Separate and Unequal: A Comparison of Student Outcomes in New York City’s Most and Least Diverse Schools

October 2017

Research Report Prepared for NYU’s Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools

David E. Kirkland
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Diversity in New York City schools appear to be regional, concentrated significantly in Queens.

All New York City students, with the exception of Asian students, are more likely to attend the City’s least diverse (i.e., “most segregated”) schools. Black students are more likely than other groups to attend such schools.

Based on 2015-2016 achievement data, third and eighth grade students attending New York City’s most diverse schools modestly outperformed students attending the City’s least diverse schools on state standardized tests in both English and math.

Students attending the most diverse high schools were slightly more likely to graduate on-time than their peers attending the least diverse schools; less economically advantaged students in particular seemed to benefit from attending the most diverse high schools.

Black third grade students performed better at the least diverse schools (in comparison to the most diverse schools), but this pattern was not sustained by eighth grade.

White, Asian, and more economically advantaged students performed substantially better and were much more likely to graduate high school in four years in the City’s least diverse schools than their peers.

Diversity along lines of race and socioeconomic status seemed to modestly close achievement gaps (i.e., opportunity gaps), while hyper-segregation seemed to greatly exacerbate them (i.e., opportunity barrier).
On June 6, 2017, the New York City Department of Education released a plan to stimulate diversity in its schools. The plan, titled *Equity and Excellence for All: Diversity in New York City Public Schools*, featured three focal goals: (1) to increase racial representativeness in NYC DOE schools; (2) to decrease economic stratification of NYC DOE schools; and (3) to increase the number of NYC DOE schools that are inclusive on the bases of language heritage, ability status, and housing status. While some believed a comprehensive diversity plan was needed to promote equity across the system, key questions about the NYC DOE plan and its goals have persisted. Perhaps chief among them is the question as to whether or not achieving the goals outlined in the plan, thus increasing “diversity” in New York City schools, will lead to better outcomes for the City’s most vulnerable students. That is, is there evidence that promoting diversity in New York City schools will lead to increased academic achievement, higher rates of attendance, and increased high school graduation rates for the City’s most vulnerable students?

This report compares student outcomes in New York City’s most and least diverse schools using 2015-2016 student achievement and graduation data. In doing so, the report presents an analysis of academic achievement for students in the least diverse (i.e., “segregated”) and most diverse (i.e., “non-segregated”) schools across New York City. Analysis of these data suggests that there is a modest benefit for vulnerable students attending the City’s most diverse schools when comparing ELA and math test scores and four-year high school graduation rates. While there seems to be evidence to support the benefits of school diversity, the data regarding the benefits of school diversity in New York City are complex. In many cases, the benefits associated with attending the City’s most diverse schools were not equally shared across student groups. In addition, White and Asian students seem to benefit incongruently from segregated schooling, which means that school segregation seems to give some students an unfair and seemingly unhealthy advantage—thus, sanctioning uneven opportunities for success. While there is some evidence in the data that homogenous schooling can yield benefits for Black students in their early years of schooling, there is also evidence that the benefits of homogenous schooling for Black students disappear completely as they age and progress through the system. Thus, evidence of the benefits of homogenous schooling for younger Black students (e.g., 3rd grade) is meager, as long-term student outcome patterns for vulnerable students (across race and socioeconomic status) point to the benefits of diversity and more precisely the problem of segregated schooling across the board.
WHAT ARE THE LEAST DIVERSE (“SEGREGATED”) AND MOST DIVERSE (“NON-SEGREGATED”) SCHOOLS IN NEW YORK CITY?

For the purposes of this report, we identified the most diverse schools in New York City as serving a student population that is highly racially representative, between 50 and 75 percent Black and Latinx.⁶ In addition, these schools were the least economically stratified in the City.⁷ We identified the least diverse schools in New York City as having a student population between 76 to 100 percent Black and Latinx or a student population more than 50 percent White and an ENI of less than 55.9 and greater than 75.9. Using these criteria,⁸ 109 New York City schools were identified as the City’s most diverse schools, while 839 schools met the criteria for the City’s least diverse schools. More than 800 additional schools did not meet the criteria for either category. Of the 839 schools identified as the City’s least diverse, 117 had a student population that was more than 50 percent White. These schools had very low ENIs compared to other schools: 25 percent, on average, compared to 69 percent for all other schools, indicating a relatively low level of need in predominately White schools.

