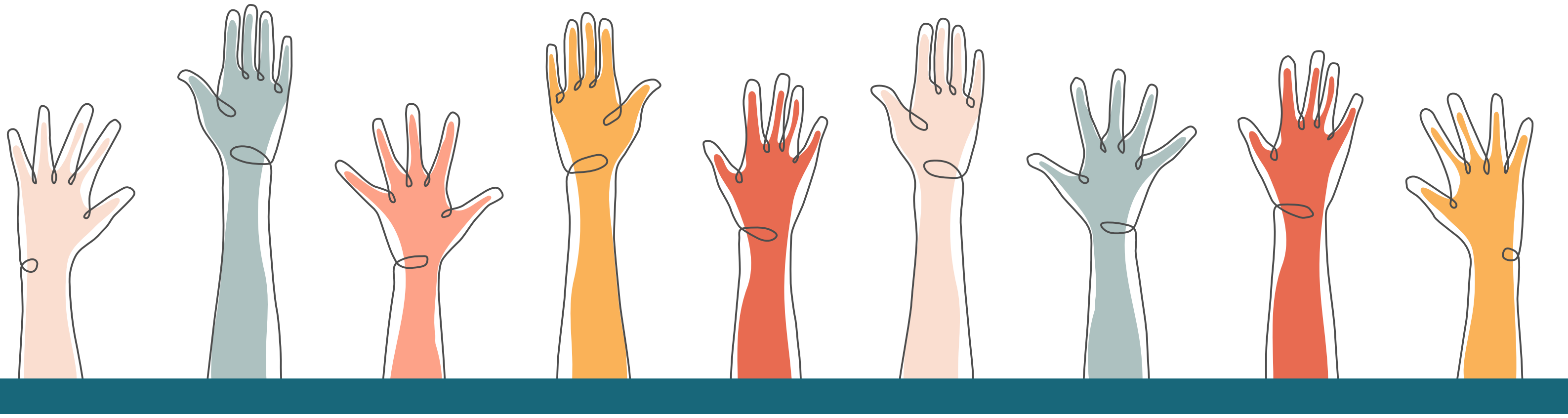
Choosing Integration

A Discussion Paper and Policy Primer

January 2022



MassINC

Executive Summary

Massachusetts public schools are highly segregated by race, ethnicity, and income. This condition is largely a choice. We have gone more than two decades without a coordinated strategy to increase integration. Leaders are quietly starting to question this status quo, and with good reason. School segregation is arguably the single greatest force behind the high levels of inequality in our commonwealth. Doing nothing to address this longstanding challenge could thwart other well-intentioned efforts to reduce racial disparities.

With leaders allocating an unprecedented trove of federal funds, this is a pivotal moment to vigorously question segregated schooling in Massachusetts. To inform inquiry, this discussion paper presents a thorough fact base: We probe trends in school and residential segregation. We examine the latest relevant peer-reviewed academic research. And we explore recent policy developments in education, housing, and transportation, surfacing numerous opportunities to achieve meaningful increases in integration.

I. Key Takeaways

This paper presents exhaustive analysis. While we hesitate to draw tight conclusions that obscure important nuance or forestall avenues for inquiry, we do believe our many layers of analysis yield three clear takeaways:

#1. From the perspective of racial equity, economic segregation is the greatest threat.

By some measures, racial and ethnic segregation is increasing in Massachusetts; others suggest it has declined slightly over the past two decades. These patterns are important and deserve careful study. However, we should not let them overshadow the foremost concern: high levels of segregation by income.

The majority of Black and Hispanic students in Massachusetts attend schools where the majority of students are low-income. In comparison, White and Asian students are enrolled in schools with half this level of poverty. An extensive body of research shows attending a high-poverty school is extremely harmful to student learning. Disparate exposure to these environments explains a large share of racial and ethnic achievement gaps.

Allocating substantially more resources to schools with concentrated poverty can ameliorate the problem. In this regard, the funding provided by the Student Opportunity Act is vital to students presently learning in these detrimental environments. However, we must also acknowledge that providing more money to schools with concentrated poverty is not the end game. This spending is not nearly as impactful or cost-effective as investments that lead to more economically integrated schools over time.

Key Terms

Throughout this report, you will encounter a variety of terms describing the composition of enrollment in schools. Here are brief descriptions of how we define them:

Racial and Ethnic School Segregation: The separation of students across schools based on their race or ethnicity.

Economic Segregation: The separation of students across schools based on their household income.

Intensely Segregated Schools: This term refers only to racial and ethnic segregation. Following other researchers, we define "intensely segregated" as schools with more than 90 percent White students, or, conversely, more than 90 percent students of color.

Diverse Schools: This term refers only to racial and ethnic integration. Borrowing methodology from a recent study, we define diverse schools as those where no racial or ethnic group accounts for more than 70 percent of students and where White students make up at least 25 percent of enrollment.[1]

Economically Integrated Schools: This term refers only to economic integration. We define schools as economically integrated when low-income students represent between 20 percent and 40 percent of enrollment. Our upper threshold is consistent with literature on the level of exposure to concentrated disadvantages that will impair individual learning and well-being. The lower threshold is a subjective definition of inclusion.

Fully Integrated Schools: Schools that are both diverse and economically integrated according to the above standards.

#2. Diverse schools provide substantial benefits to all students and society.

In contrast to schools segregated by income, which cause harm, schools that are racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse provide superior learning environments. Students gain a range of benefits from integrated classrooms, including improvements in critical thinking, stronger leadership skills, increases in civic engagement, cultural competence, and reductions in racial bias and stereotyping. In a global, multiethnic economy, these benefits have considerable value. A large majority of parents favor integrated educational settings for these reasons. Recognizing the workforce benefits, large corporations and the US military have repeatedly advocated before the courts on behalf of efforts to build and maintain diverse learning environments.

The number of K–12 public schools that are racially and ethnically diverse has doubled in the last two decades. Over one-third of Massachusetts schools now have diverse enrollment (defined as schools where no racial or ethnic group represents more than 70 percent of students and where White students make up at least 25 percent of enrollment). However, many of these schools have high poverty levels, which negate the benefits of racial and ethnic diversity. Massachusetts has only 156 schools (8 percent) that are both diverse and economically integrated (between 20 percent and 40 percent low-income).

Few of our fully integrated schools are located in urban districts. From a portfolio of 136 schools, Boston has just eight that are both diverse and economically integrated. Only nine of the 26 Gateway Cities have one or more of these fully integrated schools. In Springfield, where the average school poverty rate is 82 percent, none of the 70 schools meet the criteria.

#3. The latest research points to numerous achievable policy changes that can reduce segregation and increase integration.

Many leaders have shied away from addressing segregation because they believe it is simply too difficult a problem to solve without making unpopular changes, like consolidating school districts or busing large numbers of students across borders. Because policy dialogue has been so limited, few people are aware of the range of tactics we could pursue to increase integration and the challenges and opportunities associated with each approach. After a careful review of the relevant literature, we reach the following conclusions:

- Even when parents want integration, racial bias can powerfully distort their perception of school quality. While flawed measures of school performance have only reinforced this tendency, providing parents with better information can help them choose communities and schools with high-quality options for integrated learning.
- Experimental research in social psychology makes a powerful case for integrated education. However, qualitative research from integrated K–12 schools shows that high levels of inequality can make it very difficult for these schools to build strong and inclusive learning environments.
- Housing mobility programs that provide financial support and counseling to help people of color overcome discrimination and economic barriers to living in the suburbs have struggled to reduce concentrated poverty, but new models demonstrate that these programs can be highly effective when they are structured and implemented well.
- School improvement and neighborhood revitalization can work together in tandem. Schools can provide a powerful draw, bringing families to urban neighborhoods to increase their socioeconomic diversity and stability. But cities have struggled to get this formula right. Over the past two decades, expanded school choice has often drawn affluent families to cities and provided a force for gentrification without producing integration. While increasing racial integration in suburban communities is still critically important, increasing socioeconomic diversity in these urban school districts is equally vital.

II. Policy Framework

In our view, "choosing integration" means pulling policy levers in a careful, choreographed manner that capitalizes on the preference for diverse educational settings that most parents hold for their children, while also ensuring that our actions lead to equitable outcomes and serve the varied aspirations for growth and development in each of our communities. In the interest of building more inclusive school climates, expanding housing production, reducing congestion, and facilitating sustainable growth, leaders are already pulling harder on many of these policy levers. Through dialogue, we can build support for a course of action that leads to greater coordination across these efforts, with the aim of reducing concentrated poverty and maximizing options for high-quality integrated learning. The full report details a range of policy ideas to stimulate this discussion. The snapshot below provides a summary.

Data and Information

- **Publish integration data.** Information is vital to productive policy dialogue. We need more of it. The state does not report segregation measures. Moreover, it lacks important metrics, including racial, ethnic, and income enrollment data for school choice students, classroom-level enrollment to monitor within school segregation, school-level climate reports by race and ethnicity, and comparable data to monitor changes in school poverty.
- **Create an independent commission on communicating school quality.** Current school report cards do not offer a reliable indication of value added at the school level and as such tend to suggest that inclusive schools underperform. This longstanding issue merits attention. An independent panel of experts could suggest improvements to the development and reporting of these important metrics.
- **Develop an inclusive school district designation.** Massachusetts could recognize districts that have comprehensive pro-integration policies, including inclusive curricula, student tracking policies and practices, efforts to hire diverse educators, parent engagement models, and school governance structures.

Education

- **Help diverse schools achieve the promise of integration.** Creating an effective multicultural school requires expertise and intentional effort. Many schools are developing components of this practice, but even the most advanced will report that they have considerable room for improvement. The state can resource formal efforts to help educators in "diverse by design" schools come together and learn from one another. When distributing limited educator diversity recruitment and retention resources, the state could also provide priority consideration to schools that have demonstrated strong commitments to inclusion.
- **Build 21st-century magnet schools.** Magnet schools offer special instruction not available elsewhere to attract a more diverse student body from throughout a school district or region. This approach can be highly effective. Massachusetts is already carrying out on an ambitious plan to scale early colleges. Working to increase integration through this initiative would be complementary. We could also pursue efforts to increase access to career vocational and technical education high schools in a manner that leads to more integration. For elementary and middle schools, dual-language immersion and arts magnet schools provide other popular and proven models to increase integration and generate demonstrable educational gains for students of all backgrounds.
- **Help charters integrate enrollment.** Massachusetts can allow controlled choice methods in lottery assignment and authorize other changes to recruitment, enrollment, and assignment practices to help ensure that charter schools provide integrated learning environments.
- **Find creative strategies to modernize the METCO program.** With remote learning technology, changing transportation paradigms (such as regional rail, described below), and magnet models, there are numerous opportunities to advance a long-held aspiration to scale METCO and make it a vehicle for increasing integration in urban as well as suburban schools.

Housing

- **Expand funding for housing mobility programs.** Now that we have solid evidence that providing financial support and counseling to families with housing vouchers can expand their access to low-poverty schools, there is a strong argument for increasing investment in these programs. This resource can provide a particularly valuable support for low-income families in urban neighborhoods where displacement is occurring.

