of the Class of 1980, is a yearning for a

fuller understanding of what makes a school good. While tests can be one very important indicator of student learning, it is important to note that our interviewees never mentioned “high test scores” when reflecting on what they valued most about their school experiences.

We have seen in our study that these narrow testing measures – used as the sole criteria for judging “good” and “bad” schools – work against the kinds of schools that these graduates attended. As parents they have come to pay increasing attention to school rankings on state-mandated test scores in newspapers. And standardized tests, on which white and wealthy students generally score higher, often feed perceptions of racially diverse schools as being inferior and not worth sustaining.¹⁴

Some people argue that new testing systems may promote equity because they force schools to be accountable to all families, not just those of high-achieving students destined for Ivy League colleges.¹⁵ Indeed, under the No Child Left Behind Act, states are required to disaggregate test score data to better understand the performance of students of different racial and social backgrounds (and students who, for example, have limited English proficiency or receive special education). In theory, these accountability measures *could* compel schools to focus on serving all of their students.¹⁶

At the same time, these accountability systems still judge the quality of a school according to the narrow criterion of testing. And only the wealthiest schools, and those serving high percentages of white and Asian students, consistently rank near the top in terms of average score.¹⁷ Our data suggest that affluent parents and/or white parents are less likely to keep their children in a diverse public school that has lower average test scores *even if* it has succeeded in closing its black-white test score gap.

Such narrow measures of accountability also undermine efforts to “de-track” racially diverse public schools. Students constantly feel they are in competition for the few spaces in the best classes. Such competitive models seem to run counter to efforts in corporations to create more cooperative working environments, and they certainly work against efforts to create more democratic and equal schools.

We know from our research that the reputations of racially diverse public schools are fragile and need to be bolstered – not shot down – by state policies. Legislators could – in collaboration with local school and community leaders – enforce accountability *and* foster racial diversity. One possible means would be to devise accountability measures that more accurately reflect the range of experiences of students within racially diverse schools and give racially mixed schools credit for reflecting the “real world” and swimming against the tide of segregation. Such measures are supported by recent research showing that students who attend racially diverse schools learn more and gain deeper insights into issues and social problems by participating in class discussions that encompass many different perspectives.¹⁸

This shift in thinking about accountability would open many democratic possibilities and give schools and communities more input into efforts to define public school accountability. In other words, we need an accountability system that more clearly reflects what parents and students say are important characteristics and goals of public schools. One of these would be racial diversity.

2. *Amend current public school choice policies, including charter school laws, to make them more supportive of parents and educators who want to start and maintain racially diverse schools.*

We acknowledge the political popularity of the many newer forms of school choice policies in states across the country. Most won passage in the 1990s and were touted as measures to infuse greater competition and choice into the public school system. But many of these deregulated school choice options – including inter-district choice plans, charter schools, and vouchers – have a problem. When government oversight diminishes and choice is left to vagaries of the market, inequality and fraud arise.

The most well-known of the 1990s-era school choice policies is *charter school reform*. With charter school laws on the books in 41 states and nearly 3,000 charter schools serving more than 650,000 students up and running, the idea of giving schools public per-pupil funding, but allowing them considerable autonomy from the public system, has obviously caught on.

Yet despite broad-based and bipartisan support for charter schools, the public policies under which the schools operate tend to serve a narrow set of interests – those of free-market advocates who want public education deregulated and privatized. Nomenclature in the charter school world defines “strong” laws as those that allow more deregulation and spawn the largest number of charter schools. Conservative backers of charter school laws argue that “strong” charter school laws should include the following provisions: no cap on the number of charter schools allowed, multiple charter-granting agencies, no requirement for formal evidence of local support before start-up, greater legal and fiscal autonomy, automatic waiver from state and district laws, exemption from collective bargaining and work rules, and a guarantee of *per-pupil* funding (but no more and no special support for schools serving poor students).

Missing from this definition of a “strong” charter school law is any thoughtful discussion of “strong” for what? Many of us would say: For encouraging racial diversity. But this goal, despite strong political support in the general public, appears not to be part of the agenda for those who have the most influence in the state houses across the country. Thus, most charter schools lack any method to broadly disseminate information about their programs. Nor do most of them have the public transportation they would need to bring in students from different communities, the way magnet schools do. Furthermore, unlike magnet schools, many charter schools have admission criteria that do not take into account the goal of racial diversity. These and other factors have contributed to the

growing consensus in the research literature that charter schools are more racially and socio-economically segregated than regular public schools.¹⁹

But charter school laws could be amended to help encourage racial diversity. For instance, good or “strong” laws could provide financial and other incentives for educators and parents who want to start racially, ethnically, and socio-economically diverse charter schools.

Under such laws, state governments would: (a) pay for student transportation to and from diverse charter schools, especially for students who live far from the school and whose parents lack the means to ferry them each day; (b) prohibit charter schools from having narrow admissions criteria or requiring parents to sign contracts with the schools (such prerequisites are too reminiscent of private school practices and there is no good justification for tax dollars going to schools that exclude students because their parents work two jobs, etc.); (c) assure that information on charter schools is widely distributed and that word-of-mouth recruitment is no longer the primary means by which families learn about charter school opportunities.

In addition to charter school laws, in the last 17 years 44 states have passed *inter-district school choice laws* that now allow 487,000 students to choose to enroll in a public school in a different school district. These plans, like most of the deregulatory choice policies of late, shoulder parents with the entire burden of finding a new school, applying for admission, and providing daily transportation to and from the distant school. In about half of the states, schools and districts choose whether they want to participate in the program and accept choice students. In the other half, the districts are “mandated” to participate, but they can argue against accepting choice students based on lack of space.²⁰

Little research exists on these politically popular state policies. However, from one important study on Massachusetts, we know the following: These programs tend to either maintain the status quo in terms of segregation and inequality, or worsen the situation by allowing families to use the programs to move to more segregated schools.²¹

But inter-district school choice policies, like charter school laws, could be amended to provide incentives and transportation for families that want to use them to foster racial diversity.

