

Fulfilling Brown's Promise:

A State Policy Agenda

Brown's Promise 

A State Policy Agenda

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A State Policy Agenda: Introduction

Most Americans want every child—Black, brown, or white; wealthy or not—to have great schools with the teachers, resources, and support they need to thrive in the classroom and beyond. The fundamental role of public schools is to prepare our children to succeed throughout their lives. And the fundamental, yet unfulfilled, promise of America is one of equal opportunity. To make good on both of those promises, we need diverse, well-resourced classrooms for every student.



For students of color, the impacts of school integration are powerful for one primary reason: diverse classrooms mean these students get more resources



Schools are one of the first places where our children spend time with people from different walks of life. Exchanging ideas and perspectives and learning alongside people from different cultures helps children make friends with students who do not look like them, develop critical thinking skills, and learn how to solve problems. When we increase the diversity of our children’s classrooms, we prepare them for the diverse working environments and communities they will experience as adults. Indeed, the research is clear: diverse classrooms help all students, of all races, do better in school and beyond.

For students of color, the impacts of school integration are powerful for one primary reason: diverse classrooms mean these students get more resources. School desegregation led to dramatic increases in graduation rates, college going, adult health, and adult income and economic power for Black students and similar increases in educational attainment for Latino students.

And yet, progress toward integration peaked in the 1980s, and we have been backsliding ever since.

Today, schools are more segregated than they were in the 1970s. And wealthier, whiter schools still often get more of the resources that matter—from the most effective, experienced teachers to high-quality curricula and cutting-edge technology.

It's time to take action.

This document was created by [Brown's Promise](#). It is meant to be read after our [call to action](#), which was created with substantial input and collaboration from a community of practice comprised of a diverse and experienced group of advocates, litigators, researchers, and thought leaders in the fields of school funding and school integration. This policy agenda lays out paths for state leaders—advocates, policymakers, and practitioners—who are ready to make change.



If we adequately resource all schools, efforts to integrate will meet less resistance; if we integrate schools, we are more likely to appropriately resource them all

Why funding *and* integration?

This policy agenda reflects the deep intersection between school funding and school integration. If we adequately resource all schools, efforts to integrate will meet less resistance; if we integrate schools, we are more likely to appropriately resource them all.

Why state policy?

States have the ultimate responsibility, [laid out in their constitutions](#), to provide public education for all students. While there are critical roles for both federal and local officials, this is a call to action for state leaders to rethink how they assign students and resources to districts and schools, in order to ensure that all students have a high-quality education.

Why do we share inspiring yet imperfect examples?

This document is meant to be concrete enough to be immediately usable and meaningful—to



Achieving our shared vision will require new approaches that take the best from each of these examples (and others) while grappling with and addressing their shortcomings



provide, wherever possible, specific ideas, real world examples, and even links to first drafts of policy or legislative language that could be modified to meet state-specific needs. But, while all offer meaningful and promising starting points that have benefited many students, they often have limitations, complications, and critiques, many of which we have included alongside the benefits. Achieving our shared vision will require new approaches that take the best from each of these examples (and others) while grappling with and addressing their shortcomings. Most importantly, though, these examples show that **progress is possible** in 21st century America.

This year, as we celebrate the 70th anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*, we renew our commitment to act, and, in the pages that follow, lay out a 5-pronged policy agenda for state leaders—whether policymakers or advocates—who are ready to make change:

- 1. Fund public schools fully and fairly.**
- 2. Rethink school district lines.**
- 3. Ensure integration and resource equity *within* districts and schools.**
- 4. Foster positive student experiences in integration efforts.**
- 5. Create an ecosystem that promotes integration and resource equity.**

At Brown's Promise, we look forward to evolving this agenda to reflect new research, state-specific contextual factors, and ideas and feedback from an ever-wider variety of partners, especially students, families, and educators most directly impacted by patterns of segregation and educational resource inequities.

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.

This image and content was originally published in *Fulfilling Brown's Promise: A Call to Action to Mark the 70th Anniversary of Brown v. Board of Education*, published with the Education Law Center and the National Coalition on School Diversity.

1. Fund Public Schools Fully and Fairly



State funding policy should ensure that every district and school has the funding it needs to provide a high-quality education. The state must ensure that all students can attend school in buildings that are safe, healthy, welcoming places, and that students have access to a rigorous, high-quality public education within those walls. States must also ensure that education funding is targeted based on the level of student need so that all children have an equal opportunity to succeed.



Districts with substantially greater student need should receive substantially greater funding; districts with similar levels of student need should receive similar levels of funding

Districts with substantially greater student need should receive substantially greater funding; districts with similar levels of student need should receive similar levels of funding. One way to achieve this goal is to spend substantially more money in districts with substantially higher levels of student poverty. Another way, often more efficient and effective, is to deconcentrate that poverty across district lines. This is why school funding and school integration are so deeply interconnected.

This recommendation is foundational: pursuing integration must be done in tandem with funding equity and adequacy. However, because there are, already, detailed resources outlining concrete state funding policy recommendations, this document does not attempt to recreate them. For more detail on pursuing equity-based funding formula reform, please see [*Common Sense and Fairness*](#) and [EdBuilder](#).

STRATEGY #1A

Move Toward Regional or Statewide Revenue

Roughly 44% of all school funding in America comes from local sources

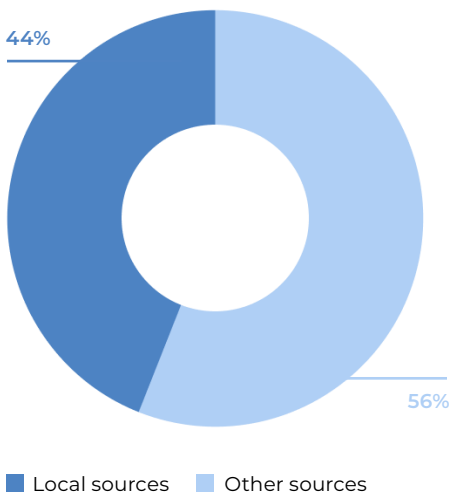


Figure 1: Roughly 44 percent of all school funding in America comes from local sources. [National Center for Education Statistics](#)

Local revenue is the component of school funding policy most directly tied to school and housing segregation and district lines. This part of the funding policy landscape is too often ignored by state policymakers and advocates; yet it is critically important for anyone working to advance integrated, well-resourced schools. Districts and their boundaries not only serve to segregate students but also as taxing authorities that concentrate wealth in certain communities and, therefore, in certain schools. Roughly 44 percent of all school funding in America comes from local sources, meaning it is closely tied to the wealth of the community in which the district is located (see Figure 1). State and federal dollars often substantially compensate for inequality in local school funding for students who live in low-wealth neighborhoods. But too often, communities with lower income and lower wealth (1) still have fewer dollars to support their schools, especially relative to the greater levels of student need in those communities; and (2) must tax themselves at higher levels to produce basic support for schools.