⁶. We determined racial representativeness using a modified version of the Civil Rights racially representative index. Our metrics for measuring racial representativeness utilized the following range: minus 20 percent to plus 5 percent the city’s average of Black and Latino student population, which is ~70 percent. We rejected the full swing of plus or minus 20 percent, as plus 20 percent would include schools that are 90 percent Black and Latino, thus severely segregated.

⁷. Economically stratified schools have an Economic Needs Index (ENI) more than 10 points plus or minus the city average of 65.9 percent. Therefore, non-economically stratified schools have an ENI between 55.9 and 75.9.

⁸. Please note that we modified the criteria for “diversity” with measures that are more rigorous than those used in the NYC diversity plan. A New Century Study found the measures in the current plan to be fairly less rigorous than what is actually diversity is. This report uses more rigorous calculations, believing, for example, that a school that is 90% Black or Latinx is not, in fact, “diverse” though the racial representative measure used in the NYC DOE plan would qualify such as school as “diverse.”
WHERE ARE THE MOST AND LEAST DIVERSE SCHOOLS IN NEW YORK CITY?

Over 200 of the City’s least diverse schools were in Brooklyn, 68 were in Queens, 164 were in Manhattan, 332 in the Bronx, and 51 were in Staten Island. Queens had the highest number of the most diverse schools (55), followed by Brooklyn (24). This tracks to demographics of neighborhoods as well.

MAP 1
NEW YORK CITY’S MOST DIVERSE SCHOOLS
MAP 2
NEW YORK CITY’S LEAST DIVERSE SCHOOLS
WHO ATTENDS THE MOST AND LEAST DIVERSE SCHOOLS IN NEW YORK CITY?

In total, 96,444 students – or 9.1 percent of all students in New York City – attended the City’s most diverse schools in 2015-16, and 418,588 students – or 39.3 percent of all students – attended the City’s least diverse schools. About 550,000 students—or approximately 50 percent of all students—attended New York City schools that did not fall into either classification. This does not mean that these schools were agnostic in relation to characteristics of segregation. There is significant analysis elsewhere that suggests that many of these in-between schools could, in fact, be described as segregated.⁹ However, such schools are not included in this report because the purposes of this report is to analyze extremes (the most and least diverse schools) as a way to understand potential benefits and drawbacks of diversity by contrasting settings that are most clearly integrated or segregated. It should be noted as well that those on the “ends” could also be those who are most impacted by their geographies.

The demographic profile of the City’s most and least diverse schools is telling. Black students made up about one-third of the student population attending the City’s least diverse schools, and only 19.3 percent of students attending the City’s most diverse schools. Latinx students comprised roughly the same proportion of the student body in both the City’s least and most diverse schools (49 percent in the City’s least diverse schools and 44 percent in the City’s most diverse schools). Asian students were more likely to be concentrated in the City’s most diverse schools (21.9 percent) compared to their population in the City’s least diverse schools (4.2 percent). The data also indicate that students across all student groups (with the notable exception of Asian students) were more likely to attend the least diverse, or most segregated, schools in New York City (see Table 2).

⁹ Orfield, Frankenberg, Ee, & Kuscera, 2014.
### Table 1
**Racial Composition of Schools, 2015-16**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Number at the least diverse schools</th>
<th>Composition of the least diverse schools</th>
<th>Number at the most diverse schools</th>
<th>Composition of the most diverse schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>127,114</td>
<td>30.4%</td>
<td>18,626</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>205,518</td>
<td>49.1%</td>
<td>42,859</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>17,678</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>21,166</td>
<td>21.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>61,324</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td>11,474</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>6,954</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>2,319</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>418,588</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>96,444</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2
**Percent of Students, by Race, Attending Most and Least Diverse Schools**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Number at the least diverse schools</th>
<th>Composition of race</th>
<th>Number at the most diverse schools</th>
<th>Composition of race</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>11,474</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>6,954</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
<td>2,319</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>39.3%</td>
<td>96,444</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In 2015-16, attending the City’s most diverse schools was not associated with increased achievement on New York State’s 3rd grade standardized tests. By 8th grade, however, a modest effect emerged, with 40 percent of students attending the City’s most diverse schools scoring at or above proficient compared to 36 percent attending the City’s least diverse schools.¹⁰ Though the impacts overall were small, larger impacts emerged for different groups of students.¹¹ Gaps increase over time, which could also be driving the increase in grade eight.

