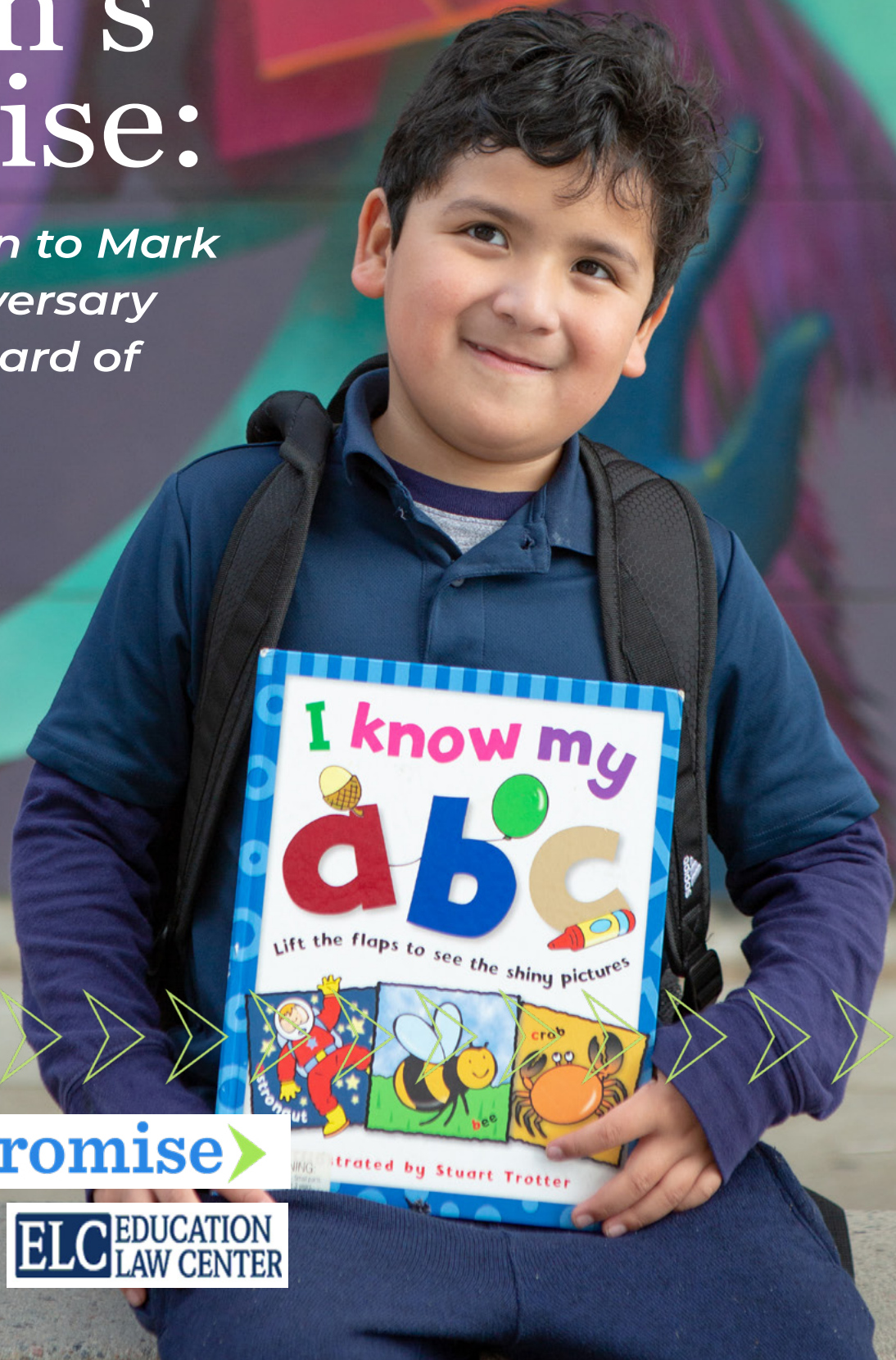


Fulfilling Brown's Promise:

*A Call to Action to Mark
the 70th Anniversary
of Brown v. Board of
Education*



Brown's Promise 

*The National Coalition
on
School Diversity*

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Fulfilling Brown's Promise

A Call to Action to Mark the 70th Anniversary of Brown v. Board of Education



Seventy years ago, the Supreme Court of the United States declared that “separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.” Court-ordered school desegregation led to [dramatic increases](#) in graduation rates, college going, adult health status, and adult income and economic power for [Black](#) students and [Latino](#) students, and an increase in years of schooling that was sufficient to [close](#) the Black-White educational attainment gap.