Weakening the link between today's district lines and the ability to fund schools could be game-changing for students of color and students in low-income neighborhoods and might ultimately increase school integration by reducing the gap in perceptions of school quality created by inequities in school funding.

➤ **State leaders should** advance this goal by considering three actions:

1. **Redefining “local” to mean a larger geographic area**, which might be a county, an area served by a regional education service agency (which can have different names in different states, e.g., an intermediate unit, a Board of Cooperative Educational Services, etc.), or, where relevant, a metropolitan area, instead of a single school district.
2. **Shifting away from local funding altogether**, replacing those funds with state revenue for education.
3. **Using some combination of these approaches**, both redefining “local” and shifting away from this kind of funding.

School finance policy is rife with unintended and unexpected consequences. As state leaders know already, modeling and studying the impact of each potential shift is a critical first step



School finance policy is rife with unintended and unexpected consequences. As state leaders know already, modeling and studying the impact of each potential shift is a critical first step. In this process, leaders must assess and prioritize the impact on the school districts serving high concentrations of students living in poverty, and students of color, ensuring that the potential education funding change will advance the goal of increasing equity.

EXAMPLE

Examples of countywide “local” revenue:

Wyoming and California both have school districts that are smaller than counties but at least some countywide taxation for schools, creating revenue pooling across multiple districts.

EXAMPLE**Example of a metropolitan area “local” revenue:**

In Nebraska, state legislators created the Omaha Learning Community, in which a new regional governing body was to oversee a tax-sharing plan to redistribute revenue across 11 school districts located in two counties as well as an interdistrict student integration plan. The effort was created and implemented from roughly 2006 to 2016, and despite the demise of much of the structure, including the revenue-sharing component, the legislative intent and process has potential to inform new efforts.

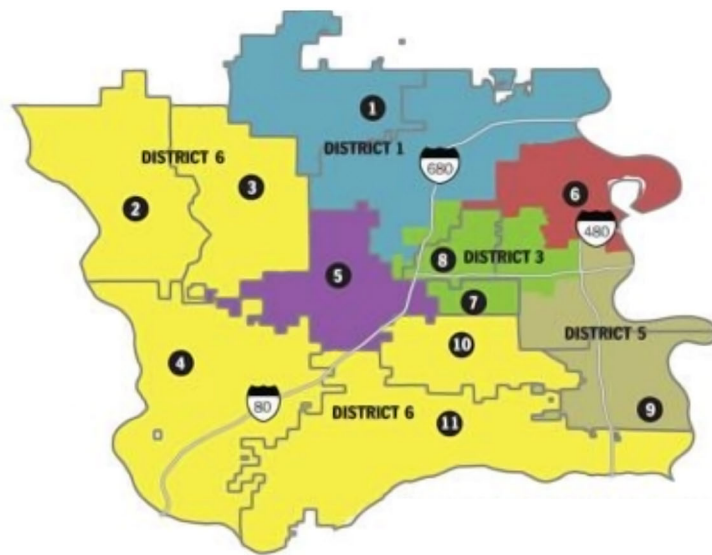


Figure 2: Learning Community Districts Map, The Omaha World-Herald, 2015.

EXAMPLE

Examples of shifting toward state revenue:

In Vermont, the state sets tax rates and redistributes money, functionally acting as a state property tax to fund schools. In 1994 in Michigan, Proposal A made a meaningful shift away from local and toward state funding for schools, in part by creating a statewide property tax revenue stream designated for schools. While it did not fully replace local property taxes with state property taxes, this is a meaningful example of a partial shift to statewide funding. In Texas, too, the state shifts some local funds raised in property-wealthy districts into property-poor districts, treating those dollars as a source of state revenue for schools in lower-wealth districts.

How state leaders can advance this goal

- ✓ Redefine “local” to mean a larger geographic area
- ✓ Shift away from local funding for schools, and replace with state investment

2. Rethink School District Lines



State Court Litigation

A Strategy To Advance Integration and Resource Equity.

State constitutions may, at least in some states, provide a legal pathway for plaintiffs seeking to advance integration and resource equity across district lines. In [Connecticut](#), state court litigation spurred the creation of interdistrict integration programs. In [New Jersey](#) and [Minnesota](#), similar lawsuits are working their way through the courts today.

District lines are responsible for roughly 60 percent of segregation in schools. It is time to stop assuming these lines are set in stone. They are creations 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. Far beyond the South, district lines have been used as an excuse for school segregation since 1974 when the Supreme Court stated in *Milliken v. Bradley* that federal courts cannot impose multidistrict, regional segregation plans in the absence of any evidence that individual districts intentionally committed acts causing racial segregation.

► State leaders should:

1. Enroll students across district lines
2. Change districts lines altogether
3. Strengthen anti-secession laws

These strategies will allow students the chance to learn alongside people from different cultures and backgrounds and help to ensure that all public schools have access to a reasonable and relatively even wealth base from which to generate local revenue.

STRATEGY #2A

Enroll Students Across District Lines

➤ **State policymakers should** invest in the creation or expansion of **interdistrict transfer programs** and **magnet schools** to enroll students across district lines. Controlled choice approaches can succeed with the right **design elements** to help advance integration rather than facilitating segregation.

These elements include four things:

- Free transportation to make program participation a meaningful option for all families.
- Fair, transparent, and inclusive lotteries to ensure true diversity.
- Ongoing, extensive multilingual outreach and communication to families in a wide range of neighborhoods.
- School siting policies that ensure that historically underserved students are not asked to bear disproportionate commuting burdens.



Magnet schools can be particularly appealing because they are often themed, making them easy to pair with other popular and innovative education approaches

Magnet schools can be particularly appealing because they are often themed, making them easy to pair with other popular and innovative education approaches such as early college, career and technical education, dual language immersion, Montessori education, and science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), as well as models like arts academies and leadership programs.