Results on the State’s math assessment mirrored those in English—third graders scored about the same in the City’s most and least diverse schools, but eighth graders in the City’s most diverse schools outperformed their peers in the least diverse schools. Students, however, did not benefit equally from attending a diverse school. In both English and math, the largest disparities in scores occurred among White and Asian students, who performed significantly better in the City’s least diverse schools. Further, Black third graders fared somewhat better in the City’s least diverse schools, while less economically advantaged students seemed to benefit more from attending the City’s most diverse school than did their more economically advantaged peers.¹²

¹⁰. Analyses presented in this report represent the student aggregate for all students in a given category as opposed to school-level average proficiency rates.

¹¹. The minimum population size required to include results in this report was 100 students. All reported percentages and averages represent at least 100 students in that specific category (e.g., White third graders in less diverse schools).

¹². In this report, we move away from the binary (i.e., advantaged/disadvantaged) when referring to socioeconomic status. We instead use a continuum, more and less advantage. At one level, the continuum allows for a fluid and non-static descriptor. At another level, the revision allows us to move away from statements of judgment (i.e., disadvantaged) that are situated in deficit vocabularies. While we understand that the State of New York and other official data keeping entities use such terminology, it is our determination that the use of such language would be unhelpful in this report. Therefore, we have opted for language that explains socioeconomic status on a continuum that sets “advantage” (as opposed to “neutral”) as the change variable.
English. Analysis of 2016 New York State test scores suggest that, overall, students performed about the same in the City’s most and least diverse schools. However, clear differences emerged when analyzing ELA data by race. Black third graders performed slightly better in the City’s least diverse schools (33 percent compared to 30 percent), while Latinx students performed slightly better in the City’s most diverse schools. ELA scores among Asian and White students were significantly higher in the City’s least diverse schools; for White students, nearly 25 points differentiated students in the City’s most diverse schools compared to its least diverse schools (Figure 1).

In the City’s least diverse schools, the Black-White achievement gap in 3rd grade ELA proficiency was -36 percent; the Latinx-White achievement gap was -41 percent; and the Asian-White achievement gap was -3 percent. In the City’s most diverse schools, the Black-White achievement gap in third grade ELA proficiency was -15 percent; the Latinx-White achievement gap was -14 percent; and the Asian-White gap was +8 percent.

**FIGURE 1.**
**THIRD GRADE ELA PROFICIENCY RATES 2015-16**

In eighth grade, ELA proficiency in the City’s most diverse schools were slightly higher than proficiency in the City’s least diverse schools (40 percent versus 36 percent). This overall pattern was mirrored in the scores for Black and Latinx students, who each had higher rates of proficiency in more diverse schools. (Please note: The portrait of Black student achievement in ELA by eighth grade had completely reversed.) White and Asian students attending the City’s least diverse schools were much more likely to earn proficient scores (Figure 2).

In the City’s least diverse schools, the Black-White achievement gap in eighth grade ELA proficiency was -40 percent; the Latinx-White achievement gap was -42 percent; and the Asian-White achievement gap was +12 percent. In the City’s most diverse schools, the Black-White achievement gap in eighth grade ELA proficiency was -17 percent; the Latinx-White achievement gap was -17 percent; and the Asian-White gap was +5 percent. In both third and eighth grade, students achieved far greater racial equity in third grade ELA proficiency rates in the City’s most diverse schools.

**FIGURE 2**

**EIGHTH GRADE ELA PROFICIENCY RATES 2015-16**

Data source: New York State Department of Education 2015-16 Report Card Database
An analysis of ELA data by students’ socioeconomic status suggest that less economically advantaged students in both third and eighth grades performed better in the City’s most diverse schools than in the City’s least diverse schools. By contrast, more economically advantaged students were more likely to earn proficient scores in the City’s least diverse schools (Table 2). In addition, the achievement gap between less and more economically advantaged students attending the City’s least diverse schools in third grade ELA proficiency was -31 percent; in eighth grade, the achievement gap in ELA in the City’s least diverse schools was slightly lower at -24.3 percent. The achievement gap in third grade ELA proficiency between less and more economically advantaged students attending the City’s most diverse schools was -15 percent (more than half the City’s least diverse schools); in eighth grade, the achievement gap in ELA in the City’s most diverse school was slightly lower at -9.5 percent (almost 15 percent better than the City’s least diverse schools).