- **Back efforts to build mixed-income multifamily housing in suburban communities.** With the new Housing Choice legislation, municipalities can approve numerous zoning changes with a simple majority vote of their governing bodies rather than the two-thirds support required previously. As of this year, cities and towns with MBTA commuter rail stations must have at least one significantly sized zone where multifamily housing is allowed by right.

  To make the most of the moment to build mixed-income housing with family-sized units in these projects, philanthropy can provide timely support to grassroots organizing efforts. State government can also provide backing by using incentives for mixed-use development to stimulate more inclusive forms of multifamily housing in these development districts.

- **Align neighborhood stabilization and homeownership tools with strategic school improvement efforts.** Through the Commonwealth Builders Program and Neighborhood Hubs, MassHousing has two new resources available to strengthen Gateway City neighborhoods. These funds will help return blighted and abandoned homes to productive use, while giving more families opportunities to own their homes and have greater residential stability. In deploying these resources, MassHousing should give strong preference to projects in neighborhoods with compelling school improvement strategies.

  School-centered revitalization is also another appropriate setting for limited use of housing vouchers for homeownership. Deployed strategically for this purpose, the state's Section 8 for homeownership program can help all members of the community benefit from increasing property values that result from successful school improvement efforts.

- **Support market-rate housing development in Gateway Cities.** At present, residential markets in most Gateway Cities are simply too weak to support new construction or rehabilitation. This means they have trouble drawing and retaining middle-income households because there is limited desirable housing to purchase or rent. The state's Housing Development Incentive Program (HDIP) stimulates production of this "missing middle" housing stock. However, HDIP has a statutory cap of just $10 million annually. At this level, the tool cannot make a meaningful difference. In the context of long-term efforts to increase school integration, this tool has a vital role to play.

- **Combat housing discrimination by increasing enforcement of fair housing laws and passing legislation to prevent discrimination and affirmatively further fair housing.** While we should make every effort to help communities develop in a manner that matches their aspirations, this does not mean we can continue to overlook overt discriminatory practices. The legislature can move to address this challenge by passing two important bills: *An Act to Promote Fair Housing by Preventing Discrimination Against Affordable Housing* (H.1373 / S.867) and *An Act to Affirmatively Further Fair Housing* (H.1441 / S.861). These bills make communities subject to civil action if they engage in discriminatory land use practices or fail to take meaningful action to address housing disparities and reduce segregation.

Transportation

- **Utilize regional rail as a force for integration.** Commuter rail is already an important asset to METCO programs around the state. During the pandemic, the MBTA changed commuter rail schedules to provide greater frequency during non-peak hours. Maintaining this change and adding even more service consistent with a "regional rail" model will make commuter rail a game changer for many students looking to expand their school options.
- **Implement low-income fares on commuter rail.** Transportation is a major barrier keeping families from moving to low-poverty school districts. At present, low-income families cannot afford to regularly ride commuter rail. A low-income discount could eliminate this obstacle. Along with mixed-income housing development in suburban station areas and housing mobility voucher programs, a low-income fare program can play an important role in furthering school integration efforts in Massachusetts.
- **Explore car-based solutions.** Cars are even more important to helping low-income families access suburban neighborhoods with low-poverty schools. Massachusetts needs more intentional strategies to help families with young children overcome high barriers to car ownership.

School Segregation as a Driver of Inequality

Acknowledging that racial and ethnic test score gaps in Massachusetts have remained relatively constant for the past two decades is an important starting point for any discussion of school segregation and inequality. The differences between White students and Black and Hispanic test takers is the equivalent of roughly two years of additional education.[2] Despite all of our well-intentioned education reform efforts, we have failed to close large racial and ethnic achievement gaps, with students of color disproportionately concentrated in high-poverty schools.

When the education reform movement began to accept economic segregation as a given and turned its focus to standards, choice, and accountability, those who study segregation predicted that progress increasing educational equity would stall.[3] A 2009 MassINC report examining the first 15 years of education reform in Massachusetts noted that increasing funding to urban districts did produce some gains, but large racial achievement gaps remained and closing them might ultimately require socioeconomic integration.[4] A more recent trend analysis suggests this prediction was correct: Massachusetts has made little progress increasing academic skills or closing racial and ethnic gaps since 2005.[5]

Last year the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston concluded that economic segregation explains between 60 percent and 90 percent of racial and ethnic test score gaps in New England metro areas.[6] The Federal Reserve is working to draw attention to this problem because these educational disparities account for more than half of the troubling growth in income inequality that the US has experienced since the 1970s.[7]

Choosing Integration

A Discussion Paper and Policy Primer

I. Introduction

Massachusetts public schools remain highly segregated by race, ethnicity, and class. This stubborn challenge has serious consequences for the social and economic health of our commonwealth. In many ways, the persistence of school segregation is perplexing: Our population has become far more diverse; people of color are moving to the suburbs and White households are returning to the cities; and most importantly, in survey after survey, families of all backgrounds report a strong preference for integrated schools.

This desire for integrated education is consistent with enlightened self-interest. Students learn more when they are exposed to peers with different backgrounds and beliefs. These learning experiences are particularly valuable in an era defined by global marketplaces and multicultural workforces. While they may be entirely genuine, preferences for integrated schools fail to produce more integration when we start from a position where students are divided by race, ethnicity, and income; marginalized students are disproportionately concentrated in low-performing schools; and pervasive unconscious biases heavily influence the choices that parents make.

With public policy intervention, we can overcome these barriers, eliminating the harms caused by segregated schooling and fulfilling the stated desire of parents for integration. The details of what would constitute an effective policy framework are increasingly understood, but Massachusetts has a lot of work to do to fashion a robust response along these lines. Like most states, we abandoned efforts to achieve integrated schools decades ago. Passage of the much-celebrated Student Opportunity Act (2019) reflects a continuation of this posture. Rather than working to increase integration, the state has committed to providing large payments to schools with high concentrations of poverty, in perpetuity.

> “Promoting integration as the means to improve the lives of Blacks stigmatizes Black people and Black spaces and valorizes Whiteness as both the symbol of opportunity and the measuring stick for equality. In turn, such stigmatization of Blacks and Black spaces is precisely what foils efforts toward integration. After all, why would anyone else want to live around or interact with a group that is discouraged from being around itself?”
>
> — Mary Pattillo

Research suggests this additional funding will not fully address the losses students incur when they attend high-poverty schools. Still, these dollars are essential to the disproportionately large number of students of color served by chronically underfunded schools today, and because we will never draw families with a choice to woefully under-resourced urban school districts, these funds can provide a sturdy foundation for efforts to increase integration in the future.

As we consider what such an undertaking might look like, we must first recognize our region’s painful experience with court-ordered desegregation, the harm people of color have endured, and the many ways in which notions of integration can reinforce racial bias and stereotypes. As Northwestern University sociologist Mary Pattillo writes in *The Problem With Integration*, “Promoting integration as the means to improve the lives of Blacks stigmatizes Black people and Black spaces and valorizes Whiteness.”[8]

These concerns must be at the center of our dialogue, but we can no longer avoid the conversation. From Aristotle to John Dewey, integrated education has long been recognized as crucial to sustaining democratic traditions.[9] The effects of school segregation on social cohesion are increasingly apparent. Similarly, in a state grappling with extremely high levels of income inequality, separating students by family economic background has become a self-perpetuating cycle, reducing upward mobility, thinning the middle class, and pulling us further apart.

As more and more educators recognize these truths, they are speaking out about the need to pursue school integration policies once again. Educators are joined by housing leaders, who, after a decades-long tug-of-war on fair housing, finally appear to be gaining the upper hand. At the federal, state, and local levels, they are advancing policies and practices to promote diverse and inclusive communities. Large flows of federal funding position them to build on this momentum.

At this crossroads, MassINC offers this discussion paper to bolster the nascent conversation and support constructive dialogue. In the pages that follow, we document school-level trends in racial, ethnic, and economic segregation and describe the forces behind them. We then dive deeply into the lessons we can extract from the latest research, contrasting the heavy costs of segregated schools with the significant benefits of integrated public education. We also draw from a large body of academic research to outline the challenges and opportunities facing strategies to further school integration. The paper concludes with principles and policy strategies to guide state and local efforts to achieve integration.

School Integration Milestones in Massachusetts

From our earliest days, Massachusetts has made public education a cornerstone of democracy. Consistent with this ideal, leaders have fought for integrated public schools throughout our history, though this commitment to integration has been qualified and, in many ways, limited, especially in recent times.

1850 **Supreme Judicial Court rules in favor of segregated public schools.** The SJC finds that separate schools do not violate the rights of Black students in *Roberts v. City of Boston*. The precedent is later cited by the US Supreme Court in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896).

1855 **Massachusetts legislature prohibits segregation in public schools.** In response to the SJC ruling, the legislature pass the nation's first law banning *de jure* segregation.[10]

1965 **Massachusetts legislature passes Racial Imbalance Act.** The Massachusetts legislature enacts one of the most aggressive state laws to end *de facto* segregation. Rather than relying on federal enforcement, the law provides state policy leadership to comply with *Brown*, empowering the state Board of Education to address schools with racially unbalanced enrollment.

1966 **METCO is created to provide voluntary busing.** With grants from the Carnegie Foundation and the US Office of Education, the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity (METCO) is created to move students of color from intensely segregated schools in Boston and Springfield to suburban schools.

1974 **US Supreme Court prohibits inter-district integration.** In *Milken vs. Bradley*, the Supreme Court finds busing for the purpose of integration cannot be required between district boundaries and courts cannot redraw district boundaries to integrate schools.

Court-ordered busing begins in Boston. The NAACP prevails in *Morgan v. Hennigan*. The city must create a desegregation plan, which leads to citywide busing.

Legislature amends Racial Imbalance Act. Changes reduce Board of Education's power to integrate but provide districts with incentives, including METCO reimbursements, funds for magnet schools, and a 90 percent state match when communities build or expand schools for the purpose of increasing integration.

1988 **Court-ordered busing ends in Boston.** A federal appeals court rules Boston had done everything it can to increase integration and returns control to the Boston School Committee. The school district is divided into three geographic zones; families receive controlled choice assignments to schools within their zone.

1998 **Federal court blocks use of race in Boston Latin School Admissions.** In *Wessmann v. Gittens*, the court finds the school district's consideration of race in assignment to BLS violates the equal protection clause of the constitution.

2001 **State eliminates incentives to create voluntary integration plans.** Among the changes, districts no longer receive a 90 percent state match when they build or expand schools for the purpose of increasing integration.[11]

II. School Enrollment Patterns Amid Changing Racial, Ethnic, and Economic Diversity in Massachusetts

Productive policy dialogue requires good data and a firm grasp of trends. This is especially true when renewing conversations around school integration. More than two decades have elapsed since we have looked closely at these issues. During this time, Massachusetts underwent profound demographic change. In this section, we describe how school enrollment patterns responded to these changes, using several common measures of school and residential segregation (see box below). We summarize the patterns revealed through this analysis in key findings, beginning with the changing racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic makeup of public school students and then drilling down on how the composition of neighborhoods and schools has shifted in Boston, the Gateway Cities, and their respective regions.