School integration made great strides toward addressing educational inequities in America. This was in large part because it addressed the segregated conditions that led to dramatic shortfalls in funding and resources in schools serving Black students and other students of color. Today, school integration is as important as ever before: a core purpose of public education is to prepare all students for their future workplaces, communities, and democratic institutions, many of which are growing more diverse by the year.

Yet progress on school integration has stalled, and has even reversed. Students are [as racially segregated](#) as they were in the late 1960s.

School segregation today is undermining our collective future:

- ▶ First, by perpetuating the underfunding and under-resourcing of schools serving primarily students of color and students from low income families: there are nationwide patterns of unequal educational [opportunity](#) for students of color – from access to [experienced teachers](#) to [advanced coursework](#) to [dollars per pupil](#).
- ▶ Second, school segregation denies all students the opportunity to learn in a diverse setting, with a mix of students from different racial, cultural, and economic backgrounds - preparing them for the workplaces and communities in which they will work and live as adults.
- ▶ Finally, segregation is plaguing the health of our democracy. Integrated schools can [lead to](#) more integrated communities and reduce prejudice and bias, an imperative in this increasingly diverse nation. In an increasingly multiracial democracy, public schools must prepare future leaders to govern and lead together, across lines of difference.

Five Equity Principles To Guide This Work



1

Listen to people and communities most impacted - center organizations that are already deeply connected in directly impacted communities, including families, faith leaders, grassroots organizations, and especially students.

2

Focus on educator diversity in addition to student diversity. An integrated school is comprised of diverse students and adults.

3

Center the student experience in an integrated school - not just numbers of students of different races or ethnicities or family income levels.

4

Avoid unintended consequences such as reducing spending in districts serving concentrations of students living in poverty or diluting Black, Latino, or other minoritized group's political power on school boards in an effort to create integrated districts.

5

Hold the state responsible- education is ultimately the responsibility of the state, so avoid falling into a hyper-localism trap that prioritizes local control over the rights of historically underserved students.

In this future, **power** is shared and distributed; students and families feel that they have a real say in what happens in their schools. Information is widely available and transparent for all to see and hear, regardless of what language they speak at home. Engagement is meaningful, impactful, and built deeply into the decision-making infrastructure. **Resources** are plentiful and strategically aligned to meet the varied levels of need in different districts, schools, and classrooms. Teachers have what they need. Students have what they need. There are supports to experiment and flourish.

School integration is not a silver bullet. We cannot repeat the mistakes of the past. This time, we must prioritize educator diversity, ensuring that Black educators, and educators of color more broadly, thrive in integrated classrooms; ensure that all students benefit from inclusive, welcoming, culturally affirming schools and educators; and ensure that biased forms of academic tracking do not segregate students within the walls of allegedly integrated schools. We must ensure that well-resourced, integrated schools are available across neighborhoods, so that students of color are not disproportionately expected to leave their communities to find such a school. Undoubtedly, integration's future looks different than its past, but we need to integrate our public schools, because we know it can work.

On this 70th anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*, we renew our commitment to act, and lay out a clear path forward.



Where We're Going

In our shared vision, at the 100th anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education* schools will reflect the rich diversity of our country; our society will be reflected in schools. By this time U.S. Census demographers predict that people of color will have just become the majority in America. In this vision, **well-resourced, integrated schools and classrooms that cultivate belonging** - across lines of race, ethnicity, family income, linguistic background, immigration status, and more - will be the norm, and not the exception.

Defining “diversity” and “integration.” Student diversity is appropriately defined differently in different places. In some communities, the core question is how integrated or segregated Black students and white students are from one another. In other places the core question is about Latino students and Black students, or Latino students and white students. And in many communities there are important issues of segregation facing students whose identities are not included or well described in the racial/ethnic categories used in most education data - Asian, Black, Latino, Native American, Pacific Islander, and white, which are incomplete and imperfect. For example, Southeast Asian students or students of Middle Eastern or North African descent may face specific school segregation challenges in some communities.