We know from our experience with magnet schools and voluntary transfers under school desegregation plans that parents can make choices that fulfill academic expectations *and* support the goal of desegregation. Parents, students, and our society deserve public policies that provide for the choices of individuals as well as the needs of the greater good.

3. *Increase the often pitiful federal and state support for school districts that are trying to maintain desegregated schools.*

One of the most obvious implications of our research is that communities and school districts that are currently operating under school desegregation court orders, or desegregation plans they adopted voluntarily, deserve support from federal and state governments.

While the era of mandatory reassignment of students for desegregation purposes is ending, hundreds of school districts across the country still struggle to maintain diversity in at least some of their public schools. For instance, most urban school districts continue to operate magnet schools, which are public schools of choice designed to attract students of different racial/ethnic backgrounds. Most of them have curricular themes such as math and science or the performing arts and they are generally popular. Magnet schools, which preceded charter schools, continue to receive nominal federal support through a grant program that has been funded at the same low level – between \$100 and \$120 million – for more than a decade. Federal funding for charter schools and other choice programs, including inter-district choice programs, that are not aimed at desegregating students, and in fact often exacerbate segregation,²² now totals almost three times what the federal government is spending on magnet schools. The federal government must be held accountable for such imbalances.

Other important, but fragile, voluntary options include inter-district transfer plans that allow students to cross urban-suburban boundaries in order to desegregate schools. Operating in a few metropolitan areas, including St. Louis and Boston, these school choice plans are at critical stages and depend on the good will of their state legislatures. Legislators should listen to the voices of the people we have interviewed and renew their commitment to such important and successful programs.

4. Pursue non-education goals, such as housing integration and suburb diversification, that will facilitate the creation of more diverse public schools.

Our study demonstrates that school desegregation accomplished a great deal, but it could have accomplished so much more if the “real world” outside the schools had made similar gains – for example, in housing and income equality. The Clinton administration’s “Moving to Opportunity” program, which helped low-income families relocate from poor urban neighborhoods to more affluent suburban ones, was a step in the right direction. But such programs must be expanded beyond a few metropolitan areas and a small number of families.

Also essential are policies to help maintain racially diverse suburbs and their suburban school districts. The vast majority of urban school districts are now less than 20 percent white. So the effort to create and sustain racially diverse public schools in the cities is all but over, save for a few stellar specialized schools or elementary schools located in predominantly white neighborhoods. Today the responsibility to fulfill the promise of *Brown* belongs more to suburban than urban school districts, as increasing numbers of blacks, Latinos, and Asians cross urban-suburban lines. According to the 2000 census,

40 percent of African Americans now live in suburbs. In major metropolitan areas – those with populations of more than 500,000 – blacks and Latinos combined constitute 27 percent of suburban residents.²³

Recent evidence suggests that the suburbs are offering a repeat performance of the urban white flight that occurred in the '60s, '70s and '80s. Thus, as blacks (and to a lesser extent, Latinos) have moved out of the cities, they have remained highly segregated in their new suburban homes as whites flee these communities for more remote suburbs. Asians, meanwhile, are more likely to live in predominantly white suburbs.

Policy makers could stem this tide before it is too late. Large urban school districts cover many square miles and include hundreds of schools and populations that are often disparate in terms of income. Suburban districts are more homogeneous in terms of social class and smaller, which means they could racially balance schools with relatively modest – and thus politically palatable – student movement. Some ask, if racial integration cannot happen in suburbia, where in American society can it happen? Are the suburbs the last hope for the integrationist's dream?

From among the graduates of the Class of 1980 – and those who graduated from high school shortly after or just before – is emerging a new generation of leaders. This report has tapped into the spirit of that generation, too long ignored and under-researched, but one with a crucial and powerful message.

Far into the future, the political choices made and the priorities set during and after this monumental *Brown* anniversary will dictate the course for this nation, so diverse and still so separate in many ways. We can continue in our current direction. Or we can choose to listen to the voices of those who experienced the benefits of school desegregation first hand – men and women who know in their hearts and minds that our increasingly diverse society need not be ever more separate and unequal – that we can do so much more and that it is worth doing.

In closing, we provide two quotes, both from Class of '80 graduates of Muir High School. A Latino, when asked to reflect on his experience with school desegregation in Pasadena, summed up many of the major themes in this study:

Could the programs have been improved? Of course they could have been improved. Were they better than what we had? Without a doubt! But I also think quite honestly, we just didn't stick with it long enough.

His former classmate and now his wife is Indonesian; she had this to say about current and future efforts to deal with diversity in education:

I've always said: If you don't actively seek diversity, it's not going to happen on its own, and [segregation is] just going to continue unless you step in and actively do things to counteract that cycle.... It's like a snowball, you know? So whatever little we can do to counteract that, that's what we need to do.

APPENDIX A

Two Graduates of Desegregated Schools

Following are vignettes of two of the 242 graduates we interviewed for this study. Embedded in their brief stories are universal themes that echo across the lives of many graduates of racially diverse schools. To ensure confidentiality, names of interviewees included in this section have been changed.

Over the Bridge and Back Again: A White Graduate of a Historically Black High School

The history of school desegregation in the United States is full of instances of white students who never showed up to their newly assigned racially mixed public schools. This was not at all uncommon in the South, where “segregation academies” – private schools for white children – opened just in time to enroll students who were fleeing desegregated schools.

Yet, in Charlotte, N.C., the focus of a famous 1971 Supreme Court case that allowed districts to transport students – i.e. “bus” them – to achieve racial balance, relatively few whites fled the public schools. Many attribute this to the role that several affluent and prominent white families played in supporting the desegregation – in some cases, putting their own children on buses to attend a historically black high school.

In Charlotte and other cities across the country, it was the black students who were more likely to be reassigned to white schools and at a younger age, thus bearing the burden of busing. But when it came to desegregating historically black West Charlotte High School, a source of pride in the city’s African American community and the only black high school the district had not closed down, the district leaders knew it would only be possible if white students were reassigned there – and if they showed up.

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg School Board and several community leaders agreed to a plan that sent white high school students from some of the wealthiest and most influential families on the east side of town to the black community that was West Charlotte’s home. Reassignment to West Charlotte of some of the district’s best teachers – along with the establishment there of a special program called the Open Program – helped entice white students.