How We Measure Segregation Across Schools and Neighborhoods

There is no perfect way to measure the sorting of children and families into neighborhoods and schools. Depending on the approach one takes, trends may appear quite different. Researchers attempt to overcome this challenge by employing a variety of techniques. Here are brief descriptions of the measures you'll encounter in this section:

Dissimilarity Index: The Dissimilarity Index (DI) is a measure of how evenly a group is spread across an area. It tells us the proportion of a racial or ethnic group that would need to move schools for their share in all schools to equal their share of the overall student population in a given geography. Demographers generally describe school enrollment as highly segregated when the DI score exceeds 0.6. Similarly, we can use the DI to evaluate racial and ethnic residential segregation across census tracts. But as we get down to smaller geographies, we must interpret the results with caution. When population sizes and/or the number of schools or neighborhoods are small, we may get large DI scores even when there is no systemic segregation.

Exposure Index: When studying segregation, we are also interested in contact between groups. Within an area, the Exposure Index (EI) tells us what share of students are of a given race or ethnicity, on average, from the perspective of students in one racial or ethnic group. To calculate the Black–White EI, for example, we average the share of White students in each school, weighting by the number of Black students in each school. In comparison to the Dissimilarity Index, this measure takes into account the relative size of each group. Black students could be evenly distributed among schools, but still have little exposure to White students if they are a relatively large share of students in the community.

Changes to the Racial, Ethnic, and Socioeconomic Composition of Public School Students

With Asian and Hispanic enrollment growing rapidly and White enrollment declining sharply, Massachusetts' school-age population has become much more racially and ethnically diverse.

Between 2000 and 2020, Massachusetts gained more than 22,000 Asian students, a 52 percent increase. The Hispanic student population doubled, adding nearly 100,000 students. Numerically, the greatest shift was the sharp 30 percent decline in White enrollment, which left the state's public schools with 226,000 fewer White students in 2020 than in 2000. Amidst this change, the Black student population provided a sharp contrast by holding steady at 85,000.[12]

These widely varying growth rates resulted in major changes to the racial and ethnic composition of the student population. Compared to 2000, the Asian and Hispanic shares of public school enrollment in Massachusetts have each doubled to 7 percent and 22 percent of students, respectively; Black enrollment remains just below 10 percent; and White students now make up 57 percent of enrollment, down from 76 percent in 2000 (**Figure 1**).

As we will consider economic integration further on in our analysis, it is important to take stock of how the changing racial and ethnic composition of the student population relates to poverty in public schools. This pattern varies widely depending on the data source.

Data published by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) suggests public schools experienced large increases in poverty alongside this shifting enrollment. Between 2000 and 2014, low-income students increased from one-quarter to more than one-third of total enrollment. By the state's accounting, the low-income share fell to 26 percent when DESE shifted to a new "economically disadvantaged" category in 2014, but the growth steadily resumed, increasing to 37 percent in 2020.13 However, there is good reason to question the validity of the trends that appear in this administrative data.

Census figures for the school-age population suggest the share of students in households with income below 200 percent of poverty (a slightly higher threshold than the state definition) has held steady at roughly 29 percent for the past two decades. According to census data, the changing racial and ethnic compensation of the state's school-age population has been entirely offset by declining poverty rates for all races and ethnicities, particularly Black and Hispanic students.[14]

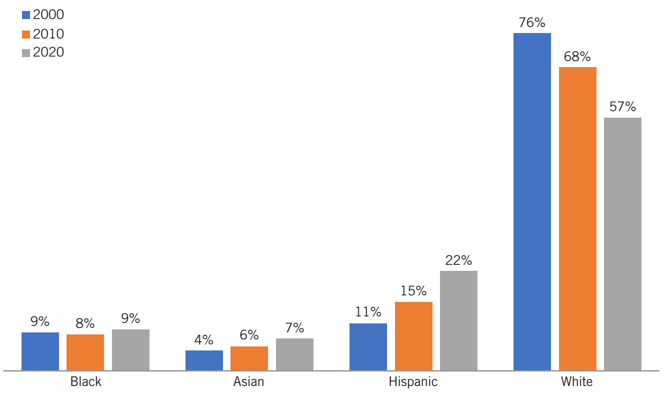
While the DESE trend data might be misleading, the department's most recent figures are close to the poverty levels found in census data. As such, there is no reason to question the high levels of concentrated poverty recorded at the school level (per the DESE data) that we will present later in this section.

Racial and Ethnic Segregation

Analysis of racial and ethnic segregation measures for the state, Boston, Gateway Cities, and regions reveals the following high-level trends:

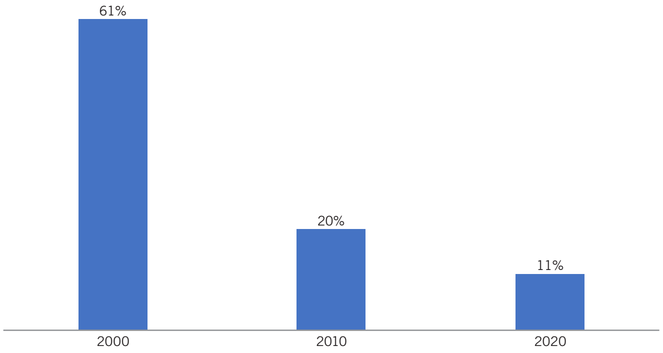
Most White students in Massachusetts no longer attend schools where almost all of their peers are White, but they still generally lack exposure to Black students. In 2000, Massachusetts had 954 intensely segregated White schools (i.e., schools where more than 90 percent of students are White); the count was down to 154 in 2020. This drastic reduction pushed the share of White students learning almost entirely alongside other White students down from 60 percent in 2000 to 10 percent in 2020 (**Figure 2**).

Figure 1: Share of Massachusetts Public School Students by Race/Ethnicity



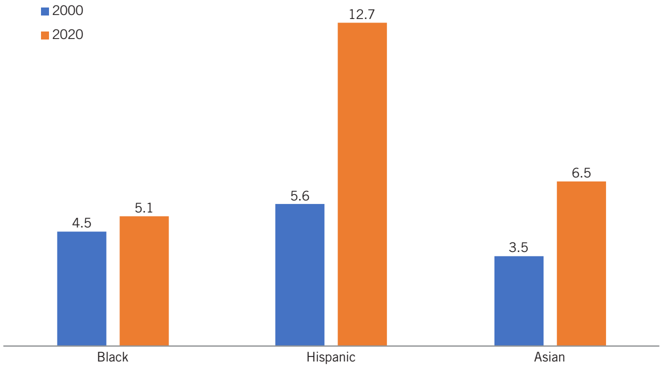
Source: Authors' analysis of data from Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education

Figure 2: Share of White Students Enrolled in Schools That Are More Than 90% White



Source: Authors' analysis of data from Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education

Figure 3: Average Exposure of White Students to Black, Hispanic, and Asian Students



Source: Authors' analysis of data from Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education

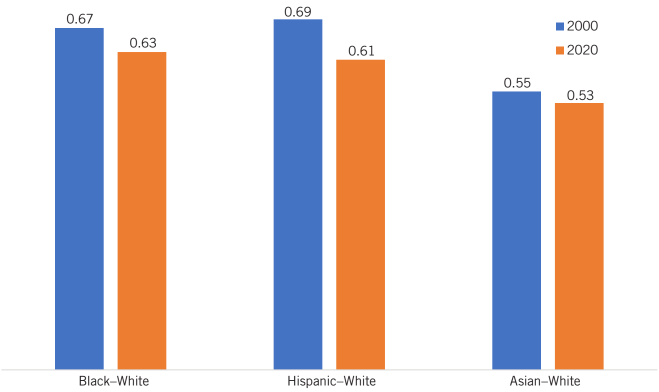
Integration in schools that were predominantly White in 2000 was primarily driven by more Asian and Hispanic students entering these districts. The average White student now attends a school where 13 percent of students are Hispanic and 7 percent are Asian, which is about double the share of Hispanic and Asian students that White students were exposed to in 2000. In comparison, there has been very little change in exposure to Black students; the average White student in Massachusetts still attends a school where just 5 percent of their peers are Black (**Figure 3**).

Massachusetts public schools are still highly segregated, and school enrollments appear to remain sensitive to racial and ethnic change. Overall, the racial and ethnic distribution of public school students in Massachusetts is slightly more balanced than in 2000. Dissimilarity index (DI) scores show segregation from White students has declined slightly for Black, Hispanic, and Asian students over the past two decades. However, at 0.63 and 0.61, both the Black–White and Hispanic–White DI scores remain within the highly segregated range of the index (**Figure 4**).

Trends suggest White enrollment patterns are still sensitive to changes in minority enrollment. Schools that saw significantly larger shares of Black and Hispanic students experienced well above average declines in White enrollment. The pattern is discernably different for Asian students. Schools with minimal enrollment growth among Asian students lost more White students than schools with modest Asian enrollment growth, whereas schools with a 10 percentage point increase in Asian students experienced slightly above average declines in White enrollment (**Figure 5**).[15]

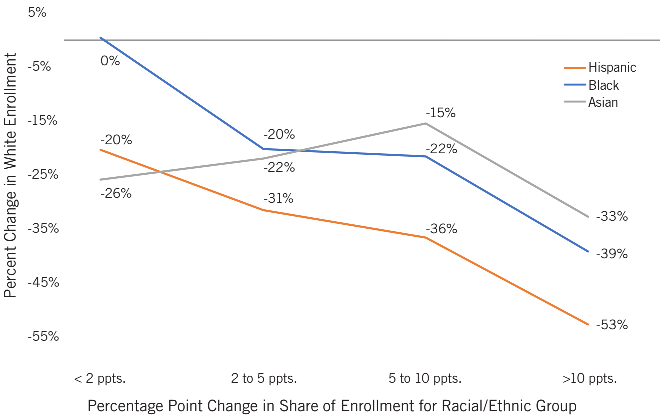
While this simple presentation only establishes correlation, and these trends merit more robust analysis, the patterns we observe are consistent with rigorous studies that find school enrollment is sensitive to “tipping points” or thresholds at which increases in minority students cause large numbers of White families to exit.[16]

Figure 4: Massachusetts School Enrollment Dissimilarity Indexes, 2000 and 2020



Source: Authors’ analysis of data from Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education

Figure 5: Percent Change in White Enrollment by Percentage Point Change in Minority Enrollment, 2000–2020

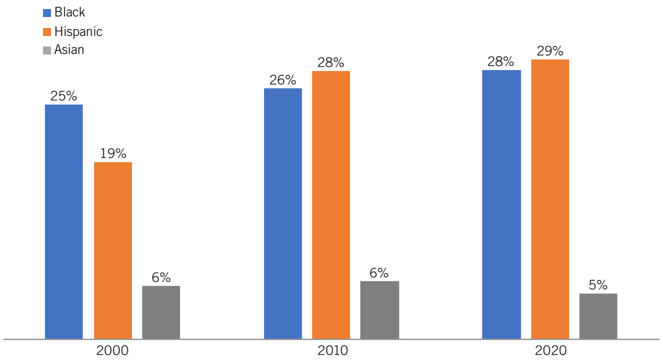


Source: Authors’ analysis of data from Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education

Black and Hispanic students increasingly attend intensely segregated schools, and their exposure to White peers is falling. The number of intensely segregated non-White schools in Massachusetts more than doubled, from 88 in 2000 to 201 in 2020. Schools in which students of color make up over 90 percent of enrollment now represent more than one out of every 10 public schools in the state.