In addition to the racial and ethnic demographics of a classroom, school, or district, diversity includes students' family income and wealth, parents' level of education, languages spoken at home, disability status, immigrant status, and other indicators. Valuing diversity is **not** the same as valuing proximity to whiteness for students of color, despite how it is often described and measured. And yet, the specific history of school segregation that facilitates resource hoarding in some white communities warrants a focus on white student enrollment patterns as one part of this multifaceted work.

Diversity is also not the same as integration, though it is a necessary prerequisite. Diversity metrics are counts of people who fall into different racial, ethnic, socio-economic, or other categories. **Integration requires** meaningful social and academic interactions across these lines - and a focus on inclusion, including an intentional sharing of power, access to resources, and a welcoming and affirming climate.

Diversity and integration will not look the same in every school or every community. But in every school, each student will walk through the doors knowing that they belong, and that their community is invested in their future - the school building will be welcoming and safe, the adults in the classrooms and hallways will believe in their future and reflect the diversity of their peers, and the learning will be top notch, building on the strengths of a diverse student body and ready to meet their particular needs, hopes, and dreams.

Schools will nurture and grow graduates who are prepared to thrive as adults in diverse communities, families, and workplaces. Every student will be taught robust academic content - literacy, math, science, arts, music, history, and civics - and will develop critical thinking, problem solving, and leadership skills that prepare them to support their families and communities; engage with civic systems and democracy; and make their world stronger and more inclusive. Well-resourced, integrated schools that cultivate belonging will nurture students' sense of self - racial, cultural, gender, and linguistic identities will be celebrated and affirmed.

Decisions - about what happens in classrooms, in schools, in district board meetings; about where each child attends school and what resources, educators, and supports are provided in that school - are made by **diverse leaders** who reflect the communities and student bodies they serve. These decisions are made in collaboration with educators, parents, community members, and students, and are guided by a set of **principles that prioritize excellence and opportunity** for all, explicitly for those who historically have been marginalized, excluded, and underserved. **Systemic work** is continuously required to put these principles into practice.



How We'll Get There

We have a long way to go to achieve this vision, but *it can be done* with smart state policy change based on what we already know works for students, actionable research to expand what we know, and strategic advocacy and litigation centering those most directly impacted by today's inequities and segregation.

1. A Clear State Policy Agenda.

States have the ultimate responsibility to provide a high quality public education for all students. Our shared policy agenda reflects the deep intersection between school funding and school integration. **If we appropriately resource all schools, efforts to integrate will meet less resistance; if we integrate schools, we are more likely to appropriately resource them all.**

States must:

- ▶ **Adequately and equitably fund public schools.** State policy should ensure that every district and school has the funding it needs to provide an adequate education - that all students can attend school in buildings that are safe, healthy, welcoming places, and that they have access to a rigorous, high quality public education within those walls. The funding should be aligned to student need. Districts with similar levels of need should receive similar levels of funding, and the same is true for schools. This necessarily includes creating policy guardrails to mitigate against local funding disparities driven by differences in property values. It also includes ensuring that public funds are spent in public schools.
- ▶ **Rethink school district lines.** District lines are responsible for [more than two thirds](#) of the segregation in our schools. It's time to stop assuming these borders are set in stone. They are creatures of state policy, and often, especially in the South, rooted in [racist ideas of "local control"](#) that emerged as a backlash to Reconstruction-era policies designed to advance racial justice. They can be changed to reduce fragmentation, promote integration, and advance resource equity. When district lines cannot be changed, state policymakers can minimize their negative impact by allowing both [students](#) and [dollars](#) to cross through them to promote integration and resource equity. This allows students the opportunity to learn alongside people from different cultures and backgrounds, and ensure all students' schools have access to a reasonable and relatively even property wealth base from which to generate local revenue.
- ▶ **Ensure within-district integration.** States' responsibilities to ensure students have access to well-resourced, integrated public schools do not end where district lines begin. The state is responsible for the education received by each student, including the impacts of decisions made by district and school leaders. States should adopt policies that require, incentivize, and support local and school leaders in adopting and implementing policies that advance integration and resource equity between schools and within them.

- ▶ **Create positive student experiences in every school.** An integrated school is more than a diverse student body. The state must ensure its schools are led by diverse educators; the curriculum is culturally responsive and sustaining, and reflects accurate history; the instructional materials are high quality; the school climate is truly welcoming for all to be their authentic selves; academic tracking does not segregate students within the walls of the building; and students have meaningful opportunities to participate in decisionmaking.
- ▶ **Cultivate an education ecosystem that values and promotes integration and resource equity.** This includes sharing data transparently, measuring what matters, creating incentives to do the right thing at the local level, and providing technical assistance to address capacity gaps wherever they exist.