Hannah Monroe was one of hundreds of white students who, in the mid-1970s, was assigned to West Charlotte High. Hannah’s parents supported public education and desegregation in Charlotte and never questioned whether she would go to her newly assigned school. In fall 1977, she and several of her friends from her affluent white neighborhood set out for West Charlotte and did not look back.

Hannah, who is cheerful, warm, and outgoing (“my husband and my children laugh at me because I talk to anybody, anywhere”), said she did not miss her neighborhood high school, Myers Park, which people in her community had attended for generations. It was seen as the most desirable school in the district, and some white students from Hannah’s neighborhood who had been reassigned to West Charlotte tried to appeal the transfer. Some families moved to keep their children in Myers Park. As Hannah explained it, “When you pull a group of people, and a pretty small group of people, [who]...had focused most of their life on attending a school that perhaps their parents attended, it is a big change.”

The change had cultural and other dimensions, many of which Hannah and her white classmates ended up embracing. For instance, West Charlotte's band and cheerleading squad had a different, more fluid style than those of the white schools. At 50 percent black and 50 percent white, and with a long tradition of serving the black community, West Charlotte was not going to become just another white school. According to Hannah, West Charlotte was a black school and it was an important part of the black community. "So, assemblies and things, [we] just did the way they'd always been done, and that didn't bother anybody."

Hannah laughed, noting that so much about West Charlotte was different than at predominantly white Myers Park. For instance, the school play one year was "Godspell," whereas the Myers Park production was "The Sound of Music." "In a lot of ways it was a more sophisticated environment we were in, and it was more fun."

Hannah became a member of the West Charlotte student council, but not without a little affirmative action. After the school was desegregated, a student government election process had been established to assure that the three students of each race – white and black – who received the most votes were elected. After that, the three students – black *or* white – who received the next highest vote totals won the last of the nine seats. In the year that Hannah ran, the student body voted in six black council members and three white ones. The school administration decided that more white students were needed to provide more balance, so the fourth- and fifth-ranked white students were assigned two "extra" seats. Hannah was one of those.

She recalled her first student council meeting and how she spoke up when she had an idea. She said that one of the black students snapped: "Honey, as somebody who wasn't even supposed to be on this council, you don't get an opinion." The remark stunned Hannah, but it also forced her to step back and realize that before she tried to exert any influence, she had to build friendships and trust in the black community.

Hannah excelled academically at West Charlotte, enrolling in the top-tier classes, where there was a far smaller percentage of black students than the 50 percent school-wide. She graduated near the top of her class and won a prestigious scholarship to a state university. She had few complaints about her education, even though she felt herself a victim of affirmative action when a black classmate, lower in the class ranking than she, was accepted to a prestigious private university that rejected Hannah.

Looking back on her three years at West Charlotte High School, she has no regrets about going there and thinks she is a better person for it. What's more, she thinks that Charlotte as a community is better for having desegregated its schools and students. She said that if the goal is to "have cross cultural, cross racial relationships, you've got to work at it. And...the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system did that."

At graduation, Hannah was approached by the black student who had said she didn't have the right to an opinion on the student council. By then they had become friends. Hannah recalled, more than 20 years later, "She told me that I was the damn nicest white girl she ever met. And...that probably meant more to me than any other... I mean, I get teary eyed when I tell you about it 'cause it was just like, okay, we've really, you know, built a bridge there".

Hannah and her classmates graduated from West Charlotte in spring 1980 feeling like they had been an important part of the city's efforts to build more long-needed bridges across the races. To an extent, these connections remain. For instance, Hannah knows more African Americans her age in Charlotte than she would have attending an all-white school. She sometimes runs into black fellow alumni through her work in the community. She also talked, as

did virtually all the white graduates we interviewed for this study, about being more comfortable in racially mixed settings and black neighborhoods than are many white people she knows.

But for the most part, Hannah's classmates returned to a segregated society, with most of the whites living in predominantly white communities and most of the blacks living in predominantly black communities.

Meanwhile, since the late 1970s, the city of Charlotte has doubled in population and grown physically and economically at an alarming rate. This made the commute across separate black and white communities more problematic, but logistics was not the greatest force working against school desegregation.

Many of the newcomers, especially whites from the north, had little patience for the desegregation plan. They demanded "better," but not necessarily racially diverse, public schools, for their children. That reduced political support for the policies that had transported Hannah from the white to the black side of town. Meanwhile, in the years since her graduation, the country generally had changed politically, leaving the goal of racial integration and equality behind.

By 2002, most of what was left of Charlotte's desegregation policies was dismantled after federal judges declared that the district had done all it could do to desegregate its schools. Today, Charlotte's public schools are more separate along racial lines than they were when Hannah was in high school. West Charlotte High School is only 10 percent white.

Hannah, her husband, and their four sons live in the same house in which she grew up. The neighborhood is still predominantly white and affluent. Her husband attended an elite private school in Charlotte, where Hannah's three school-age children are now enrolled.

Coming from a pro-public-school background, Hannah struggled with the decision to put her children in private school. She and her family tried to make the public school option work, but felt that the neighborhood elementary school where her children were assigned – the same school she had attended as a child – did not have what her oldest sons, who are twins, needed. She wanted them in separate classrooms with equally good teachers, and one of the kindergarten teachers at that school was considered superior to the other.

Even Hannah's mother, who supported public education, told her to do what she thought was best for her children, saying, "It's a different day and time in the city."

In fact, it appears to be a different day and time in most metropolitan areas as segregation prevails in so much of the housing market and in public school systems – and there is little or no emphasis on correcting it. While Hannah has fond memories of her experience at West Charlotte High School and says she might move her children to public schools as they get older, she sees many differences between today and when she went to school. For instance, she says that our society today is much more materialistic and there is much less emphasis on equality: "The things that are important to the students these days are different. I mean, even the idealism we sort of grew up with and carried over is gone."

She adds that she is "very sad" that the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system is moving away from race-based school assignments. "I just think it's not... good for our community. It's...an easy fix, for something people perceive as a problem that will have long-term detrimental effects on our community."