EXAMPLE

Example of enrolling across district lines:

The greater Hartford, Connecticut area is marred by substantial segregation by race and income, but, prompted by a state court case, *Sheff v. O'Neill*, led by the NAACP Legal Defense fund, the American Civil Liberties Union, the Connecticut Civil Liberties Union, Wesley Horton, and others, the region has become a strong—if still imperfect—example of policies and practices that allow students to enroll across district lines. It has a mix of nearly 40 public **magnet schools**—some run by Hartford City School District and some run by the Capitol Region Education Council (CREC), a separate organization that serves 35 school districts in the region—and a **robust interdistrict transfer program** that allows students to enroll in traditional public schools across district lines.

Today, Hartford is the largest interdistrict effort to address school segregation in America. Here are five features of Hartford's program:

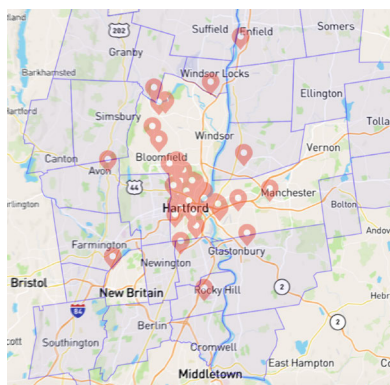
- **Large scale:** Hartford serves roughly 40,000 students in interdistrict public magnet schools each year and another roughly 3,000 in an interdistrict public school open choice program. More than half of all Hartford students attend one of these schools, and the state has committed to expanding the opportunity to all Hartford students of color.
- **Free transportation:** Transportation is free to families.
- **Diversity by design:** Lotteries and recruitment strategies use socioeconomic status to create diversity.

40,000

Hartford-area students in interdistrict public magnet schools

3,000

Hartford-area students in interdistrict public schools via an open choice program



 Magnet school

 Open choice district

Figure 3: Map of Hartford area magnet schools and open choice districts. [Regional School Choice Office](#)

EXAMPLE (CONTINUED)



Increased sense of cross-cultural/cross-racial friendships and connections for all students



- **Investments in communities of color:** Many of the magnet schools are located in cities with large concentrations of students of color (primarily Hartford and New Haven). They attract some students in from the suburbs, but the majority are students who live in the city, increasing opportunities for families of color in their home district.
- **Evidence of progress:** Evaluation of the early years of implementation shows that the public magnet schools provide
 - More **positive learning environments**, including fewer teacher and student absences, more advanced math and world languages, fewer grade retentions, more peer support for academic achievement, and more support for college
 - Stronger sense of **safety and belonging** for students than in city non-magnets (although weaker than in suburban non-magnets)
 - Better student **outcomes**, including increased proficiency on math and reading tests
 - Increased sense of **cross-cultural/cross-racial friendships** and connections for all students

EXAMPLE

Example of enrolling across district lines:

In Dallas, Texas, “50/50 schools” draw students from outside the Dallas Independent School District (DISD) and from a wide variety of neighborhoods within the district to create a set of schools with diverse student populations. In each of these schools, 50 percent of students are economically

EXAMPLE (CONTINUED)



One way to avoid these challenges, which are common in approaches that rely on controlled choice and create “sending” districts that struggle with declining enrollment and funding, is to instead redraw district lines altogether.



disadvantaged and 50 percent are not. It uses two separate lotteries—one for families of students who are considered economically disadvantaged and one for those who are not—which ensures that regardless of how many upper- or middle-class families apply, half of the seats are reserved for students living in poverty, and vice versa. This is a simple, transparent, and strategic approach to running an admissions lottery.

There are two important **critiques** of existing interdistrict choice programs:

1. **Limited seats**

Many Hartford students do not obtain a seat in their desired school, for example, and to meet integration goals, the district holds some seats unfilled in years where suburban student enrollment is too low, despite waitlists of Hartford students. As described above, though, the state is committed to expanding to meet additional demand from Hartford students of color.

2. **Students “left behind”**

Requiring families to navigate a complicated system of public school choice can leave vulnerable students stuck in under-resourced traditional neighborhood schools, which can exacerbate the problems in their schools by reducing enrollment and associated funding.

One way to avoid these challenges, which are common in approaches that rely on controlled choice and create “sending” districts that struggle with declining enrollment and funding, is to instead redraw district lines altogether.

How state leaders can advance this goal

- ✓ Invest in creation or expansion of interdistrict transfer programs and magnet schools
- ✓ Include design elements to ensure programs advance integration and student belonging instead of facilitating segregation:
 - Free transportation
 - Fair, transparent, and inclusive lotteries to ensure true diversity
 - Ongoing, extensive multilingual outreach and communication to families in a wide range of neighborhoods
 - School siting policies that ensure that historically underserved students are not asked to bear disproportionate commuting burdens

STRATEGY #2B

Change District Lines

- **State leaders should** consider changing existing lines. In many cases, shifting a district line by a matter of blocks can dramatically reduce segregation; in other cases, it may make sense to consider shifting to truly **countywide school districts** or pursuing other **consolidation** strategies. Strategically revising district lines can enhance diversity and improve resource equity.

District consolidation has historically been pursued primarily as a way to achieve efficiency and cost savings, rather than to advance integration and resources equity. This has created mixed results. Consolidating two districts that serve similar student demographics and have similar access to educational resources is unlikely to change student experience in a meaningful way.

- **State leaders should**, however, consider consolidation as a way to promote integration and resource equity in places where existing district lines create many districts serving different populations of students very near to one another.

Researchers are beginning to use sophisticated tools to illustrate these possibilities. See, for example, research showing that New Jersey district lines enshrine school segregation. This research shows that the state could reduce school segregation by nearly 40 percent if district lines were countywide and students were assigned to schools with diversity goals in mind, even while maintaining limited commutes and current enrollment levels in individual school buildings.



Strategically revising district lines can enhance diversity and improve resource equity.



Design for Equity in Consolidation

District consolidation includes the merging of two or more school boards into one. It is important to ensure that any newly formed local school board also be integrated - not just the schools, students, and educators. This means intentionally planning for meaningful representation from all impacted communities, to ensure that the integration effort does not lead to loss of political representation or meaningful voice in local educational decisions.



