

Your Question:

You requested information on school integration efforts nationally. Specifically, you were interested in the effects of school integration on affluent/high achieving students and low-income/minority students.

Our Response:

Our response is provided in five sections: 1) historical context of school integration; 2) overview and examples of socioeconomic integration; 3) policy considerations; 4) implementation challenges; and 5) additional resources.

Historical Context

The 1954 Supreme Court ruling in [Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka](#) initiated race-based integration practices across the country. For the next 60 years, states and districts implemented a variety of policies aimed at creating more racially integrated schools. However, in the 2007 court case [Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1](#), voluntary desegregation/integration efforts in Seattle, Washington and Louisville, Kentucky that were based solely on race were found to be unconstitutional. The UCLA Civil Rights Project has found that socioeconomic and racial segregation regularly appear as overlapping issues, a trend they label ‘double segregation,’ and states and districts continuing integration efforts have overwhelmingly chosen to develop policies based on socioeconomic, rather than race-based, factors.

Socioeconomic Integration

[The Century Foundation](#)’s 2016 report, “[A New Wave of School Integration](#),” serves as a leading study on socioeconomic integration across the country. The Foundation states that “socioeconomic (integration) strategies will be important practical solutions for school districts or charter schools considering integration policies.” The report highlights the following key figures and findings regarding nationwide socioeconomic integration practices:

- As of 2017 (TCF updated this figure since publishing the report), over 100 districts and charter networks were using socioeconomic status as a factor in student assignment, impacting over four million students in 32 states.
- Integrated schools have been found to boost student achievement and attract and retain strong leaders.
- Some longstanding district programs, such as that in the Cambridge Public School District, have seen steadily rising scores on state and national assessments, as well as increased high school graduation rates.
- In addition to stronger test scores, students in integrated schools have shown increased college attendance rates compared to similar peers in more segregated schools.
- When a school reaches a stable level of about 30 percent middle-class students, the lower income students achieve at higher levels and the higher-income students perform no worse, in comparison to their peers in more segregated schools.

Examples of Socioeconomic Integration

The Century Foundation report, "[Stories of School Integration](#)," highlights nine examples of socioeconomic integration policies throughout the country. The report also provides policy recommendations and conclusions for each case study. For the purposes of this response, we outline results from Connecticut and Massachusetts as they are the most regionally representative of Delaware and showcase a diversity of methodologies in their integration plans.

- [Cambridge, Massachusetts \(pg. 9\)](#): While the Cambridge plan originally focused on racial integration, the district pivoted to a focus on socioeconomic status in 2001. Cambridge Public School District utilizes a [controlled choice model](#) for integration. This model aims to balance family preference with district needs. While the district's Chief Operating Officer, James Maloney, believes that many factors tie into their students' record of academic success, he specifically credits their controlled choice policy for the outcomes they have achieved. According to the Massachusetts Department of Education, "In academic year 2014–2015, 91.5 percent of all students, 90.5 percent of black students, 88.7 percent of Hispanic/Latino students, and 89.5 percent of low-income students graduated from high school in Cambridge Public School System." All percentages are higher than national averages.
- [Hartford, Connecticut \(pg. 37\)](#): "Hartford is a high-poverty, majority-minority city of over 125,000 residents, surrounded by several affluent, predominantly white suburbs. While the poverty rate in the city is 34.4 percent, the combined poverty rate of the surrounding counties is only 12.1 percent." Hartford implements a "two-way desegregation" plan allowing city families to choose from over 30 districts surrounding the city to enroll their students, while the city operates 45 interdistrict magnet schools to attract suburban students. The model has proven successful in assisting Hartford in integrating a high-poverty and high-minority district.
- [Stamford, Connecticut \(pg. 54\)](#): "In 2007, in response to the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Parents Involved in Community Schools*, which limited school districts' ability to consider students' individual race in school assignments, Stamford revised its integration policy to be based on educational need rather than race." Under the current policy, Stamford sets a goal, "for all schools in the district to fall within +/- 10 percentage points of the district average enrollment of disadvantaged students (defined as students receiving free and reduced lunch, English language learners, and students living in income-restricted housing.)" The district achieves this goal by regularly looking at attendance boundaries for neighborhood schools and weighting magnet school lotteries, a process aimed at identifying opportunities for integration. The report notes, "As of fall 2015, Stamford had the highest overall academic performance out of the five largest school districts in Connecticut, and low-income students in the district performed above the state average."