Finding Common and Not-So-Common Ground Across Racial Lines–

Life at Topeka High School and After

Henry Delane was born and raised in Topeka, Kansas, where his family had been part of the black community for generations. Like his father and uncle and cousin before him, Henry went to Topeka High School. But unlike prior generations of Delanes, Henry experienced a Topeka public school system that was considerably desegregated – both across and within school buildings – but that still had a long way to go to achieve integration.

A little known fact about Topeka, the home of Linda Brown and the famous court case that bears her family name: Although the elementary schools were segregated when Brown and Henry’s parents were children, the city’s only high school until the late ’50s – Topeka High – had enrolled black and white students for decades. Kansas state law prior to the *Brown* ruling had allowed but not required districts to segregate schools by race. In Topeka that meant separate elementary schools but nominally desegregated junior high and high schools.

In an effort to maintain some formal degree of segregation within the diverse secondary schools, the district allowed separate black and white basketball teams, dances, and cheerleading squads within Topeka High. In fact, the blacks were not involved in most white extracurricular activities, such as school plays or performances. And many THS graduates of that era describe it as being two separate schools in one building.

By the time Henry matriculated through Topeka’s public schools, much, but not all, of that within school segregation had been dismantled. In 1977, Henry entered the grades 10-12 high school with a sense of pride. He said, “I was excited about just being there.”

He had grown up going to Topeka High football and basketball games and band concerts with his father and felt familiar with the school. He had been to both all-black and predominantly white elementary schools and junior high schools, so the racial makeup of Topeka High at that time – 69 percent white, 20 percent black, 8 percent Latino, and the rest a mixture of American Indian and Asian – did not phase him.

Still, Henry, like many of his classmates, noted that he was in “awe” of the school building itself. Topeka High is a beautiful gothic structure built in 1931 and thought to be the first million-dollar high school in the United States. It resembles a New England college or prep school campus and thus seems a bit out of place at the center of Topeka – the Kansas state capital – where drab government buildings predominate. In fact, Topeka High is one of the city’s main attractions for tourists.

In the history of this rather incredible high school, the Class of 1980 arrived on its doorstep during a relatively quiet era. In contrast, the Civil Rights movement and the ensuing protests for equal rights had led to unrest in the school district from the late 1960s through the mid-1970s. At Topeka High School in 1969, the Black Student Union was formed and presented a list of demands to the district administrators. Those included more black teachers and counselors, as well as a black studies program. In spring 1970, black students staged walkouts and boycotts.

Also that spring, Topeka High’s Mexican American students marched to city hall to protest unfair treatment at the high school and in Topeka public schools generally. They also

demanded more Mexican American counselors, teachers, administrators, and coaches; a course in Mexican American history; and Mexican American representation on the drill team and cheerleading squads.

In 1974 the U.S. Office of Civil Rights of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare notified the Topeka school district that due to on-going segregation, it was not in compliance with the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The district reorganized, including closing two junior highs, in 1975 in response to the HEW complaint. Henry and many of his classmates, still in junior high school at that time, were either attending one of the two schools that closed or were enrolled in one of the remaining junior high schools that received students from the closing schools. Meanwhile, many of these Class of '80 graduates had older siblings in Topeka High School. Reports of fights, riots, bomb scares and walkouts were common, and even if they were exaggerated some Class of '80 grads recalled similar, if less widespread occurrences on their junior high campuses.

By the time Henry and his classmates got to Topeka High, the turbulence had subsided. Educators were worn down. Some, though not most, of the changes that students of color had fought for had occurred, and Henry noted that in the late '70s students had become more apathetic. Still, several of the racial dynamics within THS troubled Henry. For instance, he resented that the teachers and administrators tried to keep a lid on tensions by not discussing race or incorporating different racial perspectives into the curriculum.

Henry recalled sitting through upper-level history classes, where he was one of only two or three blacks, and hearing little about African American history – not even the landmark *Brown* decision that some would argue should have been central to the study of the history of Topeka and Kansas. He recalled, “We never talked about, you know, accomplishments of...blacks in history... But you sure as hell would talk about George Washington.”

His parents inspired him to explore his own history more. He remembered that whenever he had a research paper for which he could choose his topic, he would write about an African American such as Frederick Douglas. Ironically, he said, since he was one of the few blacks in his upper-track classes his perspective was not seen as threatening: “I don’t think that...it really bothered [the teachers], just because I was a minority amongst a majority.”

He and other black students were sometimes intimidated in the predominantly white high-level classes. “You get some of the top white students, and they [would] just yack, yack, yack,” he said, while the black students would not say very much. He added that he thinks the black students were intimidated and afraid that it would seem like “we didn’t know and that we were stupid” if they tried to speak up more.

He also talked about the African American students’ being less involved in activities and in student-government leadership, in part because the white students had a greater voice and were more connected to the process. But Henry was popular. He had friends of all races, he said, and was a “very up front person” who did not fake anything. He was elected a member of the Homecoming Court and participated in two bands, the Spanish Club, football, basketball, wrestling, and the Black Student Union. Through extracurriculars he got to know more white students and find more “common ground.”

While his closest and longest-lasting friendships were with other black students, Henry, like many of his classmates – black, white, and Latino – remembered a sense of pride in the racial diversity of their high school, especially compared to the more white and affluent Topeka

West High across town. Henry noted, “Topeka West was seen as the elite school and Topeka High School was seen more as a melting pot.”

The two schools had an intense rivalry. It was not unusual for Topeka West students, in typical high-school fashion, to go to the Topeka High campus the night before a football game and paint the trash cans the Topeka West colors. But this rivalry had another dimension: Topeka West students often referred to Topeka High as “Congo High” – a not-so-subtle racial slur. Henry remembered seeing these words painted on THS walls, and bananas strewn across the ground. The bananas, Steve explained, were “their indication of monkeys, Africa and that kind of thing.”

That angered him and his fellow students – the African Americans in particular. Topeka High administrators, he said, never did anything about these pranks, which occurred on a regular basis, although he remembered their having the words washed off the walls. He thought the situation somewhat ironic, given that THS was predominantly white. But Topeka West had so few black students in comparison: “You could count them on two hands.”