It is important to ensure that any newly formed local school board is also integrated, not just the schools, students, and educators

District consolidation includes the merging of two or more school districts into one, which inherently involves merging two or more school boards into one. It is important to ensure that any newly formed local school board is also integrated, not just the schools, students, and educators. This means planning for meaningful representation from all impacted communities, to ensure that the integration effort does not lead to loss of political representation or voice in local educational decisions.

EXAMPLE

Examples of countywide district lines:

Florida and West Virginia have true countywide districts (without the many exceptions to this general rule that are found in most Southern states) and have the two lowest levels of between-district income segregation in the country.

EXAMPLE

Example of consolidating districts:

In Starkville, Mississippi, the state consolidated two small districts in 2015 to save money and provide a better education for students in an under-resourced, racially isolated school district bordering a better-resourced, more diverse district. Families and community members on both sides of the line had fears about fights and student mistreatment. Some were concerned about white flight. But according to local reporting at Mississippi Today, “nearly everyone involved has been surprised at how well the consolidation has gone.” One parent was quoted as saying, “I’m thrilled by the quality of the education here. All the anxiety we went through as a community, all the apprehension and rumors, it wasn’t worth it.” As for the predicted white flight, the opposite began to happen: some white families pulled their children out of private school to attend the newly integrated and better resourced public schools.

EXAMPLE

Example of consolidating districts:

In Morristown, New Jersey the state consolidated two districts in 1971 explicitly to address racial segregation and created one of the most racially diverse districts in the state, despite dire predictions at the time. And according to The Century Foundation, “the district has achieved impressive, if incomplete, success at attracting and maintaining a diverse student population and offering them the educational and social benefits of integration education.” The district has managed to create diversity within its schools despite serving families that live in quite segregated neighborhoods.

How state leaders can advance this goal

- ✓ Consider changing existing district lines, either by:
 - Adopting countywide districts
 - Pursuing integrative district consolidation
 - Or shifting existing lines in small but strategic ways to advance integration

STRATEGY #2C

Strengthen Anti-Secession Laws



Without careful attention, efforts to promote integration may be met with backlash and backsliding



Interested in strengthening your state's anti-secession laws?

The National Coalition for School Diversity's [model legislation](#) (on pages 31–35) is a great place to start.

➤ **State leaders should** adopt or strengthen anti-secession laws to prevent continued district fracturing and segregation. Without careful attention, efforts to promote integration may be met with backlash and backsliding. This is what happened in Tennessee after education leaders pursued an innovative effort to consolidate Memphis Schools into Shelby County School District, which would have integrated school districts and increased access to resources for the predominantly Black students in Memphis. The victory was short-lived, as it was followed by quick secession of white, wealthy communities into new school districts.

The Shelby secession was not unique. In 2022 the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) studied 10 years of data to find 36 school district secessions across the country. In these 36 examples, the newly created districts were roughly three times as white and half as impoverished as the districts being left behind.

EXAMPLE

Examples of stronger anti-secession laws:

EdBuild cataloged examples of stronger state policies that would prevent such a response, and cited two strong ways to do this:

- Allow secession only via a constitutional change. See Georgia and Florida as examples.
- Require strong review and approval processes for secession. For example, in California, a state agency must consider the impact on

1 Fund Public Schools Fully and Fairly

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4 Foster Positive Student Experiences in Integration Efforts

5 Create an Ecosystem that Promotes Integration and Resource Equity

**EXAMPLE
(CONTINUED)**

segregation, efficiency, and funding. Connecticut, Arizona, Texas, and Vermont require voters in the “left behind” district to vote to approve any such change.

How state leaders can advance this goal

- Adopt or strengthen anti-secession laws to prevent continued district fracturing and segregation

3. Ensure Integration and Resource Equity *Within* Districts and Schools



The state’s responsibility to ensure students have access to well-resourced, integrated public schools does not end where district lines begin. The state is ultimately responsible for the educational opportunities provided to each student, including the impact of decisions made by local district and school leaders. And, in some places, within-district segregation is a larger problem than between-district segregation.

➤ **State leaders should** both (1) require local and school leaders to advance integration and resource equity and (2) provide funding and technical assistance to support them in the work.

STRATEGY #3A

Adopt Requirements

In many districts around the country, school segregation today is worse than in the 1970s and is growing. Indeed, researchers have shown that there is meaningful room to integrate across schools within many large districts, often while not changing commute times for students.



In many districts around the country, school segregation today is worse than in the 1970s and is growing

There are also still far too many districts that add insult to injury by, after creating segregated schools, failing to adequately resource those schools to meet the additional needs that come with high concentrations of student poverty.



What about charters?

Where charters are a substantial part of the public-school ecosystem, states should regulate to support integration and equity. See [The Century Foundation's 2019 report](#) for a list of relevant state policy recommendations that include, among others, policies to allow all students to attend, provide and fund transportation, and abide by nondiscrimination laws.

➤ **State leaders should** adopt **requirements** that do three things:

1. Ensure integration

Districts should be **required** to demonstrate that all schools are within, for example, 5 or 10 percentage points of district-wide average student poverty for that grade span (e.g., all elementary schools should be within 10 points of the district-wide poverty rate for grades 1 through 5), unless doing so would require excessive commute times. This could include exceptions for high-performing schools successfully educating high concentrations of historically underserved students. For an example, see Cambridge Public School District's plan wherein every grade in every school in the district is required to fall within a certain percentage of the district-wide average student poverty rate.

At a minimum, states should require districts to set a **goal** of having all schools within 5 to 10 points of the district-wide poverty rate for that grade span, create a **plan** to achieve it that includes a specific **timeline**, and publish **annual data** showing progress toward the goal. If the district does not meet its interim targets, the state should take action to ensure progress is made.

Note that meeting these requirements is more likely with additional resources.



Districts should demonstrate to the state that they are using their resources strategically in order to meet the differing student needs in each school



2. Ensure resource equity

Districts should be required to demonstrate to the state that they are using their resources strategically in order to meet the differing student needs in each school. This should include a demonstration that schools with more student need (including more students living in poverty, multilingual learners, and special education students) are receiving additional funding and staffing to meet those needs, and are not disproportionately relying on novice, out of field, or uncertified educators. This might, for example, include a requirement that at least 75 percent of the dollars earned for a district by its low-income students, multilingual learners, or special education students actually go to the schools serving those students. For an example of this requirement in state law, see [Maryland's funding formula](#).