For a more detailed version of this **state policy agenda**, including examples and, in some cases, model legislative language, check out the [Brown's Promise](#) 70th Anniversary State Policy Agenda, coming soon.



2. An Actionable Research Agenda.

Our state policy agenda is grounded in the best available research - research that shows that [school integration](#) and school [funding](#) both matter tremendously, and are especially important for students of color and students from low-income families. Additional research is needed to:

► **Understand the relationship between integration and funding, and segregation's contribution to education inequities today.**

For example, to what extent does racial, ethnic, and income segregation between schools and districts impact:

- » Funding inequities between districts, overall education costs, and political will to raise revenue for public education?
- » Students' access to a diverse, stable, effective educator workforce; advanced, rigorous, relevant coursework; and culturally responsive and sustaining curriculum?
- » Diversity in higher education access and success - as race conscious admissions are being rolled back due to recent Supreme Court decisions?
- » Students' freedom to learn an accurate history and access a wide range of academic viewpoints?
- » Students' access to educational experiences that prepare and empower them to be civically engaged adults?
- » Students' preparation to navigate and succeed in the workplaces and communities that will make up their "real world" after high school?

To the extent that today's school segregation is shown, by this line of research, to be a core enabling condition for today's inequities in access to quality educational opportunities, intentional efforts to integrate must be a core component of education equity policy agendas more broadly.



A note about housing.

Housing policy is education policy; education policy is housing policy. Much of our school segregation is driven by the housing segregation that plagues communities across the country. America must tackle this problem if we are going to achieve meaningful integration in our public spaces. But too often, education leaders throw up their hands when asked about school segregation, claiming there is nothing they can do - that the issue is all about individual housing choices and housing policy. The data show this often is not true - in many places school [district lines](#) and [school attendance zones](#) themselves segregate students far more than their neighborhoods would require, especially when compared to a version of those lines that intentionally integrated students. This document is specifically focused on the actions education leaders can take - while we simultaneously work to achieve meaningful housing integration. Indeed, [one of the primary reasons](#) some people are opposed to inclusive housing and zoning policies is a concern about how it will impact schools. To the extent education policymakers and advocates can advance integrated well-resourced schools, more integrated, neighborhoods may be more likely to follow.



► **Understand what is possible and design equity-centered solutions.** For example:

- » What's possible given housing segregation? If we are willing to rethink district lines, how much [progress can be made](#) toward racial and income integration [without very long commutes](#), and how much would those re-constructed district and school assignment lines improve access to core educational resources for historically underserved and marginalized students?
- » What works? How should we collectively build "integration 2.0" if our goal is to promote positive student experiences? What specific policies and practices are crucial to facilitate a healthy process of "transitioning" to an integrated community? How can integrating districts avoid re-segregation between and within schools?

For a more detailed version of this **research agenda**, check out the [Brown's Promise](#) 70th Anniversary Research Agenda, coming soon.



3. An Inclusive, Strategic Action Plan.

To achieve the policy change described above will require long term, strategic, and coalition-based policy advocacy and, likely, litigation. We must:

- **Partner with state and local groups to organize, empower, and position directly impacted families and students to take a central role.** For example:
 - » Collectively refine and improve our policy agenda. Partner with organizations to [translate](#) it into plain language that is understandable and meaningful in varied local contexts and use it to [engage](#), obtain [feedback](#), and [refine](#);
 - » Conduct power mapping and power building;
 - » Identify and prioritize tactics and strategies that include:
 - Public awareness and education campaigns
 - Strategic communications and narrative change
 - Organizing for power and influence
 - Legislative advocacy
 - Litigation
 - Ballot initiatives and
 - Enforcing existing court orders.
- **Invest in a diverse next generation** of researchers, policy leaders, litigators, and changemakers dedicated to integrated, well-resourced public schools via fellowships, mentor programs, internships, apprenticeships, and youth training models designed to connect directly impacted youth with advocacy, research, and litigation experience.
- **Advocate for and / or directly provide high quality technical assistance for government leaders** who champion this work, specifically at State Education Agencies and state legislatures.