The ups and downs of attending a racially diverse high school, Henry said, prepared him well for adult life; he attended a predominantly white university and now works and lives in predominantly white settings. The subtle racism he encountered at THS readied him for many of the white students he met in college – most of whom had not had much exposure to people of different racial backgrounds.

Today, Henry is the vice president of a bank in a Midwestern town not far from Topeka. He handles commercial and real estate lending and thus must interact with a mostly white clientele. He is one of only a handful of African Americans working at this bank, and all of his black co-workers are in lower-level positions. Henry, who has determinedly overcome racial barriers while climbing the ladder, recalled when he started as a loan officer.

I was...the only black...loan person in [my town] in any bank. And these older white customers would walk in, and I'd step out of my office and I'd say, “Can I help you?” “Oh, no. We're going to wait for Bert over here.” All right. One did that, another did that. Finally...I realized what was going on, and I walked out one day, and I had in my mind that I'm not going to let 'em say no to me.

Henry explained the different tactics he used to find “common ground” with his white customers. In much the way he had established connections with white students in high school through shared interests, Henry would show the elderly white grandparents pictures of his children – “and boom, there was common ground. They got grandchildren. I got a kid.... Next thing I said, ‘Well what is it that...I'm going to do for you today?’”

One white customer at a time, Henry said he broke through with his message: “I'm a black guy over here, but I can help you. I can do it.”

Finding that common ground with some of his mostly white neighbors has been more challenging. When he, his wife, and their three children moved in, not many people welcomed them. They have since met a few friendly neighbors and his children have made some friends nearby and in the predominantly white school. But one family will not even wave to him when they drive by, so he will stand out by his mailbox and wave at them. He said, “I make them wave. I mean, they have to be...very blatant *not* to wave at me.”

Then there are neighbors who say hi and tell Henry and his family that they are going to have them over for a barbeque some time. “We’ve been here since 1997,” he said. “Haven’t been to a barbecue yet.”

Behind Henry’s somewhat comical description of these interactions is a sense of disappointment that race still matters so much in this society. When he is not at work, most of his social life revolves around his family and his African American church, where he is very involved with the youth group. Church is vital to him, he said, “so I think that has a lot to do with, you know, just who I spend most of... the social time with.”

He noted ironically that this is the same as when he was in high school – that most of his free time was spent with his African American friends. And this, he said, speaks to the color line that school desegregation itself could not dissolve:

Going to a desegregated high school ...[from] the black perspective, gave us an opportunity to intermingle and see some of white culture Now you did give [blacks] access to the same books and things like that, which I think is good... But there was nothing that was done there that would create a different social pattern.... And so, you know, if you don’t do something to create a different social setting then you’re always going to get that, even...in the professional [world]. I don’t care if you work in a predominantly white workplace, if you don’t change something social there, then when you leave work you’re going to go your separate ways still.

APPENDIX B

Descriptions of Six Racially Mixed High Schools

Austin High School

Stephen F. Austin High School was founded in 1881 as the “high school department” of the Austin public school system in Texas. The school has operated at seven locations over the years – all near the center of the city. In 1975, Austin High’s new lakeside campus was completed on the city’s affluent West Side. It is a large grayish concrete structure sitting on a narrow parcel of land between Austin’s lake and a major highway. This urban high school has a somewhat suburban feel to it, in part because it is relatively new, and in part because it is cut off from the rest of the city.

The Class of 1980 was one of the first classes to go to the new school for four years. Many of the students, particularly those from the more affluent West Austin area, saw it as an important institution in the city. The best students went on to top colleges and universities, and the athletic program yielded competitive teams. Although there was virtually no discussion of race or desegregation in the classrooms, strong cross-racial bonds were forged on the playing fields, especially among the male students.

The racial *and* social class divide in the city strongly influenced the experiences of the 1980 graduates of Austin High, which drew its students from several parts of town. Most of the white students came from either an affluent central area west of downtown and north of the lake known as West Austin.

As part of the early phase of school desegregation in Austin, in the late ’70s, Austin High was also enrolling majority-to-minority transfer students from the East Side – the “barrio” and the African American neighborhoods. Also, according to a former principal, at some point in the late ’70s, Austin High began to enroll mostly white and working class students from the South Side. These less affluent whites were – and still are – referred to as the “river rats” because they come from the other side of the river.

Thus school desegregation was especially challenging. The graduates talk about cliques that were divided not only by race and ethnicity but also by class – creating a complex hierarchy in which the mostly white and affluent West Austin students tended to dominate socially. The boundaries that were crossed – on the athletic teams and in other less formal settings – were multiple.

In 1980, the student body was 15 percent African American, 19 percent Latino, and 66 percent white. Today, as many white families have moved out of the city to more homogeneous suburbs with their separate school systems, the Austin Independent School District has lost much of its white population. Still, the board of education has sought to maintain much of the diversity at its flagship high school by constantly redrawing the attendance lines. By 2000, Austin High was 8 percent black, 37 percent Latino, 54 percent white, and 2 percent Asian, which mirrors in many ways the demographics of Austin, now about 11 percent Black, almost 30 percent Latino,

55 percent white and less the rest Asian/other. In many ways, then Austin High School has managed to remain a microcosm of a complex and changing southern city.

Dwight Morrow High School

A first-time visitor to Englewood, New Jersey, could easily mistake Dwight Morrow High School for a private prep school or a small college in this suburban community across the Hudson River from New York. Set off from the road, down a long, tree-lined driveway, the main building is English Tudor with dark, red brick and a stately gothic bell tower. Inside, classrooms have wood floors and leaded windows, and one even has a fireplace.

Across the driveway is the less impressive “South” building. This boxy brick structure went up in the ’60s, when enrollment was high – and when a neighboring school district, Englewood Cliffs, which did not have a high school, entered into a sender-receiver relationship with Englewood and designated Dwight Morrow as its high school.

Back then Dwight Morrow enrolled 1,600 students. Half of them were African Americans who lived in the diverse but segregated town of Englewood. The other half was whites drawn from both Englewood and virtually all-white Englewood Cliffs. It was seen as an excellent avenue to the Ivy League, with a vibrant performing arts program, an envied visual arts curriculum, and student diversity that symbolized the era’s hope for racial integration and equality.