### Table 3

ELA Proficiency Rates by Socioeconomic Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Least Diverse Schools</th>
<th>Most Diverse Schools</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>3rd Grade ELA</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less Economically</td>
<td>30.7%</td>
<td>33.8%</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Economically</td>
<td>61.7%</td>
<td>48.8%</td>
<td>-12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gap</td>
<td>-31.0%</td>
<td>-15.0%</td>
<td>-16.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8th Grade ELA</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less Economically</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
<td>37.4%</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Economically</td>
<td>55.1%</td>
<td>46.9%</td>
<td>-8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gap</td>
<td>-24.3%</td>
<td>-9.5%</td>
<td>-14.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data source: New York State Department of Education 2015-16 Report Card Database
**Math.** Overall, 38 percent of third grade students attending the City’s most diverse schools scored at or above proficient in math, compared to 36 percent of students attending the City’s least diverse schools. Black students performed slightly better in the City’s least diverse schools, while Latinx students performed slightly better in the City’s most diverse schools. Significantly more White and Asian students scored at or above proficient in the City’s least diverse schools. For White students, more than 20 percentage points separated students in the City’s most and least diverse schools (Figure 3).

In the City’s least diverse schools, the Black-White achievement gap in third grade math proficiency was -37 percent; the Latinx-White achievement gap was -39 percent; and the Asian-White achievement gap was +1 percent. In the City’s most diverse schools, the Black-White achievement gap in third grade math proficiency was -17 percent; the Latinx-White achievement gap was -14 percent; and the Asian-White gap was +11 percent.

---

**FIGURE 3**

THIRD GRADE MATH PROFICIENCY RATES 2015-16

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Data source: New York State Department of Education 2015-16 Report Card Database
Among eighth graders, 26 percent attending the City’s most diverse schools scored at Levels 3 and 4 on the math exam compared to 21 percent of those attending the City’s least diverse schools. Most student subgroups in the City’s most diverse schools performed substantially better – particularly White students (difference of 23 percent) and more economically advantaged students (difference of about 12 percent). By contrast, more Black students attending the City’s least diverse schools scored at Levels 3 and 4 compared with their peers in the City’s most diverse schools. Twenty-one percent of Black students attending the City’s least diverse schools scored at a proficient level, as did 12 percent of Black students in the City’s most diverse schools. This trend persisted even when excluding charter schools; 14 percent of Black eighth graders attending the City’s most diverse traditional public schools scored at or above proficient, compared to 11 percent of Black eighth graders attending the City’s least diverse traditional public schools.
In the City’s least diverse schools, the Black-White achievement gap in eighth grade math proficiency was -38 percent; the Latinx-White achievement gap was -37 percent; and the Asian-White achievement gap was +26 percent. In the City’s most diverse schools, the Black-White achievement gap in eighth grade math proficiency was -19 percent; the Latinx-White achievement gap was -18 percent; and the Asian-White gap was +7 percent. In both third and eighth grades, greater racial equity was achieved in the City’s most diverse schools.

An analysis of math test score data for less economically advantaged and more economically advantaged students suggests that less economically advantaged students benefitted more from attending a diverse school than other students. Among third graders, 3.6 percentage points differentiated less economically advantaged students in the City’s most and least diverse schools; this difference grew to 7.1 points in the eighth grade. More economically advantaged students performed higher in math in both third and eighth grades, though the disparity between the City’s least and most diverse schools narrowed from 11.7 points to 4.2 points.
In addition, the achievement gap between less and more economically advantaged students attending the City’s least diverse schools in third grade math proficiency was -29.5 percent; in eighth grade, the achievement gap in the City’s least diverse schools (in math) was slightly lower at -17 percent. The achievement gap between less and more economically advantaged students attending the City’s most diverse schools in third grade math was -14.2 percent (more than half percentage of the City’s least diverse schools); in eighth grade, the achievement gap in the City’s most diverse schools in math was slightly lower at -5.7 percent. Across the board, not only did vulnerable students perform better, gaps in achievement in the City’s most diverse schools shrunk significantly.

### Table 4
**Math Proficiency Rates by Socioeconomic Status 2015-16**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Least Diverse Schools</th>
<th>Most Diverse Schools</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>3rd Grade ELA</strong></td>
<td>Less Economically</td>
<td>29.9%</td>
<td>33.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advantage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More Economically</td>
<td>59.4%</td>
<td>47.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advantage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gap</td>
<td>-29.5%</td>
<td>-14.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8th Grade ELA</strong></td>
<td>Less Economically</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advantage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More Economically</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
<td>30.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advantage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gap</td>
<td>-17.0%</td>
<td>-5.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data source: New York State Department of Education 2015-16 Report Card Database
**High school graduation.** Analysis of four-year graduation rates reveals slightly higher rates of graduation in New York City’s most diverse schools. Among 28 of the City’s most diverse high schools, 69 percent of the 2012 cohort graduated in four years (June 2016), compared to 67 percent of students in 192 of the City’s least diverse high schools. Citywide, 72 percent of the City’s 2012 cohort graduated in four years.¹³