If a district has effectively integrated its schools and does not have schools with substantially different levels of student need, this requirement would be met simply by equally allocating resources across all schools.

There could be an exception to this requirement for districts that can show that they are providing equal educational outcomes for students (e.g., via test scores, graduation rates, participation and success in advanced courses, etc.)

Note that meeting this requirement is more likely with additional resources.



3. Ensure all change is good change

When districts change school boundaries or school assignment policies for any reason (e.g., opening a new building, closing a school, redrawing boundaries to address changes in housing patterns and school capacity), or when a district changes a lottery process that governs public school choice, a state should review and approve the plan only after a demonstration that it will advance integration and increase the likelihood that all students get an equal educational opportunity, rather than exacerbating segregation or resource inequities.

How state leaders can advance this goal

- ✓ Adopt requirements for districts that:
 - Ensure integration
 - Ensure resource equity
 - Ensure all school assignment changes advance equity and integration and protect against backsliding

STRATEGY #3B

Provide Funding and Technical Assistance



If a state is serious about equal opportunities for all students, it must also invest in local leaders' capacity to meet expectations

If a state is serious about equal opportunities for all students, it must also invest in local leaders' capacity to meet expectations. This means providing money to support the work while also providing training and guidance to grow local leaders' belief in and ability to achieve the goals.

➤ **State leaders should** provide **grants** to support district leaders in planning for and implementing innovative strategies to advance integration and resource equity.

➤ **State leaders should** also provide **technical assistance** in the form of written guidance, communities of practice, and even place-specific consultation and deep implementation support. District leaders should be consulted in determining what sorts of assistance would be most helpful, but likely would benefit from support in identifying (1) sources of federal, state, and philanthropic funds to pursue this work; (2) legal requirements—and flexibilities—that support this work; and (3) examples of other places that have pursued similar efforts and seen success.

➤ **State leaders should invest in the capacity of the state education agency (SEA)**, or other entity tasked with leading this work. High-quality technical assistance is challenging to provide. The SEA can only do this effectively if it has the necessary expertise, time, and resources, as well as trusting relationships with district leaders. This may be achieved by hiring or training experts within the SEA, by contracting with external partners, and/or identifying national partners



Interested in creating a new statewide grant program?

The National Coalition for School Diversity's [model legislation](#) (pages 19-23) is a great place to start.

as part of federally funded technical assistance programs. See, for example, the U.S. Department of Education’s [National Comprehensive Center](#), [Regional Centers](#), Equity Assistance Centers (serving the [South](#), [Mid-Atlantic](#), [Midwest and Plains](#), and [West](#)) and Content Centers, returning soon, to include centers focusing on English learners and multilingualism; early school success; fiscal equity; and supporting the educator workforce.

How state leaders can advance this goal

- ✓ Provide grants to district leaders to support integration and resource equity
- ✓ Provide technical assistance to district leaders in the form of written guidance, communities of practice, place-specific consultation, and deep implementation support
- ✓ Invest in the State Education Agency to enable high capacity leadership

4. Foster Positive Student Experiences in Integration Efforts



Explicitly focusing on fostering positive student experiences will help to prevent common problems that emerged during implementation of “integration 1.0” in America during the decades that followed *Brown v. Board*



An integrated school is more than a diverse student body. The state has an important role to play in ensuring that integrated and integrating schools are welcoming places that nurture, support, and teach every child. Explicitly focusing on fostering positive student experiences will help to prevent common problems that emerged during implementation of “integration 1.0” in America during the decades that followed *Brown v. Board*, including, for example, firing Black teachers and principals; segregating students within the walls of allegedly “integrated” schools; and creating and maintaining hostile learning environments for students of color.

There are already robust and relevant state policy agendas published by other organizations that outline steps states should take to support positive, sustaining, relevant student experiences. This document does not attempt to recreate all of those recommendations. For example, see The Education Trust’s key state policies to advance educator diversity; policies to advance equity in social, emotional, and academic development (including a focus on climate, discipline, wraparound supports, and curriculum).

These policies are critical across all public schools, but in designing and supporting programs and investments designed to integrate schools and deconcentrate poverty, states must specifically elevate these issues.

- **State leaders should** (1) promote educator quality and diversity; (2) encourage meaningful student, family, and community engagement; and (3) ensure all students have access to advanced coursework.

STRATEGY #4A

Promote Educator Quality and Diversity



A truly integrated school is staffed by diverse, high-quality, well-supported educators

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- **State leaders should**—every time they invest in an integration program— also do the following:



- Publish annual educator quality and diversity data in the schools and districts impacted by the initiative, and how they compare to other schools in the surrounding district(s).
- Set educator diversity, quality, and support goals in the schools and districts that participate, including timelines with interim targets.
- Identify state resources to support educator quality, diversity, and support in schools and districts that participate.
- Invest in opportunities to prepare, support, and retain teachers of color in the schools and districts that participate.
- Require and fund ongoing, job-embedded, evidence-based professional learning for educators in schools and districts that participate, including support for understanding adult mindsets and asset-based pedagogies; anti-bias training; and diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging training.

How state leaders can advance this goal

- ✓ When creating or expanding a school integration program, also:
 - Publish annual educator quality and diversity data about the program
 - Set educator diversity, quality, and support goals for the program
 - Identify state resources to support educator quality, diversity, and support
 - Invest in opportunities to prepare, support, and retain teachers of color in the program
 - Require and fund ongoing, job embedded evidence-based professional learning for educators in the program

STRATEGY #4B

Encourage Meaningful Student, Family, and Community Engagement

- **State leaders should**—every time they invest in an integration program— also provide guidance, training, and funding to local leaders that is focused on community engagement. This support should focus on four actions that will help educators in integrating schools:
 - Engaging families that live further from a particular school or who speak different languages. This is particularly important for magnet schools and other public, choice-based integration efforts, which cannot create diversity if diverse families are not aware of, connected to, and excited about sending their children to the schools.



- Leveraging community-based organizations (CBOs) in both the “sending” and “receiving” communities to partner with a school to accelerate student learning and meet whole-child needs.
- Creating parent and family advisory councils with power to participate in decision-making about a school’s programming, practices, and policies. These councils should include meaningful representation of families from underrepresented communities.
- Providing ongoing financial and personnel support for the daily work of authentic community engagement.