Generally the students got along across racial lines. But there was within-school segregation, as the top-level classes and the more aesthetically pleasing cafeteria in the “old” building were both predominantly white. By the time the Class of 1980 entered Dwight Morrow in fall 1976, blacks made up about 57 percent of the student body, whites less than 40 percent, and Latinos a small but growing percentage. From 1982 to 1987, the white population dropped from 32 to 12 percent of the total. By 2000, there were no white students in the all black and Latino school of less than 600 students, rendering superfluous the second building, the one built to accommodate the now evaporated influx of Englewood Cliffs students.

In the mid-1980s, Englewood and Englewood Cliffs went to court over whether they could end the 20-year-old sender-receiver relationship. Englewood Cliffs lawyers argued that the quality of education at Dwight Morrow had declined, so Cliffs’ students should have other public school options. Englewood lawyers argued that when the Cliffs’ families pulled out of Dwight Morrow, the quality of the academic program was as strong as it had been in prior years and that the Cliffs families were leaving for racial reasons. Englewood won the legal battle, but judging from the composition of Dwight Morrow today, the district and the high school lost the war.

John Muir High School

John Muir High School was once the crown jewel of one of California’s most esteemed school districts, Pasadena Unified. Muir traditionally had served the children of

Pasadena's wealthy elite and of intellectuals who worked at nearby Cal Tech and the Jet Propulsion Laboratory. It also had a history of serving a small number of African American students, including children of the "gilded ghetto" – the city's wealthier African American community.

By the 1960s, however, racial change in the district led to an influx of lower income students of color to Muir. Meanwhile, a wealthy white community that had sent its students to Muir seceded from Pasadena Unified and constructed its own high school. The resulting racial imbalance was exacerbated by Pasadena's school board, which re-drew attendance boundaries to siphon additional white students away from Muir and towards the city's newer Pasadena High School in the heart of the white East Side.

Muir parents fought this re-segregation in court. In 1970, Pasadena became the first district outside the South to be ordered by a federal judge to desegregate its schools. Muir, then, was at the heart of the battle over desegregation in the city. Yet it was also a school that many African American students felt connected to, and where interracial relationships among students had always been stronger than at Pasadena's other high schools.

The Class of 1980 attended Muir at the moment in the school's history when white flight in the district had caused the student population to shift from majority white to majority black. By the time the Class of '80 arrived, the school was 34 percent white, 50 percent black, 11 percent Latino, and 5 percent Asian and Pacific Islander.

Most educators responded to these demographic shifts by attempting as much as possible to ignore race – believing that the most progressive approach was to adopt the attitude that race did not matter. Thus, most graduates observe that race was rarely discussed in their classes, and that the curriculum did not reflect different cultures or perspectives.

Graduates themselves, however, remember being very aware of race. For instance, many noted that white students were more often assigned to upper-track classes, while African American and Latino students were regularly assigned to lower-level courses. Furthermore, although graduates report getting along well, they also recall incidents of intimidation – by black *and* white students – that were not addressed by administrators.

This avoidance strategy by the Muir staff had negative repercussions for a school that was on the brink of re-segregation and that had been increasingly fighting a reputation as the "ghetto school" in the district. Today, Muir is the struggling, predominately low income and minority institution that, in the late 1960s, many parents feared it would become.

Shaker Heights High School

In the late 1970s, Shaker Heights High School prided itself on being one of the premiere public high schools in the country – with large numbers of national merit scholars and many graduates going off to Ivy League universities. Shaker Heights High was also one of the few schools in the country that was integrated through proactive housing policies that provided incentives for residential integration and concerted efforts to prevent white flight. Thus, many of our interviewees spoke of the "integration" that occurred here as both voluntary and "natural" as opposed to other places where "desegregation" connotes court orders and strife. Most all the graduates from the Class of 1980 expressed enormous pride in graduating from such a renowned

institution and being from a community known as much for the quality of its school system as for integration.

Still, the ability grouping at Shaker Heights High became quite elaborate – at one point consisting of five separate “levels,” but down to four levels by the time the Class of 1980 arrived. These tracks or “levels” were racially distinct, with the highest track mostly white, and the lowest level mostly African American. Furthermore, although Shaker Heights High was praised for its racial diversity, race was rarely discussed inside the school walls. Indeed, most graduates recall feeling that race was not –and should not have been – an issue.

Members of the Class of '80 almost uniformly report fond memories of Shaker Heights High and think of the years at SHHS as the one time in their lives when they had true friends from other racial and ethnic backgrounds. Most were shocked going off to college and to work and finding the “real world” a much more segregated and less tolerant a place than Shaker Heights High.

Today, many Shaker graduates actively seek out diverse neighborhoods and schools for their children. Yet they are also troubled by the test scores that make them doubt the quality of racially and socio-economically diverse schools, which generally have lower average scores than white schools.

Though little has changed at the school but the student population, which has become more non-white since 1980, the increase in testing and publicized scores has profoundly affected SHHS. People have begun to question whether Shaker is the school it once was and to engage in heated debates over the existence of a test score gap between its white and African American students. Today it is fighting for its reputation, trying valiantly to counter the tide of public perception against racially diverse schools, and struggling to hold on to its white population.

Topeka High School

Topeka High School is one of the main attractions in the Kansas capital. Built during the Depression and completed in 1931, it cost more than \$1 million dollars, which was unheard of at that time. But growing enrollment in what was then the only high school in the city had necessitated a new building. Inspired by at least three British landmarks, this gothic-style school looks more like a liberal arts college.

Perhaps as important as its impressive architecture is Topeka High's central location in a city that is divided racially and socio-economically. Against the backdrop of the school district's decades-long struggle to racially balance the elementary and junior high schools, the flagship high school always drew students from across color lines.

The site of the most famous school desegregation case in America had, until the late '50s, only one high school, which enrolled black and white students since long before *Brown v. Board of Education*. Prior to 1954 Kansas state law, Topeka allowed but did not require districts to segregate schools by race.