- ▶ Conduct high quality **communications research** and build practical **tools** to support thoughtful dialogue and engagement, especially in and with communities of color and other communities most directly impacted by segregation and resource inequities.
- ▶ Following the lead of the most directly impacted communities, file **state-court lawsuits** that demand states fulfill their obligation to provide constitutionally adequate public education for all students, including education that is both well-resourced and integrated. This litigation would explicitly tackle the role that current district borders play in creating segregation and resource inequities. Litigation, particularly in conjunction with organizing and advocacy, can advance the rights of the historically underserved when policymakers are not willing to take the political risk to do so.
- ▶ **Study and design new federal court strategies** that lay the groundwork for revisiting the harmful *Rodriguez* and *Miliken* decisions from the 1970s and protect strategies to pursue diversity at the K12 level. This effort to advance a [federal right to a high quality education](#) (currently led by The Education Rights Institute) is a critical long term strategy that we must pursue in parallel to state court efforts that provide a more actionable short to medium term path to progress.

About Us

**Brown's
Promise**▶

Hosted at the Southern Education Foundation, Brown's Promise is fighting to advance educational equity through integration. Brown's Promise combines research, litigation, advocacy, collaboration, and communications to create schools where children from all backgrounds learn together in excellent, well-resourced, diverse environments led by diverse educators. To learn more, visit www.brownspromise.org/about.

The
**National
Coalition**
on
**School
Diversity**

Founded in 2009, the National Coalition on School Diversity (NCSd) is a cross-sector network of 50+ national civil rights organizations, university-based research centers, and state and local coalitions working to expand support for school integration. NCSd supports its members in designing, enacting, implementing, and uplifting PK-12 public school integration policies and practices so we may build cross-race/class relationships, share power and resources, and co-create new realities.

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ELC pursues justice and equity for public school students by enforcing their right to a high-quality education in safe, equitable, non-discriminatory, integrated, and well-funded learning environments. To achieve these goals, we engage in litigation, research and data analysis, policy advocacy, communications, and strategic partnerships and collaborations.

At the Intersection: A Community of Practice

This document was created with substantial input and collaboration from a Community of Practice co-hosted by Brown's Promise, the National Coalition on School Diversity, and the Education Law Center. *At the Intersection: School Funding and School Desegregation* is a diverse and experienced community made up of a broad group of advocates, litigators, researchers, and thought leaders. These individuals are listed to acknowledge invaluable thought partnership and contributions, not to imply formal endorsement. Organizations listed for identification purposes only.

Alejandra Vázquez Baur
The Century Foundation

Halley Potter
The Century Foundation

Maura McInerney
Education Law Center PA

Philip Tegeler
Poverty and Race Research
Action Council

Ann Owens
University of Southern
California

Harry Chiu
Southern Education
Foundation

Maya Brodziak

Qubilah Huddleston
The Education Trust

Bruce Baker
University of Miami

Hetal Dangat
Education Law Center PA

Michael Gregory
Harvard Law School Youth
Advocacy and Policy Lab

Rebecca Sibilia

Chavis Jones

John Affeldt
Public Advocates

Michael Rebell
Columbia University

Sam Boyd
Southern Poverty Law
Center

Chinh Le
University of Virginia
School of Law

Kathleen Gebhardt
Children's Voices

Milly Arbaje-Thomas
The Metropolitan
Council for Educational
Opportunity

Stefan Lallinger
The Century Foundation &
Next100

Derek Black
University of South
Carolina School of Law

Kris Nordstrom
North Carolina Justice
Center

Morgan Craven
Intercultural Development
Research Association

Victor Jones
NAACP Legal Defense Fund

Fred Jones
Southern Education
Foundation

Kristina Moon
Education Law Center PA

Omari Soulfinger
IntegrateNYC

Zahava Stadler
New America Foundation

Genevieve Siegel-Hawley
Virginia Commonwealth
University

Margie Wakelin
Education Law Center PA

Oren Sellstrom
Lawyers For Civil Rights -
Boston



Join us!

This effort will take all of our collective efforts.

Let us know what you're doing to fulfill Brown's Promise 70 years later, share feedback on our vision, and uplift the many incredible people already leading this work in their state or community.

Tag us on social media to join the conversation: #BrownAt70 // @BrownsPromise // @diverse_schools // @EdLawCenter



Brown's Promise

Contact Us:

www.brownspromise.org

info@brownspromise.org

740 15th Street NW, Suite 800, Washington, DC 20005