How state leaders can advance this goal

- ✓ Provide guidance, training, and financial support to local program leaders that is focused on:
 - Engaging with families that live further from a particular school or who speak different languages
 - Leveraging community based organizations (CBOs)
 - Creating diverse, representative parent and family advisory councils
 - Doing the daily work of authentic community engagement

STRATEGY #4C

Ensure All Students Have Access to Advanced Coursework



Districts working to integrate schools are historically prone to segregate students within “integrated” buildings via biased academic tracking policies.

► **State leaders should** require—and fund—all schools, and especially those participating in an integration program, to do two things:

- Conduct **universal screening** for participation in gifted and talented programs at the elementary level. For an example, see [Maryland’s universal screening](#) requirement.
- Implement **automatic enrollment** policies that put all students who demonstrate readiness on one or more of a wide variety of valid metrics (including grades, end of course assessments, standardized tests, and teacher recommendations) into advanced courses. For examples, see [Dallas, Texas](#), and [Washington State](#).

How state leaders can advance this goal

- ✓ Require all schools—and especially those participating in integration programs—to:
 - Conduct universal screening for participation in gifted and talented programs at the elementary level
 - Implement automatic enrollment policies for advanced coursework

5. Create an Ecosystem that Promotes Integration and Resource Equity



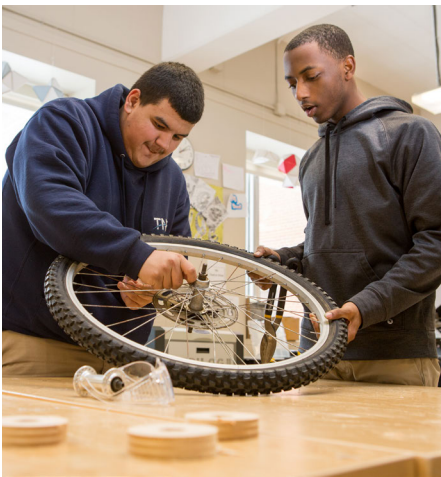
No single policy or set of policies will ever be enough to achieve the vision we have for a public school system that truly fulfills Brown’s promise. As the demographics of students and our society change, as researchers and practitioners learn more about what works and does not work in different places and contexts, and as political preferences and leaders evolve, the details and specific ideas in this policy agenda (like every policy agenda) will become out of date. But some recommendations stand the test of time because they do not specify particular strategies or reforms, and instead strengthen the ecosystem within which decisions are made.

➤ **State leaders should**

1. Collect and report **data**, so that advocates and policymakers can continuously assess what’s working and what needs to change
2. Use **accountability systems** to set clear expectations, so that system leaders consider advancing integration and resource equity to be a core part of their job
3. Leverage **federal requirements and supports** to advance integration and resource equity



[Data] allows researchers and policymakers to evaluate the impact of policy changes and adjust course as needed. It gives community members, families, educators, and students a way to see patterns that go beyond their specific experience, placing their neighborhood school in the context of state or district-wide systems



STRATEGY #5A

Collect and Report Data

Transparency in the form of consistent and easily accessible data over time builds understanding about the persistence of segregation and resource inequities. It allows researchers and policymakers to evaluate the impact of policy changes and adjust course as needed. It gives community members, families, educators, and students a way to see patterns that go beyond their specific experience, placing their neighborhood school in the context of state or districtwide systems.

► **State leaders should** calculate and share on **school and district report cards** information that covers four categories:

- Measures of socioeconomic and racial integration/segregation between schools for the district as a whole.
- Property tax rates for the district's taxpayers as compared to statewide rates and rates for adjacent districts.
- Spending per student in the district as compared to statewide spending and spending in adjacent districts.
- Local spending in the district that is above and beyond the amount called for by the state funding formula.
- Easy to understand data visualizations showing how the district allocates resources to schools, including, at minimum:
 - dollars per student
 - percentage of novice educators
 - percentage of teacher vacancies

- student-to-counselor ratio
- student-to-teacher ratio
- number of (high school) AP courses and seats offered

It is not enough to show these data points for each individual school. The school and district report cards must contextualize and display the data well, allowing readers to see patterns and to understand how resources shift in relation to school poverty and other student demographics, including race and ethnicity, multilingual status, and any other appropriate measures for the state.

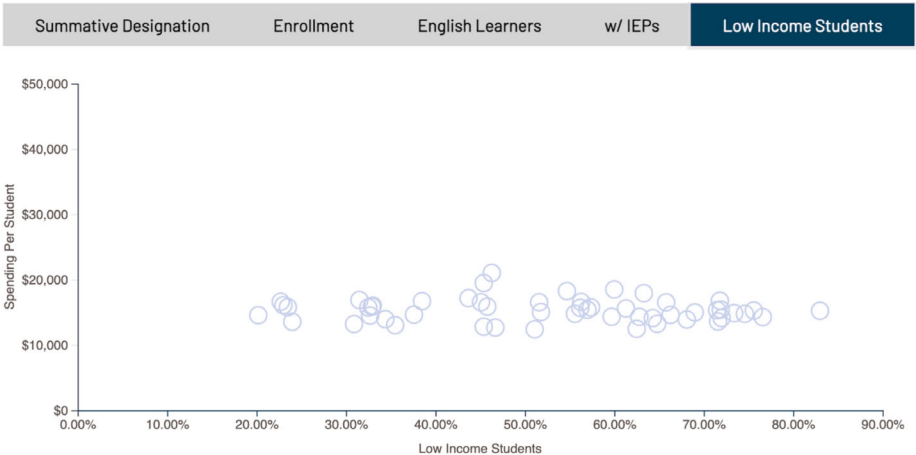
EXAMPLE

Example of high-quality school finance data reporting

Illinois presents school funding data well on school report cards. See Figure 4 for an example. Families, journalists, and other readers of this report card can see that this district spends roughly the same amount per student in each school, regardless of whether the school is comprised of 20 percent or 85 percent low-income students, contrary to best practice of spending substantially more money in higher poverty schools. There may be good explanations for this (e.g., the lower-poverty schools might have higher concentrations of students

Figure 4: Illinois School Finance Data as Illustrated on District Report Card

Illinois district report cards provide a high-quality example of data visualization, showing total per-pupil spending in all schools in a district arranged by the percentage of low-income students in each school. [Illinois Report Cards](#)



**EXAMPLE
(CONTINUED)**

with disabilities), but, upon seeing this visual, the community should be concerned about what appears to be an “equal funding for unequal need” approach. This visual also raises clear questions about patterns of socioeconomic segregation. District leaders and stakeholders should be asking why this district maintains school assignment lines in which there is a 60-point spread in the percentage of students living in poverty, and whether there is a better way to draw those lines.