Between 2000 and 2020, the share of Hispanic students attending intensely segregated schools rose from 19 percent to 29 percent. For Black students, the increase was smaller (25 percent to 28 percent), though still significant. The share of Asian students in intensely segregated schools held steady at around 5 percent (**Figure 6**).

Figure 6: Share of Students Enrolled in Schools That Are More Than 90% Non-White by Race and Ethnicity



Source: Authors’ analysis of data from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education

While White students today have more students of other races and ethnicities in their schools, students of color actually have far fewer White peers than they did in 2000 (**Figure 7**). The average Black student now attends a school that is 31 percent White, down from 39 percent White in 2000. Similarly, between 2000 and 2020, the average exposure to White students declined from nearly

40 percent to 32 percent for Hispanic students, and from 60 percent to 51 percent for Asian students.

With a declining White population and a persistently uneven distribution of students by race and ethnicity, it is decreasingly likely that students of color will have exposure to White students in Massachusetts.[17]

Residential segregation has fallen slightly in the city of Boston, but school segregation is trending sharply in the opposite direction. Dissimilarity indexes for Boston (**Table 1**) show slight declines in Black–White residential segregation (0.71 to 0.69), although it remains extremely high. Asian–White segregation also fell (0.41 to 0.37), while the Hispanic–White index (0.53) remained stable.

Table 1: School and Residential Dissimilarity Index Scores, 2000 and 2020

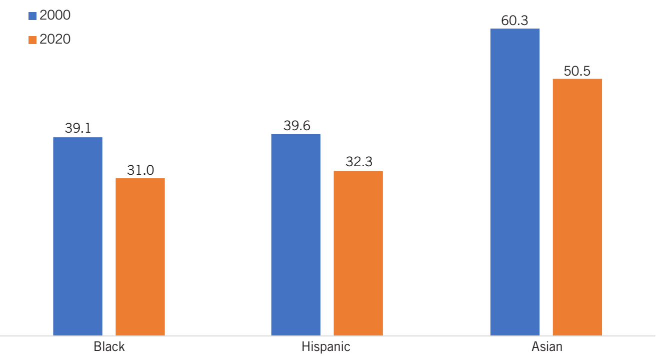
Dissimilarity Index	School Segregation			Residential Segregation		
	MA	Boston	Gateway Cities	MA	Boston	Gateway Cities
Black–White						
2000	0.67	0.49	0.50	0.64	0.71	0.49
2020	0.63	0.61	0.50	0.57	0.69	0.45
Hispanic–White						
2000	0.69	0.45	0.51	0.61	0.53	0.55
2020	0.61	0.54	0.49	0.54	0.53	0.49
Asian–White						
2000	0.55	0.40	0.52	0.50	0.41	0.50
2020	0.53	0.47	0.56	0.48	0.37	0.52

Source: Authors' analysis of data from Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education and US Census Bureau

Despite somewhat less segregation at the residential level in Boston, school segregation increased significantly in the city for all races and ethnicities. Over the past two decades, the share of Black and Hispanic students attending intensely segregated schools rose from 60 percent to 72 percent and from 52 percent to 62 percent, respectively.

This increasing level of concentration for students of color was not driven by fewer White students; in contrast to the rest of the state, the share of White students in Boston remained stable, at around 15 percent of enrollment over the past two decades. White students simply became more segregated from students of color. This is evident in DI scores for school segregation, which rose considerably between 2000 and 2020 for Asian (0.40 to 0.47), Black (0.49 to 0.61), and Hispanic (0.45 to 0.54) students.

Figure 7: Average Exposure to White Students by Race/Ethnicity



Source: Authors' analysis of data from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education

Boston's significant increase in school segregation runs counter to other major cities that have experienced strong gentrification pressures. In both New York City and Washington, DC, recent studies show an influx of White residents has led to more diverse school enrollment, particularly in traditional public schools.[18] As noted in a recent analysis from Boston Indicators, roughly half of middle- to upper-income children living in the city of Boston are leaving when they reach school age.[19]

While both school and residential segregation declined in Greater Boston, segregation levels in the region remain very high, and intensely segregated schools are beginning to appear outside of the city. Grouping schools located in the 79 municipalities that comprise the Boston metro area as if they represented one district, Dissimilarity Indexes for the region have fallen considerably since 2000 (**Table 2**). The Black–White school score declined from an exceedingly high 0.72 in 2000 to 0.64; the Hispanic–White score's movement was nearly identical (0.73 to 0.64). Residential scores showed similarly large declines. The Black–White index went from 0.68 to 0.59, and the Hispanic–White score declined from 0.59 to 0.51, moving into the moderate range of the index.

Still, the number of intensely segregated non-White schools in Greater Boston rose from 65 to 92. Boston accounted for about half of this growth. In 2000, the region had no intensely segregated non-White schools outside of the city of Boston. However, these schools are now appearing outside of the city, including two in Cambridge, 10 in Chelsea, and one each in Randolph and Waltham.

Table 2: Regional School and Residential Dissimilarity Index Scores, 2000 and 2020

Dissimilarity Index	School Segregation				Residential Segregation			
	Black–White		Hispanic–White		Black–White		Hispanic–White	
	2000	2020	2000	2020	2000	2020	2000	2020
Boston–Cambridge–Newton, MA	0.72	0.64	0.73	0.64	0.68	0.59	0.59	0.51
Brockton–Bridgewater Town–Easton, MA	0.47	0.70	0.48	0.59	0.53	0.60	0.51	0.52
Haverhill-Newburyport–Amesbury, MA–NH	0.42	0.47	0.63	0.53	0.42	0.46	0.57	0.54
Lawrence–Methuen–North Andover, MA-NH	0.55	0.35	0.75	0.73	0.45	0.33	0.67	0.66
Leominster–Gardner, MA	0.34	0.47	0.41	0.47	0.36	0.40	0.44	0.40
Lowell-Billerica–Chelmsford, MA–NH	0.56	0.45	0.69	0.60	0.48	0.40	0.60	0.51
Lynn–Salem–Marblehead, MA	0.44	0.53	0.43	0.60	0.53	0.52	0.53	0.53
New Bedford, MA	0.43	0.45	0.43	0.48	0.47	0.44	0.53	0.50
Pittsfield, MA	0.47	0.47	0.34	0.32	0.46	0.46	0.31	0.30
Springfield, MA–CT	0.75	0.72	0.73	0.68	0.67	0.61	0.63	0.59
Worcester, MA–CT	0.60	0.66	0.64	0.56	0.56	0.55	0.59	0.50
Gateway Region Avg.	0.50	0.53	0.55	0.56	0.49	0.48	0.54	0.51

Note: Multistate metro areas include only the Massachusetts portion

Source: Authors' analysis of data from Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education and US Census Bureau

Exposure to White students is declining in Gateway Cities as the White population in these communities shrinks, but both residential and school segregation are stable or falling. In contrast to Boston, White students declined from 57 percent to 31 percent of enrollment in Gateway City public schools between 2000 and 2020. This large drop led to significant increases in exposure to racial and ethnic isolation for students of color. Over the past two decades, the share of Black Gateway City students attending intensely segregated schools rose from 3 percent to 19 percent. More than one out of three Hispanic students living in Gateway Cities attend intensely segregated schools, triple the share as compared to 2000. Black and Hispanic Gateway City students now attend schools where just under one-quarter of students are White, on average. This is down from 45 percent and 38 percent White in 2000 for Black and Hispanic students, respectively.

While these trends are concerning, DI scores suggest they cannot be tied to increasing imbalances either residentially or across schools. On average, both the school and the residential indexes fall at the low end of the range, and they declined slightly over the past two decades.

With some exceptions, school and residential segregation is generally holding steady at moderately high levels in Gateway City regions. On average, school segregation ticked up ever so slightly in Gateway City regions while residential segregation fell a bit; the various Dissimilarity Indexes range from 0.48 to 0.56 in 2020.

However, patterns in a handful of regions do stand out. In the Brockton area, the Black–White school score jumped from 0.47 to 0.70, while the residential measure increased more modestly, from 0.53 to 0.60. The indexes decline slightly in the Springfield metro area, but they remain extremely elevated, with the Black–White school DI at 0.72 and the Hispanic–White score at 0.68. Greater Worcester's Black–White school score increased from 0.60 to 0.66, while the residential score remained steady. In contrast, the region's Hispanic–White scores fell (0.64 to 0.56 for schools, 0.59 to 0.50 for residential).

Gateway City regions still contain no intensely segregated non-White schools outside of the core cities.

Economic Segregation

Two patterns emerge from an examination of the interaction between racial and ethnic segregation and economic segregation:

While more than one-third of Massachusetts schools can now be classified as racially and ethnic diverse, just 8 percent of schools are both diverse and economically integrated. The number of schools that can be described as racially and ethnically diverse has doubled in the last two decades, to more than 650 schools. Over one-third of Massachusetts schools now have a diverse population, according to the 70-25 standard (no group represents more than 70 percent of enrollment, and White students make up at least 25 percent).

However, if we also consider economic integration, Massachusetts has only 156 schools (8 percent) that meet the racial and ethnic standard for diversity as well as our economic measure (between 20 percent and 40 percent of students are low-income). This figure is up from 73, or 4 percent of schools, in 2000.

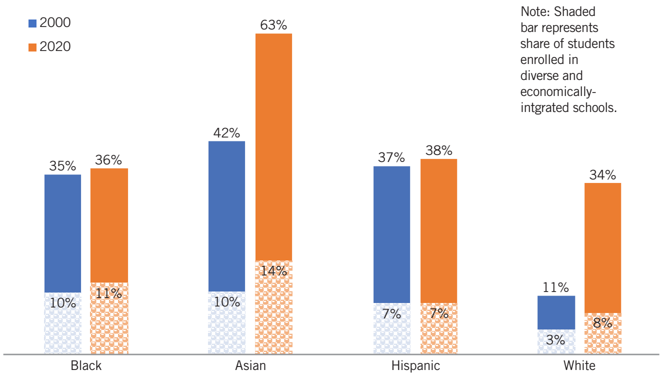
The share of White students in diverse schools tripled to 34 percent, and the share of Asian students in diverse schools jumped by more than 50 percent to two-thirds (**Figure 8**). In comparison, just over one-third of Black and Hispanic students attend diverse schools, which is roughly the same fraction as in 2000 for these groups. (Black and Hispanic students have not seen enrollment gains in diverse schools because they attended many of the diverse schools that existed in 2000 and later became segregated; so, on net, their numbers in diverse schools did not change.)

If we incorporate economic integration into the discussion again, the relative changes by race and ethnicity appear somewhat similar. White and Asian students see the largest gains. However, no racial or ethnic group has a particularly sizeable share of students enrolled in schools that are both diverse and economically integrated.