Policy Considerations for Socioeconomic Integration

[The Century Foundation report](#) cited above provides recommendations and considerations to policymakers examining socioeconomic integration. Reviewing the nine case studies, the Foundation offers the following seven themes for policymaker consideration:

- "When socioeconomic diversity policies are well implemented, they appear to produce strong academic outcomes for students and better prepare them for living in a diverse society."

- “While school integration is often politically challenging, key steps such as using choice and incentives effectively can assist in gaining community support.”
- “Setting clear system-wide goals for integration increases the likelihood of achieving success.”
- “Policies that break down artificial walls between city and suburb can have greater impact than those limited to existing district lines.”
- “Socioeconomic diversity policies can often lead to racial diversity.”
- “Districts are more likely to be successful when they ensure integration not only in schools, but also in classrooms.”

A more nuanced explanation of these themes can be found at the beginning of the [TCF report](#) and throughout each district case study.

Challenges of Integrating

While there are multiple reasons for districts and schools to develop socioeconomic integration policies, there are challenges in implementing these practices. Some of the most commonly faced challenges are issues of preparation, school choice, and transportation.

Preparation

Integration policies may place students into environments for which they are not socially or academically prepared. According to findings from the [National Assessment of Educational Progress \(NAEP\)](#) (as detailed in a [Fordham Institute report](#)), just 2 percent of Illinois 8th graders who were eligible for subsidized lunches reached the advanced level in math in 2015. Due to the disparity between low-income and high-income students’ achievement levels, there is concern that integration policies may harm all students involved. However, the [TCF report](#) cites empirical evidence contradicting this belief.

School Choice

As school choice becomes a more prevalent topic in education, it is important to understand how choice impacts integration policies. School choice policies may factor into the number of seats available in schools, as some schools in each district are viewed as more desirable. Transportation needs (described in more detail below) may prohibit available choices from being viable options for families. To address choice issues, some districts such as the [Cambridge Public School District](#) utilize a policy of controlled choice which aims to balance family preference and district needs. The ECS [School Choice Glossary](#) is useful for understanding the choice issue.

Transportation

Integration plans often rely on student mobility to other schools within the districts. When such mobility is not the norm, integration plans can be adversely affected. For example, [Wake County School District in North Carolina](#) developed a complex integration plan, but due to a lack of transportation funding, the district struggled with viable implementation – even though the number of students impacted by transportation needs in [Wake County](#) was relatively small. As an added complication, several [research studies](#) show that the country is currently experiencing a nationwide shortage of school bus drivers, which adds to transportation challenges and further highlights the need to incorporate transportation components into a successful integration plan.

Other Resources

The following resources provide additional information and data on integration practices throughout the country.

- The [Brookings Institute](#) report, "[Convenience plus a conscience: Lessons for school integration](#)" (2017) outlines the current status of school segregation. The report notes low-income students and students of color generally receive fewer resources relative to the academic challenges they encounter. Often, state and local governments spend less on their lowest-income school districts than on their wealthiest. Though federal spending assists in closing this gap, Arne Duncan notes, "Federal spending was never intended to equalize funding streams; instead, it was meant to provide additional funding for students who need more services." The authors conclude segregation of schools is not a product of natural forces, but of policy, adding that more integration is both desirable and practicable.
- "[Brown at 62: School Segregation by Race, Poverty and State](#)" (2016), produced by the [UCLA Civil Rights Project](#), showcases the importance of confronting segregation issues, given the strong relationship between double segregation and inferior educational opportunities clearly demonstrated through decades of research.
- "[When Integrating a School: Does it Matter If You Use Class Instead of Race?](#)" (2016), an NPR article on integration, notes there are economic arguments in favor of practicing socioeconomic integration. According to the article, "Nearly half of the companies in the Fortune 100 signed a brief testifying it was an economic imperative in the global economy to hire diverse employees with cross-cultural skills that only diverse education settings can provide."
- "[Mixed Results for Income-based K-12 Assignment](#)" (2015), an article published by Duke University, takes a closer look at the aforementioned Wake County integration plan. The examination finds mixed results for the program, but does note the study provides "tentative evidence that income based assignment policies improve achievement and increase diversity."
- "[The Widening Academic Achievement Gap Between the Rich and the Poor: New Evidence and Possible Explanations](#)" (2011), is a Stanford research study that examines whether and how the relationship between family socioeconomic characteristics and academic achievement has changed during the past fifty years. The author concludes family income is now nearly as strong a predictor of children's achievement as parental education.