➤ **State leaders should** also calculate and share on state report cards three categories of statewide or regional information:

- Measures of socioeconomic and racial integration/segregation between schools and between districts statewide and for major metropolitan regions.
- The percentage of students statewide attending school in highly segregated schools and districts.
- The percentage of students statewide attending school in districts that do (or do not) promote equal opportunity for all by (1) deconcentrating poverty, (2) meaningfully targeting resources to meet the needs of students in high-poverty schools, or (3) both.

States should look for opportunities in these data points to celebrate and learn from success. This might include, for example, creating and honoring a list of districts who are promoting equal opportunity for all by maintaining integrated schools, wisely targeting resources toward schools with the greatest student need, or both.

How state leaders can advance this goal

- ✓ Calculate and share measures of integration and resource equity on school, district, and state report cards in a way that makes it easy to see districtwide patterns across schools

STRATEGY #5B

Add Integration and Resource Equity to District Accountability Ratings



Statewide accountability systems attempt to measure how well schools and districts are serving students, provide support to those not serving students well, and demand change for the better. There are deep and long-standing disagreements about how much benefit or harm has come from efforts to promote school accountability. The [future of accountability](#) in education is the topic of much debate.

This debate presents an opportunity.

The word *accountability* in education brings to mind, almost exclusively, systems that grade or rate **individual schools**. But resource equity and integration are fundamentally multi-school, system-wide issues that require systemic change. States should provide accountability and support for the leaders who have the power to make those changes in **district** accountability systems.

In many states, there are already accountability systems that grade how well school districts serve students. The state of [Colorado](#), for example, labels districts as something between “accredited with



Resource equity and integration are fundamentally multi-school, system-wide issues that require systemic change

This common approach ignores the key differences between running a school and running a district. It misses the chance to hold districts accountable for the things that they alone have the ability to do—including integrating schools and changing budget processes to channel more resources to schools with the greatest student need



distinction” (the highest level on the districtwide accountability system) and “accredited with turnaround plan” (the lowest level). Florida assigns districts letter grades. Other states give districts numeric scores, or a star-based rating. In general, these district accountability systems simply aggregate the same student data points that are used to assess individual schools and apply them to the district as a whole. In Florida, for example, “the district’s grade is calculated as if the district’s students are enrolled in one large combination school,” according to the accountability guide from the Florida Department of Education. This common approach ignores the key differences between running a school and running a district. It misses the chance to hold districts accountable for the things that they alone have the ability to do—including integrating schools and changing budget processes to channel more resources to schools with the greatest student need.

➤ **State leaders should** change these district accountability systems to include indicators that hold leaders responsible for the things they are uniquely able to control. These new indicators should be generated in partnership with district leaders themselves, as well as students and families. They might include two key measures:

- **Deconcentration of poverty**
Districts would earn more points by reducing the range of poverty rates between the highest- and lowest-poverty schools in their district. For example, they could get all elementary schools within five points of the district-wide average for elementary schools.
- **Resource allocation**
Districts would earn more points by aligning the level of resources in a school with the level of

student need in that school, either by spreading need evenly and allocating resources equally or by channeling resources (spending per student, number of certified, non-novice teachers and support staff per student, etc.) to the schools with greater student need. The specific measures would depend on the state context. For example, in a state with a funding formula that provides additional funds to the district for each student living in poverty, the accountability system could provide more points for the district as it gets closer to spending all funds generated by the low-income weight in the schools where those students are actually enrolled.

Changing what district leaders are graded on doesn't matter much if the grade doesn't mean anything to anyone.



Making the district accountability system more clearly prioritize district levers for change is a step in the right direction but is not likely to be impactful on its own. Changing what district leaders are graded on doesn't matter much if the grade doesn't mean anything to anyone. District accountability systems should come with improvement strategies in which district leaders are provided with additional supports and are given clear expectations for change.

How state leaders can advance this goal

- ✓ Change district accountability systems to include indicators that specifically hold leaders responsible for the things they are uniquely able to control, including measures of resource equity and integration
- ✓ Generate these new measures in partnership with district leaders, students, and families

One part of building an education ecosystem that values integration and resource equity is leveraging federal requirements and supports



STRATEGY #5C

Leverage Federal Requirements and Resources

Sometimes state and local leaders need support from federal leaders in order to make difficult change; sometimes that support comes in the form of financial resources and other times in the form of political cover for decisions that could otherwise come with local political repercussions. One part of building an education ecosystem that values integration and resource equity is leveraging federal requirements and supports.

➤ **State leaders should** use each of these four federal programs to advance their goals of integrated, well-resourced public schools that work for all students: (1) Title I of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA); (2) Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964; (3) the Fostering Diverse Schools Demonstration Grant program; and (4) the Magnet Schools Assistance Program.

- **Title I of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)** requires state, district, and school level resource allocation reviews to support schools that are in need of comprehensive support and improvement and to support underserved students in other schools. See Figure 5 for a more detailed explanation of the requirements.

Figure 5: Excerpt from The Education Trust's Fact Sheet on ESSA' Resource Allocation Reviews. [The Education Trust](#)