Graduation rates for Black and Latinx students attending the City’s most diverse high schools slightly exceeded those of their peers attending the City’s least diverse high schools. Sixty-nine percent of Black students in the City’s most diverse high schools graduated in four years, compared with 66 percent in the City’s least diverse high schools. The disparity among Latinx graduates was slightly greater by 5 percentage points. White and Asian students in the City’s least diverse high schools graduated at significantly higher rates than their peers in the City’s most diverse schools.

Compared to other students, less economically advantaged students seemed to benefit more from attending a more diverse high school. Seventy-one percent of less economically advantaged students in the City’s most diverse high schools graduated in four years, compared with 64 percent in the City’s least diverse schools. By contrast, more economically advantaged students graduated at higher rates in the City’s least diverse schools.

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¹³. **For purposes of this report, we did not consider high school admissions policies and how they might impact the level of diversity at particular high schools. We recognize that, in New York City, this is an important factor for consideration. However, the purpose of this report was to highlight overall patterns in academic achievement and high school graduation. Future analyses may include consideration for the types of high school admissions policies implemented by the City’s least and most diverse schools.**
In the City’s least diverse schools, the Black-White graduation gap was -23 percent; the Latinx-White graduation gap was -29.4 percent; and the Asian-White graduation gap was -3.8 percent. In the City’s most diverse schools, the Black-White graduation gap was +0.1 percent; the Latinx-White graduation gap was -3.9 percent; and the Asian-White gap was +7 percent. The graduation gap between less and more economically advantaged students attending least diverse schools was +10.6 percent. In the case of both race and socioeconomic status, diversity seemed to have eliminated or, in some cases, reversed the graduation gap, whereas segregation significantly exacerbated it.
The academic achievement and high school graduation evidence that we analyzed suggests that increasing diversity can increase equity in New York City schools and significantly decrease gaps in some significant student outcomes (such as high school graduation). Thus, plans to stimulate diversity in the NYC DOE can pay off for the City’s most vulnerable students. For this reason, at least conceptually, the City’s diversity plan is a step in the right direction in terms of extending equity throughout its systems. However, a diversity plan and the modest gains it may bolster may not be enough alone to significantly extend equity to the City’s most vulnerable students.

The real problem facing New York City schools goes beyond diversity, what can be seen as part of the “cosmetics of equity.”¹⁴ To achieve its goal of equity, NYC DOE (and other school systems across New York City) will need policies that strive beyond diversity because New York City’s academic achievement and graduation data reinforce observations made by Judge Robert L. Carter three decades ago. According to Carter, “the basic barrier to full equality for Blacks was not racial segregation, a symptom, but white supremacy, the disease.”¹⁵ Although the historic strategy to attack segregation in education was meant to remove “the basic barrier to full and equal citizenship rights for Blacks in this county,” the lawyers arguing the Brown case (and their allies) did not understand then how effective White power could be in preventing full implementation of the law.” With segregation eliminated, it was thought, Blacks and other vulnerable groups would have “an unrestricted opportunity to function in America on equal terms with Whites.”¹⁶ However, in keeping with Carter’s observation, the data presented here suggest that segregation is not simply a matter of separation (i.e., separate and unequal), but rather segregation is the apparatus upon which barriers to opportunity for the City’s most vulnerable students rest (i.e., separate as inherently inequitable).

¹⁴. Concept coined in a presentation on “Segregated Schooling in Battle Creek, Michigan,” and based on an NYU Metro Center report to BC Vision (Kirkland et al, 2017).
¹⁵. Ibid.
Thus, the entrenchment of segregation, from Carter’s perspective, was significant in that it yields two very different systems of schooling. In NYC, it simultaneously and vastly privileges some students while gratuitously disadvantaging others. This system of inequality, primarily equated with the denial of access, subordinates vulnerable students (as observed in the data presented here) back to the status of supplicants to full citizenship under law (understood here as uneven access to literacy, numeracy, and graduation), where unequal schooling becomes a kind of silent social treaty maintaining chronic and vicious forms of human subordination.