Nonetheless, at Topeka High there were separate black and white dances, sports teams, and extracurricular activities. Black alums we interviewed who attended in the 1930s, '40s, and '50s complained about a “school within a school” and white students' being treated better than black students by teachers and administrators. Blacks were not involved in school plays. And

although Topeka High had a swimming pool – a big deal for a high school in those days – the white administrators opted not to fill it because that would mean blacks and whites swimming together – a taboo at the time.

By the time the Class of 1980 arrived at Topeka High School for their 10-12 grade years, many things had changed since the 1940s and some had remained the same. For one thing, there were then three high schools in the district because the city had annexed predominantly black and Latino Highland Park and its high school. Then in 1961 the district built Topeka West High School on the predominantly white and more affluent West Side. This left racially mixed Topeka High School still at the center of a racially divided city and school district, but gave it an identity as the diverse high school. White students from Topeka West called it “Congo High,” and black students from Highland Park High considered it too white. Because of that identity, some students tried to transfer in, others to transfer out.

Meanwhile, some but not all of the within-school segregation had disappeared. There were no longer separate black and white teams or dances (at least officially). In fact, the school had quotas for certain extracurricular programs, such as cheerleading, a reflection of the diversity of the school.

The classrooms remained relatively segregated, with the top-level classes including few black or Latino students. Still, given the demographics of the school at the time – 69 percent white, 20 percent African American, 8 percent Hispanic and 3 percent “other” (American Indian and Asian) –Topeka High did not have lower-level classes that were all black or all Latino.

In 1969, the Black Student Union was formed and members demanded that the district hire more black teachers and counselors and add a black studies program. The next year, black students staged walkouts and boycotts to draw attention to these issues. Also in 1970, Topeka High’s Mexican American students marched to city hall to protest unfair treatment at Topeka high school and in the district as a whole. They also demanded more Mexican American counselors, teachers, administrators, and coaches, as well as a course in Mexican American history and Mexican American representation on the drill and cheerleading teams.

By the late 1970s, although most of these student demands remained unmet, political activism was quieting. But Topeka High School was – and still is in many ways – at the center of an increasingly diverse but still divided city.

West Charlotte High School

Charlotte, North Carolina’s famous school desegregation case, decided by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1971, is cited as a landmark ruling because it sanctioned the use of transportation – or “busing” – of students to racially diverse schools. Over the next 30 years, thousands of students in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg system were reassigned to schools outside of their neighborhoods and sent on yellow school buses to their newly desegregated facilities.

In Charlotte and most other school districts undergoing desegregation, the burden of busing was placed on the African American or Latino students, as many schools serving these students were shut down and the students were reassigned to predominantly white schools outside their neighborhoods. White students were more often allowed to stay in schools close to home, especially in the early grades...

In the 1960s and early 1970s, several black schools, including three high schools, in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg city-county school district were shut down, including the oldest black city high school. But the last remaining black high school in the city, West Charlotte High, was housed in a fairly new facility in a middle-class black neighborhood where it was the pride of the community. To shut West Charlotte would have been the ultimate slap in the face to blacks. But desegregating a historically black high school in a black neighborhood would be difficult.

Interestingly, the sticking point in the negotiation process over student assignments became the symbol of the success of school desegregation – all in a matter of a few years.

Under a previous plan, ordered in 1969, black students from West Charlotte – many of whom were middle class – had been bused to nine predominantly white high schools, and whites, mostly from working class families, were bused to West Charlotte. The plan failed, because many of the white students did not show up. “What to do with West Charlotte” remained a central tension throughout the 1969-74 period as various parties proposed various solutions.

Finally, a plan agreed to by some of Charlotte’s most affluent and politically powerful leaders reassigned white students from the affluent southeastern area of the city – along with middle-class blacks and whites, as well as some poorer whites from all over the city – to West Charlotte.

By the mid-1970s, West Charlotte had shifted from 100 percent black to about 50-50 black-white. What’s more, West Charlotte in so many ways, came to symbolize the success of school desegregation in Charlotte, as it excelled academically and athletically to become one of the most desirable schools in the city. When the Class of 1980 graduated, the school was on the ascent.

While there were issues of re-segregation within West Charlotte as the top-level classes tended to be more white and more upper-middle- or middle-class, there was also a strong sense of camaraderie across color lines, especially among the black and white student leaders. Also, as black West Charlotte students sought to maintain many of the school’s traditions and connections to the black community, white students learned to adapt to a high school steeped in African American history and culture – a cross-cultural experience that many of the white graduates still treasure.

Today, West Charlotte has few white students. More than 75 percent are African American and more than 10 percent are Latino, with a smattering of white and Asian students. Like the desegregation plan that it came to represent, West Charlotte is seen as a has-been, defined by low test scores and middle-class flight.

Then and Now: Racial Demographics
of the Six High Schools

	Late 1970s		Early 2000s	
Austin High School Austin, Texas	African American	15%	African American	8%
	Hispanic	19%	Hispanic	37%
	White	66%	White	54%
			Asian/Pacific Isle	2%
Dwight Morrow High School Englewood, N.J.	African American	57%	African American	65%
	Hispanic	7%	Hispanic	32%
	White	36%	White	1-2%
			Asian/Pacific Isle	2-3%
John Muir High School Pasadena, California	African American	50%	African American	49%
	Hispanic	11%	Hispanic	40%
	White	34%	White	9%
	Asian/Pacific Isle	5%	Asian/Pacific Isle	1%
Shaker Heights High School Shaker Heights, Ohio	“Minority” (mostly AA)	39%	African American	52%
	White	61%	Hispanic	1%
			White	43%
			Asian/Pacific Isle	3%
Topeka High School Topeka, Kansas	African American	20%	African American	20%
	Hispanic	8%	Hispanic	15%
	White	69%	White	61%
	“Other” (American Indian and Asian)	3%	American Indian	3%
			Asian/Pacific Isle	1%
West Charlotte High School Charlotte, N.C.	African American	50%	African American	75%
	White	50%	Hispanic	10%
			White	10%
			Asian	5%

¹ For the purposes of this study, we defined “diverse” as any school that had no more than 75 percent of any one racial group.