Examining the distribution of diverse schools geographically, we see strikingly little change in the share located in Boston and the Gateway Cities since 2000. About half of all schools in Gateway Cities continue to be classified as diverse. However, in Boston, fewer than one in five schools meet the criteria (**Figure 9**). Despite its racial and ethnic diversity and an assignment system that facilitates enrollment across neighborhood boundaries, Boston is home to far fewer diverse schools than the state average.

A closer look at the locations of schools that are both diverse and economically integrated shows how they cluster in a handful of communities. Cambridge and Quincy tie for the most, with 11 each, followed by Attleboro and Framingham at seven each, and Braintree and Stoughton with six each. Five of the schools in Amherst meet the definition, as do many schools on Cape Cod. In Boston, there are eight diverse and economically integrated schools, including Boston Latin Academy, Boston Collegiate Charter, and six elementary schools. Only nine of the 26 Gateway Cities have one or more of these fully integrated schools. Notably, those without a single one include Brockton, Fall River, Lawrence, Lowell, Lynn, and New Bedford. In Springfield, where the average school poverty rate is 82 percent, none of the 70 schools meet the criteria.

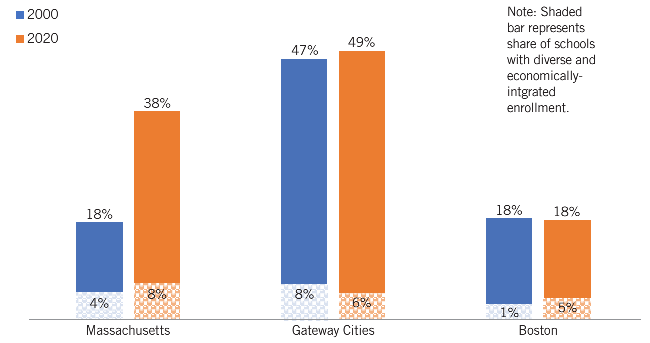
Figure 8: Enrollment in Fully Integrated Schools by Race and Ethnicity



Note: Shaded bar represents share of students enrolled in diverse and economically-intgrated schools.

Source: Authors' analysis of data from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education

Figure 9: Fully Integrated Schools as a Share of All Schools in Massachusetts, Gateway Cities, and Boston



Note: Shaded bar represents share of schools with diverse and economically-intgrated enrollment.

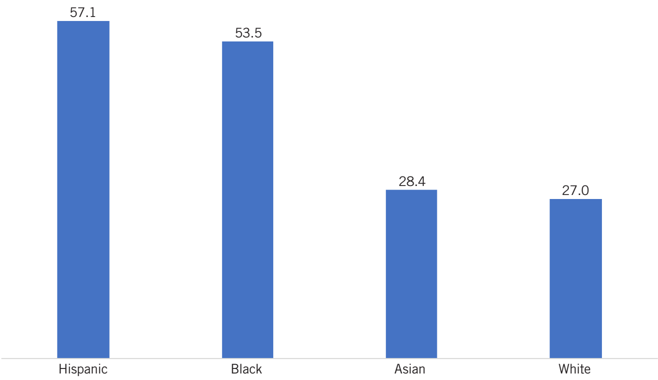
Source: Authors' analysis of data from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education

Black and Hispanic students remain concentrated in schools with high levels of poverty. Even when they attend racially and ethnically diverse schools, students of color are disproportionately exposed to poverty. On average, Black and Hispanic students in Massachusetts attend schools where more than half of students are low-income (**Figure 10**). Asian and White students are exposed to poverty at about half of this rate. Exposure to school poverty did increase significantly for White students between 2000 and 2020, from 17 percent low-income students, on average, to 27 percent. In contrast, the average poverty rate in schools attended by Asian students fell from 36 percent in 2000 to 28 percent in 2020.

On average, nearly three-quarters of students in intensely segregated schools are low-income. For diverse schools, low-income students make up a similar share of enrollment (37 percent) as the state average across all schools. However, the concentration of poverty varies considerably by their location. Diverse schools in Gateway Cities struggle with high concentrations of poverty. More than half (58 percent) of students are low-income in the average diverse Gateway City school. In Boston, 43 percent of students at diverse schools are low-income. Diverse schools with poverty rates below 30 percent enroll just 14 percent and 23 percent of Hispanic and Black students attending diverse schools, respectively. In comparison, 42 percent of White students and 65 percent of Asian students enrolled in diverse schools learn in these relatively low poverty environments.

As we turn now to the research on school integration, we will see how this issue of disparate racial and ethnic exposure to poverty, what experts term "double segregation," is the fundamental problem we must reckon with in order to close wide and persistent achievement gaps.[20]

Figure 10: Average Exposure to Low-Income Students by Race and Ethnicity



Source: Authors' analysis of data from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education

How Is School Choice Impacting Segregation in Massachusetts?

Several studies indicate that growth in charter schools has led to increases in segregation in some metropolitan areas.[21] Enrollment trends suggest growth in charters over the past two decades may have furthered racial and ethnic segregation in Massachusetts. In 2000, the state had only 12 charter schools, just three of which were intensely segregated. In 2020, the state had 78 charters, and nearly half (37) were intensely segregated. Together, the state's highly segregated charters account for more than one-third of Black students and nearly one in five Hispanic students attending intensely segregated schools.

In Boston, 79 percent of charters are intensely segregated, compared to 57 percent of non-charters. Over 80 percent of Black students in charters attend an intensely segregated school, compared to 70 percent in district schools; for Hispanic students, the difference is minimal (66 percent in charters versus 62 percent in district schools).

Given the size of Boston's population and the concentration of students of color in the city, how it approaches school choice in traditional district schools has even more significant ramifications for school integration in Massachusetts. A 2018 analysis by the Boston Area Research Initiative found that changes to a new school assignment system designed to reduce travel distances in 2014 may have contributed to increases in segregation at the city's elementary schools, but only minimally.[22]

Private school is another option for families that could influence school segregation patterns. Unfortunately, Massachusetts does not track private school enrollment by race and ethnicity. However, the share of students attending private schools has fallen, from 10 percent in 2000 to 7 percent in 2020. Declines in the share of students enrolled in private schools have been even sharper in Boston (18 percent to 11 percent) and the Gateway Cities (10 percent to 4 percent). However, without demographic data, it is difficult to say whether changes in the composition of private school students have impacted school segregation in Massachusetts.

The number of students participating in the state's inter-district choice program has grown considerably over the past two decades, from around 7,000 students in 2000 to over 17,000 in 2020. While limited data makes it difficult to determine how this has influenced integration patterns, these transfers represent less than 2 percent of total public school enrollment. Moreover, the increase in students taking advantage of school choice appears to be driven almost entirely by rural communities in Western Massachusetts with declining enrollment.

III. Gaining a Deeper Understanding of the Problem, the Opportunity, and the Challenges to Overcome

While interest in school segregation was largely dormant among policy leaders for the past two decades, social scientists kept their lens on the issue. In recent years, they have developed more powerful techniques to disentangle the impact of segregated schools from family background and neighborhood context. In this section, we distill takeaways from the latest research, describing the negative effects of segregation and contrasting them with the positive benefits of integration. We also explore the challenge in terms of the forces pulling students and families apart and what contemporary research suggests about the efficacy of potential strategies to bring them together.

The Problem With Segregation

A flood of new research shows we cannot close racial opportunity and wealth gaps without integration in public education. Here are the facts as we understand them today:

1. Segregation increases racial and ethnic inequality primarily by disproportionately exposing students of color to high-poverty schools. Researchers have long debated whether racial segregation harms student learning on its own. In the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the Supreme Court found separate can never be equal because legally separating students by race inflicts psychological damage on students from marginalized backgrounds. Now that segregation is no longer the result of laws constructed to subjugate, many believe that students in racially segregated schools will perform equally, so long as they have access to equal resources. This position is flawed because achieving equality is not just a question of resources.

Extreme racial income and wealth disparities in Massachusetts mean segregating schools by race produces large disparities in the socioeconomic composition of the schools attended by White students and students of color. Because the socioeconomic status (SES) of peers is a strong predictor of student success, segregated school systems produce large achievement gaps.[23] In fact, the socioeconomic makeup of students in a school has more impact on academic achievement than a student's own family background. According to the seminal study on this topic, the SES composition of a school is 1.75 times more important than a student's individual race/ethnicity or social class for predicting their educational outcomes.[24] If students of color and White students attended schools with equal resources and equal socioeconomic compositions, separate could be equal. But this is mathematically impossible with the wealth disparities in Massachusetts today. Closing racial achievement gaps will therefore require efforts that lead to racially integrated public schools.

2. High-poverty schools are more harmful to academic achievement than high-poverty neighborhoods. The latest cutting-edge research tells us that deconcentrating poverty in schools is even more important than reducing exposure to high-poverty neighborhoods. This is relatively new knowledge. Over the past few decades, social scientists built an impressive body of research that demonstrated the various ways in which growing up in a high-poverty neighborhood creates lifelong disadvantage. We cannot discount this problem. Exposure to unhealthy air and buildings, gun violence, noise, and a variety of other features of poor neighborhoods undermines health and positive youth development.[25] However, when researchers can disentangle the effects of schools from neighborhoods, they find school poverty is a strong predictor of achievement gaps, while the impact of neighborhood poverty, independent of schools, is muted.[26]

3. Compared to integration, providing greater funding to high-poverty schools is inefficient and less efficacious. A related line of research examining the impact of school funding on racial achievement gaps provides further support for pursuing policies that promote socioeconomic integration. To be sure, efforts to desegregate schools in the South led to major reductions in racial achievement gaps, primarily by reducing large funding disparities.[27] However, more recent efforts to equalize funding through state aid formulas like Chapter 70 have not closed racial and ethnic gaps because these equalizing formulas are not well targeted to schools serving students of color, and they have not provided adequate funds to address the unique needs of schools with high concentrations of poverty.[28]

The Student Opportunity Act attempts to address this problem by providing substantially more state aid to high-poverty schools. While these extraordinary resources can compensate for the effects of concentrated poverty, evidence from Montgomery County, Maryland, suggests socioeconomic integration has greater efficacy.[29] This suggests investments to increase integration will be far more cost-effective over the long term.

> "If it were possible to create equal educational opportunity under conditions of segregation and economic inequality, some community—among the thousands of districts in the country—would have done so. None have. Separate is still unequal. If we are serious about reducing racial inequality in educational opportunity, then, we must address racial segregation among schools. This we do know how to do, or at least we once did."
>
> — Sean Reardon

The Benefits of Integration

Socioeconomic integration will lead to moderate increases in school poverty in districts that currently have low concentrations of poor students. While this could reduce the modest academic advantages affluent students may gain through their separation, this should be offset by the very real cognitive and non-cognitive benefits that all students receive from learning in more diverse settings.[30] Below, we present the evidence on the benefits of integration for both individual students and the larger community:

1. Students who attend integrated schools are less prone to racial bias and stereotypes. One of the core arguments in the *Brown* case was that separating people by race and ethnicity increases suspicion, distrust, and hostility between groups. While science has dramatically enhanced our understanding of racial bias in the subsequent decades, studies continue to demonstrate that this truth still holds.

