



AS SCHOOL SEGREGATION INTENSIFIES, WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?



In a [recent piece](#) in *The Atlantic*, Will Stancil concludes that school segregation is on the rise in America:

According to my analysis of data from the National Center on Education Statistics, the number of segregated schools (defined in this analysis as those schools where less than 40 percent of students are white), has approximately doubled between 1996 and 2016. In that same span, the percentage of children of color attending such a school rose from 59 to 66 percent. For black students, the percentage in segregated schools rose even faster, from 59 to 71 percent.

Stancil points to multiple causes, including the termination of hundreds of court-ordered desegregation plans, the secession of white neighborhoods and cities from large, diverse Southern school districts, and the expansion of highly segregated charter schools that are typically exempt from desegregation efforts.

Still other factors include demographic changes (such as the increases in the Hispanic and Asian populations) that make it challenging to create diverse schools in certain communities, National Education Policy Center Fellow Roslyn Arlin Mickelson writes in a recent article in the peer-reviewed journal *Social Currents*.

In her [NEPC policy brief](#), Professor Amy Stuart Wells describes “ostensibly ‘colorblind’” education policies. Such policies are not necessarily focused on race, but they intensify racial segregation and race-based achievement gaps, nonetheless.

Wells concludes by recommending that the nation create and sustain more racially and ethnically diverse schools. She suggests accomplishing this objective by:

- Supporting and sustaining diverse districts and communities in conjunction with local zoning boards, developers, real estate agents and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) effort to “Build Integrated and Sustainable Communities.”
- Fostering cross-district cooperation and collaboration with magnet programs and other special offerings.
- Encouraging inter-district transfers to promote diversity.

Wells also stresses the necessity of supporting curriculum, teaching, and assessment that emphasize the educational benefits of diversity. Means of working toward this goal include:

- Expanding legal challenges based on the educational benefits of diversity. Stancil notes that these benefits include stronger academic achievement, reduced exposure to the criminal justice system, superior professional and educational outcomes, better connections that lead to jobs or college, reductions in racial prejudice, and higher levels of preparation for living and working in diverse communities.
- Tapping into the progressive potential of the Common Core State Standards to focus more on deeper learning and critical citizenship.
- Placing less emphasis on standardized tests that often lead to poor outcomes for students of color.

Wells concludes:

Much can be done in the policy arena to support and further the educational benefits of diversity. Such efforts will only progress, however, in a context in which people in power admit that they and their constituents can indeed see color. In fact, we know that seeing is believing in the potential of the most racially and ethnically diverse democracy in the world.

SEE ALSO: NEPC Fellow Roslyn Arlin Mickelson maintains the *K-12 Integration, Desegregation, and Segregation Archive*, a database containing about 600 entries related to diversity.

NEPC Resources on School Segregation

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