² See Amy Stuart Wells and Robert L. Crain, “Perpetuation Theory and the Long Term Effects of School Desegregation” (1994) Review of Educational Research: 64 (4), 531-555.

³ See Orfield and Lee (2004) and Nancy St. John, N., *School Desegregation: Outcomes for Children* (1975), New York: John Wiley & Sons. Schofield, J. W., *Review of Research on School Desegregation’s Impact on Elementary and Secondary School Students* (1989). The Connecticut State Department of Education. And

Amy Stuart Wells, "Re-examining social science research on school desegregation: Long- versus short-term effects." (1996), *Teachers College Record*: 96 (4). 691-706.

- ⁴ See Melba Patillo Beals, *Warriors Don't Cry* (1984), New York: Washington Square Press. J. Anthony Lukas, *Common Ground* (1985), New York: Alfred A. Knoph. And Lorene Cary, *Black Ice* (1991), New York: Alfred A. Knoph.
- ⁵ See Gary Orfield and Chungmei Lee, *Brown at 50: King's Dream or Plessy's Nightmare?* (January 2004). Cambridge, Mass: The Harvard Civil Rights Project. Gary Orfield, *Schools More Separate: Consequences of a Decade of Resegregation*. (2001), Cambridge, Mass: The Harvard Civil Rights Project. And The Harvard Civil Rights Project, *Resegregation in American Schools: A Civil Rights Alert*. (2002) Cambridge, Mass: Author, www.law.harvard.edu/civilrights/alerts/reseg.pdf
- ⁶ Gary Orfield, *Schools More Separate: Consequences of a Decade of Resegregation* (2001). Cambridge, Mass: The Harvard Civil Rights Project. Erica Frankenberg and Chungmei Lee, *Race in American Public Schools: Rapidly Resegregating School Districts* (2002) Cambridge, Mass: The Harvard Civil Rights Project http://www.law.harvard.edu/civilrights/publications/reseg_districts02/Race_in_American_Public_Schools1.pdf; The Harvard Civil Rights Project, *Resegregation in American Schools: A Civil Rights Alert* (2002). Cambridge, Mass: Author, www.law.harvard.edu/civilrights/alerts/reseg.pdf. David Rusk, "Trends in School Segregation," *Divided We Fall: Coming Together Through School Choice* (2002), The Century Foundation Task Force on the Common School (ed.), New York: The Century Foundation Press, pp. 61-85.
- ⁷ We realize that after 1974, when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Milliken v. Bradley* that court-ordered urban-suburban school desegregation was possible only when plaintiffs could prove that suburban districts helped to create the racial segregation in the cities, that the possible impact of school desegregation on poor urban school districts was highly limited. But, for the students who were living school desegregation during this later era at the end of the 70s, things were better, more hopeful and certainly calmer in their communities than they had been before.
- ⁸ See Thomas Byrne Edsall, and Mary D. Edsall, *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights and Taxes on American Politics* (1993), New York: W.W. Norton.
- ⁹ This means we "purposefully" sample communities, schools and people to study based on who or what can provide the most insight and understanding on the phenomenon we want to study. See. Sharon B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* (1998), San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- ¹⁰ For prior research on the role of tracking in racially mixed schools see Jeannie Oakes and Amy Stuart Wells, *Beyond the Technicalities of School Reform: Policy Lessons from Detracking Schools*. (A Policy Monograph, 1996), Los Angeles: UCLA Graduate School of Education & Information Studies.
- ¹¹ See Oakes and Wells (1996).
- ¹² For prior research on the importance of "colorblindness" in desegregated schools see Janet Ward Schofield, *Black and White in School* (1989). New York: Teacher College Press.
- ¹³ See Lewis Mumford Center. *Ethnic Diversity Grows, Neighborhood integration Lags Behind* (April 3, 2001), Albany, NY: Author, www.albany.edu/mumford/census.
- ¹⁴ See Amy Stuart Wells and Jennifer Jellison Holme, "No Accountability for Diversity: Standardized Tests and the Demise of Racially Mixed Schools" (August, 2002) Paper Presented at "The Resegregation of Southern Schools?" Conference, Chapel Hill, NC.

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- ¹⁵ See Richard W. Riley, “Reflections on Goals 2000” (1995) *Teachers College Record*: 96 (3), 380-388.
<http://www.tcrecord.org>
- ¹⁶ See Lynn Olson, “Final Rules Give States Direction, Little Flexibility” (December 4, 2002), *Education Week*: 22 (14), 1, 26, 27.
- ¹⁷ See John R. Novak and Bruce Fuller, *Penalizing Diverse Schools?* (A Policy Brief, December, 2003), Berkeley, CA: Policy Analysis for California Education.
- ¹⁸ The Harvard Civil Rights Project, *The Impact of Racial and Ethnic Diversity on Educational Outcomes: Cambridge, MA School District*. (2003) Cambridge, Mass: Author.
- ¹⁹ See Lewis Mumford Center (2001).
- ²⁰ Jennifer Hochschild and Nathan Scovronick, *The American Dream and the Public Schools* (2003), New York: Oxford University Press.
- ²¹ See Center for Education Research and Policy, *Mapping School Choice in Massachusetts, Data and Findings* (2003), Boston: MassInc.
- ²² See Erica Frankenberg and Chungmei Lee, *Charter Schools and Race: A Lost Opportunity for Integrated Education* (2003). Cambridge, Mass.: The Harvard Civil Rights Project. Casey Cobb and Gene Glass, “Ethnic Segregation in Arizona Charter Schools” (1999), *Education and Policy Analysis*: 7 (1), <http://epaa.asu.edu>. And Amy Stuart Wells, Jennifer Jellison Holme, Alejandra Lopez, and Camille Wilson Cooper, “Charter Schools and Racial and Social Class Segregation: Yet Another Sorting Machine?” *A Notion At Risk: Preserving Public Education as an Engine for Social Mobility*, Richard D. Kahlenberg (ed.), New York: The Century Foundation Press pp.169-222.
- ²³ See Lewis Mumford Center (2001).