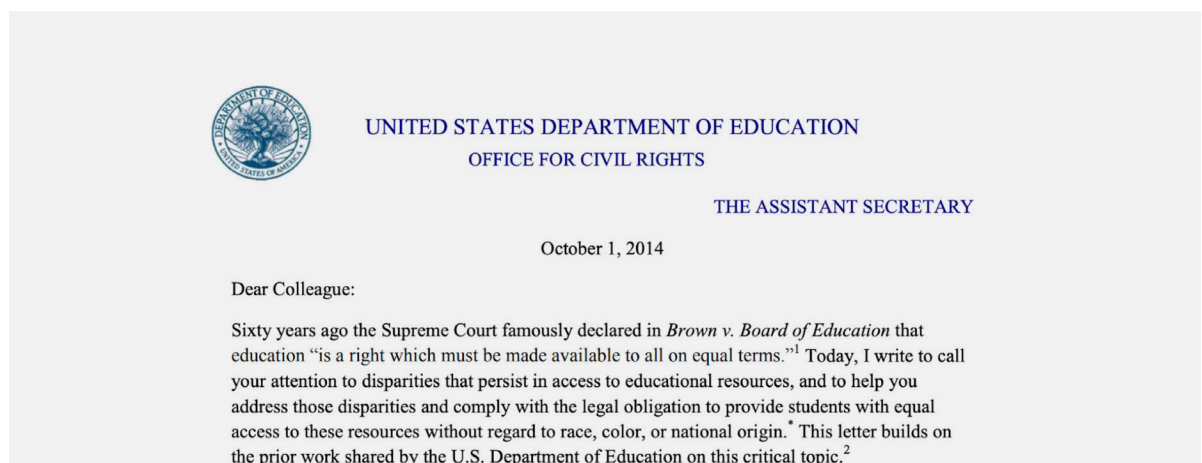
What does the Every Student Succeeds Act require?

ESSA requires resource allocation reviews at every level that, if done well, can get to the bottom of the resource inequities that matter most for underserved students:

- **State Resource Allocation Reviews:** State education agencies must review resource allocations to support school improvement in districts with a significant number of schools identified for improvement (§1111(d)(3)(A)(ii)).
- **District Resource Allocation Reviews:** Districts with schools identified for comprehensive improvement must identify and address resource inequities within their district (§1111(d)(1)(B)(iv)).
- **School Resource Allocation Reviews:** Schools identified for improvement based on low performance for individual groups of students must identify and address resource inequities within their school (§1111(d)(2)(C)).

- **Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964** prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin in the allocation of school resources such as courses, academic programs, extracurricular activities, teachers, leadership, student support, school facilities, instructional materials, and access to technology and digital opportunities. The U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR) enforces Title VI. School districts that receive federal funds must not intentionally discriminate on the basis of race, color, or national origin, and must not implement facially neutral policies that have the unjustified effect of discriminating against students on the basis of race, color, or national origin. OCR issued guidance in 2014 to support districts and states in complying with the requirements. See Figure 6 for an illustration of the cover page of this guidance.
- **The Fostering Diverse Schools Demonstration Grants Program (FDS)** is run by the U.S. Department of Education. Awards were made for the first time in 2023 to 14 awardees—primarily school districts—working around the country to advance more integrated, well-resourced schools.

Figure 6:
Introduction to Title VI Resource Equity Guidance from the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights. U.S. Department of Education





What would look like for state leaders to leverage these federal requirements and resources to advance well-resourced, integrated public schools?



- **The Magnet Schools Assistance Program (MSAP)** provides grants to school districts—individually or in partnership with other districts—to establish and operate magnet schools designed to “desegregate public schools.” Only districts implementing a desegregation program (or committing to do so upon receipt of the grant) are eligible to apply.

For an example of multiple district leaders working together to leverage this grant and launch a regional high school, see CodeRVA Regional High School, a computer science themed school in Richmond, Virginia that admits students from different districts via weighted lottery to ensure diversity. As described on page 137 of A Single Garment by Genevieve Siegel-Hawley, “emphasizing the opportunity for the federal magnet school grant helped” to keep the focus on “equitable access” as the school was being conceptualized and launched.

What would it look like for state leaders to leverage these federal requirements and resources to advance well-resourced, integrated public schools?

- **State leaders should** turn ESSA resource allocation review requirements into a meaningful opportunity to advance educational equity, instead of useless compliance exercises. For example, state board members or legislators could invite the SEA and districts to present an update on how they are meeting these ESSA requirements, preliminary findings, and plans to address and improve alignment of educational resources with the needs of students in each school. These invitations should make clear that the state expects plans to include integration, as integration is one of the most successful ways to support access to educational resources and opportunities for students living in poverty and students of color.

- **State leaders should** provide training to district leaders and local board members to ensure that they understand their obligations under Title VI and understand best practices in allocating educational resources fairly and equitably to avoid any violations of the law.
- **State leaders should** support any Fostering Diverse Schools or Magnet School Assistance Program grantees in their state by expressing an interest in seeing the work succeed, asking the grantee for updates, and providing additional support where possible. These state leaders can also use their convening and communicating powers to share positive work completed under the grant with other districts in their state as exemplars of what's possible.

State leaders should prioritize identifying, sharing, and supporting applications for new rounds of these and other relevant federal grant opportunities with their districts.

How state leaders can advance this goal

- ✓ Support meaningful resource allocation reviews required by Title I of the Every Student Succeeds Act
- ✓ Train state and local education leaders on requirements under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1965
- ✓ Support district leaders in identifying, securing, and implementing federal grants that support integrated, well resourced public schools

Conclusion



State policymakers must lead the way into a future in which schools reflect the rich diversity of our country, a future in which well-resourced, integrated schools nurture graduates who are prepared to thrive as adults.

If we want to end educational inequity, we need to end segregation. If we want to prepare our children to thrive in the communities and workplaces they will participate in as adults, we need diverse, well-resourced classrooms for all. Seventy years after the *Brown v. Board* decision declared separate schools to be “inherently unequal” and put forth a vision of equal educational opportunity for all, we have yet to make good on that promise.

State policymakers must lead the way into a future in which schools reflect the rich diversity of our country, a future in which well-resourced, integrated schools nurture graduates who are prepared to thrive as adults. This starts by deconcentrating poverty and addressing the persistent racial segregation in schools today, and by funding public schools fully and fairly.

Of course, school integration and school funding reform are powerful tools, but neither are silver bullets. It is critical, too, for instance, that state leaders ensure that within integrated, well-resourced schools, every student is taught robust academic content—reading, math, science, arts, music, history, and civics—and develops critical thinking, problem-solving, and leadership skills that prepare them to support their families and communities and engage with civic systems and democracy.



We need to integrate our public schools, because we know it can work

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*, our policy agenda lays out a clear path forward for state leaders who are ready to:

- 1. Fund public schools fully and fairly.**
- 2. Rethink school district lines.**
- 3. Ensure integration and resource equity *within* districts and schools.**
- 4. Foster positive student experiences in integration efforts.**
- 5. Create an ecosystem that promotes integration and resource equity.**

We look forward to partnering in this work.



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