White children who attend diverse schools are more likely to choose children from other ethnic groups as friends. These cross-race friendships lead to more positive attitudes toward racial and ethnic minorities in adulthood.[31] Students of all races who attend integrated schools are also more likely to live and work in integrated environments throughout their lives.[32]

Because racial bias develops in early childhood, exposure to diverse learning environments at a young age is particularly helpful.[33] However, experience later in life can be impactful as well.[34] The manner of interracial contact is important to reducing racial bias. The most progress is possible in situations where individuals have equal status and common goals, and their intergroup contact is valued and encouraged. But even if the contact occurs in less-than-ideal situations, reductions in racial bias are still likely.[35]

2. Diverse school experiences enhance critical thinking, civic engagement, and leadership. Developmental psychology shows that cognitive growth is generated by placing individuals in new situations that require them to depart from previous experience and employ more complex forms of thought. Simply assigning students to classrooms where they can interact with peers from a different race or ethnicity may not be sufficient to produce meaningful gains. Considerable growth in these skills occurs with frequent interaction, especially informal interactions outside of the classroom. While all students benefit from integration, evidence suggests White students may achieve the largest cognitive gains.[36]

The connection between exposure to diversity and civic engagement may be even stronger than the impact of diversity on cognitive growth. Increased exposure to diversity increases interest in politics, time spent volunteering, and participation in efforts to further social justice.[37] These findings are mostly drawn from studies of college students. While evidence suggests secondary schools may struggle to produce the same benefits (because teachers there are less likely to discuss political issues and often hesitate to bring controversial topics to the fore), this could likely be overcome in schools with a focus on inclusion.[38]

Students exposed to diverse learning environments should develop empathy and self-confidence in the face of difference that translate to more effective leadership. While research in this area is more limited, a handful of studies find that exposure to students of other races leads to quantifiable increases in leadership skills, particularly for those with more racially homogeneous friendship circles.[39]

Recognizing these intrinsic benefits, colleges and universities have long fought for the legal right to factor diversity in admissions, and major business groups and the military have come before the courts to provide influential support.[40] In contrast, we have made relatively little effort to create inclusive K-12 learning environments, depriving students of increasingly important educational experiences.

3. School integration has the power to increase economic mobility and reduce housing prices. Rising inequality and high housing costs are perennial challenges for Massachusetts. A growing body of evidence demonstrates that these challenges are interrelated. Rising inequality creates stark divides that lead to greater physical separation between households.[41] The likelihood that children from low-income families will experience upward economic mobility is strongly associated with the degree of economic segregation in a region, which means there is a negative feedback loop: Rising inequality leads to greater economic segregation, which reduces economic mobility, furthering income inequality and producing additional economic segregation.[42]

Researchers have shown that the movement of families with school-age children attempting to sort into affluent communities accounts for all of the increase in economic segregation since the 1990s.[43] This is because inequality leads to greater disparities between schools and creates a stronger imperative to gain educational advantage. Parents increase housing expenditures and stretch financially to pay for homes in school districts that they perceive as high-quality.[44] As inequality rises in a metropolitan area, this leads to pronounced increases in housing costs.[45]

Creating more high-quality, economically integrated learning environments could increase economic mobility among low-income families. At the same time, instead of rationing school quality through exclusion, schools that achieve the benefits of diversity will draw middle-class parents with a choice, reducing demand for housing in select communities and lessening a dimension of the state's housing affordability crisis that is critical to long-term economic competitiveness.

> "There have been no more consistent findings of educational research than the paramount importance of a school's socioeconomic makeup on academic achievement and that low-income children learn best when surrounded by middle-class classmates ...There also have been no findings of educational research more consistently—I would say even deliberately—ignored by many educators and most politicians."[46]
>
> — David Rusk

The Challenges and Opportunities

With a firm grasp of the arguments in favor of pursuing economic integration, we turn now to lessons from the latest research describing the challenges and opportunities:

1. Even when White parents want integration, racial bias can powerfully distort their perception of school quality. While flawed measures of school performance have only reinforced this tendency, providing parents with better information can help. As noted in the introduction, surveys consistently find that parents of all racial, economic, and political leanings prefer that their children attend integrated schools. However, this sentiment is inconsistent with actual enrollment patterns. In part, this may occur because White families select schools based on other qualities that they are unable to find in combination with integration. Diverse schools are generally located in urban neighborhoods, and far too often, they lack outdoor space and high-quality facilities.[47]

However, experimental research suggests White families may opt for schools with primarily White student enrollment even when they have access to diverse schools that are objectively better.[48] Moreover, White families with children who move tend to select neighborhoods where schools have mostly White enrollment, and this pattern holds after controlling for school quality and other observable factors, including the type of housing available and neighborhood amenities.[49] Perhaps most concerning, White residents of neighborhoods surrounding predominantly White schools report that school quality has declined when schools experience a modest increase in Black enrollment, even when test scores, behavioral issues, and poverty levels remain constant.[50]

The enrollment patterns of White parents likely reflect deeply ingrained bias. Unfortunately, these biases have been reinforced by flawed approaches to measuring and communicating school quality. For nearly two decades, parents have been presented with results from standardized tests that offer a misleading view of school performance. Websites such as greatschools and zillow have communicated this information to parents making residential choices. Evidence suggests that these metrics have increased racial and economic segregation by pushing White and high-income families toward districts with the best test scores.[51]

While the performance of a child's peers on standardized tests is without a doubt an important component of educational quality, parents will certainly want to know whether the school contributes to student success or whether high scores are merely a reflection of its socioeconomic makeup. Growth measures that look at the progress of individual students over time in different schools can offer a better gauge of school performance. Evidence suggests presenting these growth measures may lead parents to choose integrated schools.[52] Greatschools and other websites have now incorporated them into their ratings. However, they are still providing a very imperfect measure of school quality, with substantial bias against diverse schools.[53] By penalizing schools that serve lower-performing students, these websites give schools and communities strong incentives to screen out groups of students who tend to score lower on standardized tests.[54]

This research suggests efforts to increase socioeconomic integration will require both better methods of informing parents about multiple dimensions of school quality as well as accountability systems that create strong incentives to serve a socioeconomically diverse population.

2. Integrated schools may struggle to create equitable learning environments. A growing number of "diverse by design" schools may provide new strategies to overcome these challenges. An extensive body of qualitative research explores school climate in urban public schools that have experienced an influx of White, middle-class parents. These studies suggest school leaders have great difficulty creating strong and inclusive school climates in this context.[55]

In large part, this may be due to the manner in which these parents attempt to use their social and economic capital to benefit the school. As more White, middle-class parents enroll their children in a local public elementary school, the PTA often becomes disproportionately led by these new members of the community. This creates significant tension for both parents and school leaders. In addition, the educators in these schools are often a highly diverse team, and they must work through their own challenges. White staff frequently hail from other communities and suburban educational backgrounds, while staff of color often come from the community and its school system. These educators of color must struggle with the weight of racism, the changes their neighborhoods are going through, and the difficult personal experiences many of them encountered as students in the district.[56]

As noted previously, many of the benefits of integration derive from informal interaction between students of different backgrounds. However, the extreme levels of inequality common in urban public schools today limit these interactions. The frequently cited example is one set of students spending the weekend at their second homes, while another group struggles with housing and food insecurity. This stark divide makes it very difficult to facilitate relationships among parents and students outside of school.[57]

These themes have caught the attention of the media, most notably the *New York Times* podcast, *Nice White Parents*. As the Century Foundation's Michelle Burris and Stefan Lallinger have written, these schools are often cast in a pejorative manner that may lead many to believe that "integration is a doomed endeavor."[58] This body of research tends to concentrate on urban schools with extreme levels of inequality, and it draws heavily on qualitative methods. We could find just one quantitative analysis of urban schools that became more diverse, and it concluded that gentrification in New York City elementary schools has actually increased academic outcomes for all students.[59]

While additional research would be valuable, it is clear that school leaders lack training and support to address the difficult challenges integration presents. To address this gap, The Century Foundation (TCF) started the Bridges Collaborative, a new national initiative bringing together school districts, charter schools, and housing organizations that are committed to advancing school and neighborhood diversity and integration in their own communities. A key focus of these organizations is creating inclusive cultures. According to TCF, nearly 200 districts and charter schools nationwide are actively working to integrate.[60] At present, much of this energy is found in the charter sector. Charter leaders have formed the Diverse Charter Schools Coalition (DCSC), which helps connect members with resources to increase integration and build inclusive school climates.[61]

3. While housing mobility policies designed to increase integration in suburban communities with strong school systems have struggled, several regions have demonstrated that more effective models are possible. Offering vouchers to help families afford rents in wealthier communities is one of the main strategies housing leaders have pursued to increase socioeconomic integration. About 85,000 households in Massachusetts receive rental assistance through the federal Housing Choice Voucher Program (Section 8), and another 6,000 are served by the state's mobile Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP).[62] Because these rental subsidies are not tied to a specific property, they can help reduce racial and economic residential segregation. However, this has not been the case, especially for Black and Hispanic recipients. Households with vouchers are typically more concentrated in poor neighborhoods than other low-income renters due to a host of barriers, including discrimination against voucher-holders by rental agents and landlords; programmatic time constraints to lease a unit and high search costs; lack of transportation; desire to maintain proximity to social ties; and limited access to information.[63]

In the mid-1990s, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) launched the large-scale Moving to Opportunity (MTO) experiment to demonstrate the efficacy of helping voucher-holders move to lower-poverty neighborhoods. Even with counseling and other housing search supports, few families in the MTO study made long-term moves to integrated, low-poverty neighborhoods.[64] However, the study did find that children who were able to relocate to better neighborhoods and remain in them throughout adolescence were significantly more likely to attend lower poverty K-12 schools and go on to college, and they had substantially higher income in their mid-twenties.[65]

Responding to a court desegregation order in the early 2000s, the Baltimore City Housing Authority drew upon these lessons to implement the largest assisted housing mobility intervention in the country.[66] Combining housing vouchers with supportive counseling and policy supports, the Baltimore Housing Mobility Program (BHMP) helped low-income Black families move to more integrated and affluent neighborhoods in higher-performing school districts. Most families stayed in these neighborhoods; even when they made second moves, they still resided in areas with lower poverty rates and better schools.[67]

Seattle recently replicated Baltimore's model with voucher recipients in King County and evaluated the impact with a randomized controlled trial. The control group received customized search assistance and short-term financial assistance. More than half of recipients (53 percent) who received this intervention moved to high-upward-mobility areas, compared to just 15 percent of those in the control group. The study offers further evidence that housing vouchers can allow low-income minority families to make stable moves to school districts with significantly lower concentrations of poverty when they have appropriate support.[68]

4. Efforts to link school improvement and neighborhood improvement also provide valuable lessons. An equitable integration strategy requires balance—policy cannot solely draw families out of urban neighborhoods. This would lead to higher concentrations of poverty for those left behind, disinvestment, and loss of wealth for people of color who own homes in these communities. Moreover, to the extent that families desire walkable urban neighborhoods with diverse populations, school should not be the limiting factor. We want to facilitate infill development in these areas to limit sprawling suburban growth that increases traffic congestion and environmental degradation. In recent years, cities have taken two very different approaches to link neighborhood revitalization to schools.

