



## BETWEEN-DISTRICT DESEGREGATION: THREE DISTRICTS THAT ARE DOING IT RIGHT



We recently [wrote](#) about white parents' efforts to draw new school district lines, splitting off from their racially integrated districts. A much more uplifting story can be found in Boston, Hartford, and Omaha, where students are crossing district lines to integrate rather than segregate. Since most racial and ethnic segregation takes place between, rather than within, school districts, this kind of effort can be particularly important to integration, as NEPC Fellow [Peter W. Cookson](#) and his co-authors note in a [recent report](#) published by the [Learning Policy Institute](#) (LPI).

Cookson, along with John Brittain and Larkin Willis, explain how these three school districts have made commitments to reversing rather than ignoring or exacerbating between-district segregation.

- **Boston, MA:** Founded in 1966, Boston's Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity (METCO) has been in existence longer than any other voluntary desegregation plan in America. More than 3,000 students of color from Boston and Springfield receive free transportation and support services when they elect to transfer to suburban districts. The receiving districts also receive \$5,000 per transfer student. In 2014, transfer students' 98% graduation rate was higher not only than the graduation rate for Springfield and for Boston, but also higher than the 95% rate of the receiving districts and the 86% average for the state as a whole. While selection bias is certainly at play in these numbers, they do provide evidence that participating students are doing very well.

- **Hartford, CT:** The 2003 *Sheff v. O'Neill* case established that segregation between Hartford and its surrounding districts violated the state's constitution. In that decision's wake, a two-way transfer program was created for Hartford and nearby districts. The more transfers they enrolled, the more money receiving districts received. Meanwhile, more than a billion dollars went into construction designed to improve Hartford schools and make them more attractive to students transferring in. A Regional Choice Office runs marketing campaigns informing parents about inter-district choice. A 2009 study found that magnet school attendance led to better reading and math achievement for Hartford's own students.
- **Omaha, NE:** The Raikes plan was established by a state senator in 2006 to promote educational equity. The plan included a voluntary program to desegregate high-poverty high schools and a weighted funding formula that incentivized affluent communities to welcome children from low-income families. Evaluations found that students from low-income families had much higher rates of math and reading achievement when they transferred to low-poverty schools.

Brittain, Willis and Cookson stress that these policies require ongoing adjustments and commitment: "[P]olicymakers interested in advancing equity through inter-district desegregation plans must be persistent and must engage in ongoing problem solving." The LPI brief also offers four specific recommendations for policymakers interested in replicating inter-district desegregation plans in their own backyards:

1. Create a regional agreement that includes financial incentives for receiving schools.
2. Ensure everyone is clear about the program's mission by creating specific timelines, definitions, and goals related to educational equity.
3. Provide equitable resources through such approaches as sharing the expenses of magnet programs and capital improvements, implementing regional finance reform, uniting to market desegregation-related choice options to the community, and providing services for students who do and do not elect to transfer.
4. Evaluate results to ensure the program is aligned to its vision, successful across measures and subgroups, and able to improve based on publicly available feedback and data.

### NEPC Resources on School Segregation

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