The first is simply expanding school choice options. This approach can provide a powerful force for reinvestment. One recent study found expanded school choice doubles the probability that communities of color will experience an influx of college-educated White households.[69] Another found large price increases in Black neighborhoods of Chicago where residents were given greater access to magnet schools.[70] Studies consistently find that cities that have greater school choice options have lower residential segregation. However, they also have significantly higher levels of racial, ethnic, and economic segregation in their schools, which is the exact opposite of what one would hope to see from a school integration perspective.[71]

School districts can attempt to circumvent this tendency through a "controlled choice system" that factors parent choice and socioeconomic balance when making assignments. In 1981, Cambridge was the first city in the nation to adopt this approach, and it has largely been successful.[72] However, many other cities that tried controlled choice (often under court order or the threat of legal action) experienced White flight.[73] In dense cities where there is broad support for integration and a relatively large portfolio of schools, controlled choice could prove effective. However, only a handful of communities meet these conditions.

The alternative is to retain neighborhood schools and make significant investments in them as part of a larger strategic neighborhood revitalization initiative. Giving families a guaranteed place in a desirable school can increase demand for housing and stimulate investment in the neighborhood. There is very little research evaluating this school-centered neighborhood revitalization strategy. The few published studies are from the early 2000s and examine HUD's HOPE VI program. Throughout the 1990s, HOPE VI provided a large infusion of federal funding to convert the nation's most distressed public housing projects into mixed-income housing developments. While it did not have an explicit focus on integrating schools, in a few instances, housing authorities successfully partnered to create new high-performing schools in these redevelopments. But these projects were complex, costly, and controversial, and Congress eliminated funding for HOPE VI in the 2000s.[74]

There have also been a few notable efforts to carry out school-centered neighborhood revitalization through state and local partnership. For instance, the state of Maryland authorized $1.1 billion in capital funding to renovate 28 Baltimore City schools with a focus on neighborhood revitalization.[75] With limited research, it is difficult to determine the efficacy of this strategy. However, the qualitative studies consistently suggest that these efforts face great difficulty in bridging large divides between public school districts and housing, planning, and community development agencies.[76] Often, they struggle to define targeted goals, and their multifaceted approach means their impact in any one area is difficult to evaluate and likely relatively muted.[77]

As we turn now to strategy, this particular theme from our distillation of the research will be important to bear in mind. Achieving integration will require broad-based support for the goal and leadership at all levels and sectors to carry out an effective policy response.

> "The gulf between the two fields [schools/community development] only widened with the mounting alarm over physical disintegration in the inner cities throughout the 1960s and '70s. The specter of dilapidated neighborhoods and derelict buildings drew more and more federal attention toward construction and renovation, housing assistance and financing, and urban infrastructure. Educators, meanwhile, were focusing ever more narrowly on what happened inside schools, classrooms, and school systems, with little reference to other work underway in the streets beyond. To achieve social equity, courts increasingly mandated busing of children away from their neighborhoods, further deepening the divorce between where children lived and where they learned. It was as if the future of neighborhoods had somehow become all but unrelated to the future of the children living in them."[78]
>
> — Tony Proscio

IV. Choosing Integration: Principles and Policy Framework

With a firm understanding of why Massachusetts should muster an intentional effort to increase integration, and of the challenges and opportunities we face creating more integrated learning environments for families who desire them, we turn now to a discussion of principles and policy. The ideas we present below are not intended to be exhaustive or limiting in any way. We simply aim to stimulate dialogue around the posture we must take, should we choose to pursue integration, and to show how much progress is possible through coordinated and targeted initiative.

First Principles to Guide School Integration Efforts

Integration is a complex challenge, fraught with both a difficult history and the sensitivity that families will understandably feel any time changes are discussed that could impact their children. For these reasons, it is imperative to begin not with policy, but rather principles. Leaders working to draw attention to integration must help the public understand what we mean by integration, how we will act to further it, and what we will take great precautions to avoid. Drawing from the research presented in this report, we attempt to articulate four first principles for consideration:

1. Racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse learning environments are beneficial to all students; state policy should seek to create more integrated schools so that every family who desires these learning opportunities can obtain them. The markets for housing and quality schools currently constrain the options available to families seeking out integrated learning environments for their children. Addressing this market failure requires cross-sector public policy intervention.

2. High-poverty schools are harmful to their students; state policy should seek to reduce the number of schools in Massachusetts with concentrated poverty. We must work to reverse trends leading to the increasing concentration of poverty. As we do so, we must ensure that high-poverty schools have more than adequate resources to meet the needs of their students.

3. All efforts to pursue integration must be grounded in a commitment to equity. First and foremost, school integration must be undertaken with an eye toward benefiting students and families who have suffered injuries from racism and marginalization.

4. Efforts to increase integration must respond to the unique needs and aspirations of each community. A one-size-fits-all model will not work. For instance, some communities will want to stimulate neighborhood investment, leading to increases in socioeconomic diversity, while others may prefer access to an integrated school in another neighborhood. Our policies must be sensitive to these wishes and meet each community where they are.

Policy Framework

With leadership and decisive action across a range of areas, there is a lot Massachusetts can do to capitalize on the clear preference for integration that the majority of parents express. Below, we outline a comprehensive policy framework that includes data and information, education, housing, and transportation.

1. Data and Information

- **Publish integration data.** At present, the state does not track or report measures of segregation. While these can be calculated from publicly available data as we have done here, the state does not make available racial, ethnic, and income data for school choice students. Massachusetts also does not provide classroom-level metrics to monitor segregation within schools. Particularly concerning is the state's lack of progress providing school climate data at the school level by race and ethnicity; Massachusetts is years behind many states in generating this vital information for parents and the general public. Finally, the state needs a reliable measure to observe changes in school poverty over time. All of these data elements will be necessary to increase public awareness of the status of various dimensions of segregation across schools and communities and to track efforts to increase integration over time.

- **Create an independent commission on unbiased performance metrics and communicating school quality.** There is good reason to believe that the state's student growth metrics do not provide a reliable indication of value added at the school level and, as such, tend to suggest that inclusive schools underperform. This creates perverse incentives for educators and may serve to reinforce parent bias. When it comes to recognizing and addressing this problem, the state has a disappointing track record. For these reasons, we should convene an independent panel of experts to review the metrics in use and suggest improvements. The panel could also offer recommendations as to how the state responsibly provides this information to both families and third parties, with an eye toward preventing the harm caused by improper communication of school quality information.

- **Develop an inclusive school district designation.** Massachusetts should develop a process for recognizing districts that have comprehensive pro-integration policies. This should include a review of curricula; tracking policies and practices; efforts to hire diverse educators; parent engagement models; and school governance structures.

  To avoid politicization, this process could be carried out by a third-party accreditation team but recognized by the state for the purpose of allocating education and housing resources directed toward school integration.

  Such a designation could be especially helpful to business groups working to attract professionals of color to Massachusetts. The state's reputation with school integration leaves many hesitant to relocate here. With a well-regarded designation process, businesses could show prospective employees that not only does Massachusetts have some of the best public schools in the nation, according to traditional metrics, but many schools offer exceptionally strong and inclusive climates.

2. Education

- **Form strong learning communities to help diverse schools achieve the promise of integration.** From building classrooms that allow students to express their identities, to hiring diverse and culturally competent teaching staff and helping teachers overcome biases and beliefs and deliver a culturally relevant curriculum, creating an effective multicultural school requires expertise and intentional effort. This work is critical both to engaging parents and families and to ensuring that all students feel valued and develop a positive ethnic identity. Study after study finds that a climate where students can feel "belonging" in school is critical to educational commitment and academic performance.[79]

  Many schools are developing components of this practice, but even the most advanced will report that they have considerable room for improvement. The state can demonstrate its commitment to this important work by resourcing formal efforts to help educators come together and learn from one another.

  At the same time, we must start examining inclusive, high-performing schools to learn more about what works. Special consideration should be placed on autonomy and governance. While autonomy is generally central to organizational effectiveness, observers suggest it is particularly important to empower leaders of integrated schools so that they can build an effective culture for their diverse constituents.

- **Align efforts to increase educator diversity with school integration efforts.** A diverse educator workforce is critical to building an effective integrated school. When distributing limited recruitment and retention resources, the state should provide priority consideration to schools that have demonstrated a strong commitment to inclusion.

- **Build 21st-century magnet schools.** Magnet schools offer special instruction not available elsewhere to attract a more diverse student body from throughout a school district or region. They have a decades-long track record for delivering voluntary integration. The Greater Hartford region has been particularly successful in utilizing magnet schools to reduce school segregation in recent years.[80] At a time when we require new 21st-century learning models and families are particularly keen on meeting the unique needs and interests of their children, these models hold particular promise.

  Massachusetts is already pursuing an ambitious effort to create early college high schools throughout the state. Typically, these programs take advantage of college campuses in urban areas to give high school students opportunities to take on more rigorous coursework and accelerate their progress toward a post-secondary degree. The model boosts college completion for low-income students, but the learning opportunities and cost savings appeal to middle-class families as well. Learning on college campuses, where instructors are accustomed to tackling culturally sensitive topics, makes it more likely that students will get full advantage of discussion with peers from different backgrounds.

  Career vocational and technical education (CVTE) is another high school model that can be offered with an aim toward increasing integration. Many of these schools are oversubscribed, and there is already considerable effort to increase their number throughout the state. Integration is particularly important to these schools, given the significant upgrades they require in equipment to keep up with changing technology. The more these schools serve all students, the more support they will have for investment to keep up with the latest trends. Inclusive, state-of-the-art CVTE schools can also play a vital role in ensuring that all students have access to STEM careers and the knowledge-intensive industries producing the greatest wealth today.

  Dual-language immersion and arts magnet schools provide other popular and proven models to increase integration and generate demonstrable educational gains for students of all backgrounds. In both instances, these school models are particularly well suited to ensuring that cross-cultural conversation occurs in a manner that positions us to realize the benefits of our diversity.

- **Help charters integrate enrollment.** Massachusetts can allow controlled choice methods in lottery assignment and authorize other changes to recruitment, enrollment, and assignment practices to help ensure that charter school enrollments reflect the racial, ethnic, and economic diversity of the regions where they are located.

- **Explore creative strategies to modernize the METCO program.** Without question, METCO benefits students. As the research presented above suggests, when a student moves from a high-poverty school to a low-poverty school, their academic achievement will increase. We have also seen that students will benefit from exposure to peers from other races, even if this occurs in less-than-ideal settings. However, we must weigh the benefits of the model against the significant costs as currently structured. The program may inadvertently reinforce racial bias and stereotypes by moving students from “bad” communities to “good” communities. And urban students who do not win spaces in suburban schools are left behind in even higher-need schools.

  It would be a major mistake to retreat from METCO when these shortcomings can be addressed. Building on the program’s long history, considerable goodwill, and a growing number of committed suburban communities, this is the moment to think anew about devising a METCO program that brings as many suburban students to the cities as city students to the suburbs. With remote learning technology, changing transportation paradigms (such as regional rail, described below), and magnet models, there are numerous opportunities to advance a long-held aspiration for a bi-directional METCO program. METCO is also well positioned to serve as a strong partner in the housing response. All applicants and participants should be thoroughly informed about housing mobility programs and connected to the appropriate contacts when they express interest.

3. Housing

- **Expand funding for housing vouchers and ensure that this resource increases access to low-poverty schools.** Now that we have solid evidence that housing vouchers can expand access to opportunity and deconcentrate poverty, there is a strong argument for increasing the number of vouchers available. However, we must ensure that housing authorities are working to provide greater access to low-poverty schools with these vouchers. This means crafting housing mobility programs. To operate effectively, these programs must provide customized assistance with searching as well as sustained support post-placement to ensure that the families are stable in their new community. Both the state and the city of Boston have designed programs with these features for their voucher holders. Other housing authorities must do the same.

  In addition, housing authorities should follow Boston and Cambridge's lead and utilize HUD's ZIP code–based Small Area Fair Market Rents (SAFMR). This practice allows for larger subsidies in more expensive communities and greatly expands the potential for low-income families to afford apartments in low-poverty school districts.[81]

  Along these same lines, the state should enable the use of SAFMR for the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program, and work to ensure that more housing authorities create mobility programs and provide appropriate search and counseling services to families with young children, even if this requires renewed effort to consolidate and regionalize these agencies to gain efficiencies.

  As we think about building inclusive school communities, strategies to help families utilize their rental voucher subsidy to purchase homes could also play a role. Federal regulations currently allow housing authorities to leverage vouchers in this manner when families meet guidelines that indicate they are prepared for homeownership. This model could help overcome racial wealth gaps and ensure that people of color in suburban communities with high homeownership rates are full members of the community in this important regard.

- **Combat housing discrimination by increasing enforcement of fair housing laws and passing legislation to prevent discrimination and affirmatively further fair housing.** A 2020 study by the Boston Foundation and Suffolk University Law School once again demonstrated that overt discriminatory practices are commonplace in Greater Boston's housing market. Even when they were not seeking to utilize housing vouchers, Black testers were able to arrange to view apartments less than half the time (48 percent), compared to 80 percent for White testers who were similar in every other way. Moreover, housing providers showed White market-rate testers twice as many apartments as those who were Black, and the White testers received better service across a range of measures.[82] These findings further underscore the need for stronger enforcement of existing housing laws, including far greater use of testing to identify discrimination and heavier consequences for realtors who engage in illegal practices.

  The legislature can also work to increase integration by passing two important bills. *An Act to Promote Fair Housing by Preventing Discrimination Against Affordable Housing* (H.1373 / S.867) makes communities who engage in discriminatory land use practices subject to civil action, including injunctions and relief for damages. *An Act to Affirmatively Further Fair Housing* (H.1441 / S.861) takes a proactive approach by requiring communities to take meaningful action to address housing disparities and reduce segregation. The legislation would create a state commission to catalog "meaningful actions" and require all municipalities to affirmatively further fair housing by pursuing some combination of them. Those that do not comply would be subject to civil action.

- **Back efforts to build mixed-income multifamily housing in suburban communities.** Building apartments and condos in suburban communities with low-poverty schools was exceedingly difficult in the past. However, the playing field has changed. With the new Housing Choice legislation, municipalities can approve numerous zoning changes with a simple majority vote of their governing bodies rather than the two-thirds support required previously. As of this year, cities and towns with MBTA commuter rail stations must have at least one significantly sized zone where multifamily housing is allowed by right.

With the gates opening, now is the time to get behind efforts to ensure that well-conceived projects move forward on land that will only be developed once in our lifetimes. All of these projects should be mixed-income and include units large enough to accommodate families with multiple children.

To make the most of the moment, strong civic coalitions must emerge. There are many strong models to emulate, most notably, the Great Neighborhoods Initiative. In the early 2010s, the Massachusetts Smart Growth Alliance spearheaded this effort to foster civic partnerships among public, private, and nonprofit stakeholders in six communities. In less than five years, these civic coalitions achieved solid progress with planning, zoning, infrastructure, and housing development.

There is now even more support for this form of organizing. Local advocacy groups have formed in dozens of communities, encouraged by regional nonprofits like CHAPA and Abundant Housing Massachusetts. Many of the volunteers are young adults hoping to start families but struggling to find housing that they can afford. Philanthropy can play an important role in fueling this grassroots organizing.

State government can also provide backing by using incentives for mixed-use development to stimulate more inclusive multifamily housing development. Suburban communities that want infrastructure grants or other forms of state financial assistance to build districts with shops, restaurants, and other amenities should be prepared to include mixed-income housing with family-sized units in these projects.

- **Align neighborhood stabilization and homeownership tools with strategic school improvement efforts.** Through the Commonwealth Builders Program and Neighborhood Hubs, MassHousing has two new resources available to strengthen Gateway City neighborhoods. These funds will help return blighted and abandoned homes to productive use, while giving more families opportunities to own their homes and have greater residential stability. In deploying these resources, MassHousing should provide strong preferences to projects in neighborhoods with compelling school improvement strategies.

  School-centered revitalization is another appropriate setting for limited use of housing vouchers for homeownership. Deployed strategically for this purpose, the state's Section 8 for homeownership program can help all members of the community benefit from increasing property values that result from successful school improvement efforts.

- **Support market-rate housing development in Gateway Cities.** Efforts to build dense suburban development must be mirrored by policy to promote reinvestment in urban areas to ensure balanced growth. Many Gateway Cities need resources to incentivize market-rate housing development. At present, residential markets in these cities are simply too weak to support new construction or rehabilitation. This means Gateway Cities have trouble drawing and retaining middle-income households because prospective residents struggle to find desirable housing to purchase or rent.

  For years, Gateway City housing professionals have sought support for the state's Housing Development Incentive Program (HDIP), which stimulates production of this "missing middle" housing stock. However, HDIP has a statutory cap of just $10 million annually. At this level, the tool cannot make a meaningful difference. Despite impressive results in the limited number of instances where HDIP has been deployed, Gateway City leaders have had difficulty winning more resources for the program because it is not well understood and lacks a broad base of support. In the context of long-term efforts to increase school integration, this tool has a vital role to play creating apartments to house teachers and other young professionals so they can maintain and/or deepen their roots in the community as they approach child rearing age.

4. Transportation

- **Utilize regional rail as a force for integration.** Commuter rail is already an important asset to METCO programs around the state. During the pandemic, the MBTA changed commuter rail schedules to provide greater frequency during non-peak hours. Maintaining this change and adding even more service consistent with a "regional rail" service model will make commuter rail an even more important resource for students looking to expand their school options. The Greater Boston region can leverage this remarkable asset by locating new schools (particularly new magnet schools) near commuter rail stations. As the state works with communities on the multifamily housing districts now required by law, we have an excellent opportunity to strategically consider the development of new schools in these transit-connected locations.
- **Implement low-income fares on commuter rail.** Along with high rents, studies show transportation is a major barrier keeping families from moving to low-poverty school districts. A low-income commuter rail fare pass would help reduce this obstacle.[83] In one of its final votes before its term ended in 2021, the MBTA Fiscal Control Board passed measures to help the agency develop a low-income fare program. Along with mixed-income housing development in suburban station areas and changes to the administration of state and federal housing vouchers, a low-income fare program can play an important role furthering school integration efforts in Massachusetts.
- **Explore car-based solutions.** Studies suggest cars are even more important to helping low-income families access suburban neighborhoods with high-quality schools.[84] Low-income families typically pay far more for cars due to inferior credit, which lead to significantly higher borrowing costs. This means they are generally limited to older, less reliable vehicles. The transition to electric vehicles (and potentially, the introduction of carbon taxes) could exacerbate these inequities. Researchers with expertise on the connections between vehicle access and economic mobility have called on regions to develop coalitions for equitable transportation access to explore strategies to help low-income households, particularly families with young children, overcome high barriers to car ownership.[85]

Where Do We Go From Here?

We have unveiled these ideas at a public forum intended to generate additional thinking on these topics. MassINC will curate this feedback and publish it on our website alongside the report. We encourage communities to utilize these materials to organize local conversation, and we will eagerly accept your invitations to participate.

As candidates for governor circle the state, sharing their ideas for the future of education in Massachusetts throughout 2022, we hope that you will raise these challenges and share your perspective on solutions. We also believe bills filed by Rep. Chynah Tyler (H. 709) and Sen. Brendan Crighton (S. 870), which would create a commission to examine these issues, presents a promising avenue to further our thinking and organize a robust response. Finally, Massachusetts can look to other states that have pursued integration more aggressively in recent years. There is much that we can learn from their efforts as we work to position our state for success.

Endnotes

[1] See: Jack Schneider and others. “School Integration in Massachusetts: Racial Diversity and School Accountability.” (Lowell, MA: Beyond Test Scores Project and Center for Education and Civil Rights, 2020).

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[10] For more on this early history, see: http://www.longroadtojustice.org/.

[11] Summary of events between 1965 and 2001 adapted from Jennifer Ayscue and others. “Losing Ground: School Segregation in Massachusetts.” (Los Angeles, CA: The Civil Rights Project, 2013).

[12] In 2000, Massachusetts did not record multiracial enrollment. However, the addition of this category likely had limited influence on overall trends. These students composed just 4 percent (37,000) of enrollment in 2020.

[13] Prior to 2014, the state categorized students eligible for the federal Free and Reduced Priced Lunch Program as low-income. This measure was dropped when students in high-poverty schools were automatically deemed eligible without verifying their income. The new economically disadvantaged category relies on receipt of public benefits that many low-income students do not qualify for due to immigration status. The 2014 American Community Survey reported 29 percent of children in Massachusetts live in families with income below 200 percent of poverty; this fell to 25 percent in the most recent survey figures from 2019.

[14] Authors’ estimates for Massachusetts children ages 5 to 18, using public use microsamples (2019 ACS and Census 2000). The share of Black students in households with income below 200 percent of poverty went from 54 percent in 2000 to 43 percent in 2020. Similarly, the share of Hispanic students below 200 percent of poverty went from 64 percent to 52 percent. The drop was smaller for Asian students (38 percent to 32 percent) and White students (20 percent to 19 percent).

[15] Schools were very well distributed across these groupings. With one exception, they all had over well over 100 schools. (Schools with greater than a 10 percentage point increase in Black enrollment had just 59).

[16] The classic paper is Thomas Schelling, “Dynamic models of segregation,” *Journal of Mathematical Sociology* 1.2 (1971). While Schelling’s neighborhood tipping point theory has been questioned, there is less controversy around tipping points in the school segregation literature. However, it should be noted that our analysis does not include controls for public safety, housing development, school finances, and other forces that might be correlated with the changing demographics of schools within a community. Moreover, this is change over two decades and these simple averages hide considerable variation across schools. Research suggests tipping points are significantly higher in communities with greater levels of racial tolerance. Whether the racial and ethnic makeup changes dramatically may also hinge on whether the school can effectively create an inclusive climate. The dynamics of enrollment change in different contexts in Massachusetts merit further investigation. See: David Card and others. “Tipping and the Dynamics of Segregation.” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 123.1 (2008).

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