One could argue, then, that by increasing diversity across schools in New York City, one also will decrease school segregation. This idea, however well-intentioned, seems aspirational, as there is little evidence to actually substantiate that diversity eliminates segregation. (The demographic evidence of New York City is telling. The City is among the most diverse geographies in the world, but also boasts one of the most segregated school systems in the U.S.) Even within some diverse schools, systems of segregation persist, evoking severed realities between more and less vulnerable students (e.g., AP versus remedial tracks). This persistence of segregation has meant a quantum leap forward for more privileged students (see student outcome data in this report from least diverse schools)—a set of experienced differences in education that manifests in disparities that are difficult to overcome for more vulnerable students.
If segregation is the child of white supremacy (i.e., acting as gatekeeper/barrier to opportunity), then addressing the issue of segregation through interventions aimed at only achieving diversity (i.e., racial and class equality without removing barriers to opportunity) seem short-sighted. As Carter suggested: To rightly deal with segregation one must first deal with the parent (i.e., a system of racial discrimination such as white supremacy) and not just the relative (i.e., a system of colorblind indifference to racial injustice such as diversity). By acknowledging Carter’s evocation, we also acknowledge that the unearned fruits of supremacies (e.g., privilege) are difficult things for the privileged to relinquish.¹⁷ If more economically advantaged students and White and Asian students enjoy a tremendous (and unearned) advantage from segregated schooling (existing on the other side of the opportunity barrier), why should such students give up that advantage? The question is rhetorical. It has been argued that, in isolation, all students (even more privileged ones) suffer.¹⁸ Then a more important question deals with the benefits educational equity has to the City and to the nation. There is evidence that more equitable systems of education reinforce a healthier, safer, and freer society.¹⁹

Segregated schooling in NYC means inequitable schooling in NYC. The diversity plan released by the NYC DOE is an important first step toward achieving educational equity. However, based on the evidence presented in this report, it cannot be the only step. If the City of New York is serious about achieving equity in education, then the City must add additional layers to the NYC DOE equity framework. While diversity is important, the City must also pursue other policies that promote opportunity. We offer the following broad recommendations for framing equity policies that seek not only to stimulate diversity, but also expand opportunity and interrupt segregation in New York City schools.

1. BREAK UP “OPPORTUNITY MONOPOLIES”

Segregated schooling seems to allow for steroid schooling—types of performance-enhancing experiences that students locked into the deprivities of social injustice (e.g., racial discrimination, poverty, housing instability, inadequate school facilities, non-rigorous curricula, low expectations, unstable teacher workforces, health risks, and so on) do not enjoy. Like in sports, if the threshold is measured by those whose abilities are artificially induced, then those who do not have access to such inducements will find it difficult to compete, but will suffer in such a competition. It is noteworthy, then, that the NYC DOE has situated its diversity plan under a border equity vision that leaves needed room to add important policy layers necessary for achieving equity. One additional policy layer would be a plan, or a system of specific policy reforms, aimed at interrupting the persistence of segregated schooling at both school and classroom levels.

Such policies must be aimed at disrupting systems of privilege in New York City. These systems can be realized as promoting “opportunity monopolies,” excessive privileges for certain groups that make possible the manipulation of opportunities. For example, the most selective of the nine specialized high schools in NYC are also among the City’s least diverse schools, with enrollments grossly overrepresented by Asian, White, and more economically advantaged students. These highly specialized schools give students access to the best colleges in the nation, if not the world. They also give students an enhanced curriculum, a wealth of material resources, and other forms of social capital linked to school success.²⁰ While there are compelling arguments for completely doing away with such opportunity monopolies, the City could also break up these monopolies by using different criteria for selecting students into its specialized high schools. For example, if the City selected students into its specialized schools based on neighborhood or district pools (e.g., the top 10% of students per middle school/neighborhood/District across NYC, along with key qualitative criteria that considers such things as race and socioeconomic status), the City would innovate a system of selection that expands opportunity across race, socioeconomic status, and other diversities. However, the current criteria for student selection across the system promote segregation and oppose diversity. The point is, if it wants to integrate its schools, the City must do more to break up the monopoly that some students have on opportunity by breaking up schools that disproportionately serve almost exclusively the privileged.

²⁰ Bell, Jones, & Johnson, 2002.
Segregation is as much ideological as it is structural, and almost every facet of schooling encourages it—from the existence of deeply stratified AP courses that can extend college credits to some students to the highly specialized schools that overwhelmingly enroll White and Asian students.²¹ Another way to discourage segregation, then, is to encourage diversity in school spaces entrenched by segregation. There is some evidence that inducements such as smaller class sizes, child- and healthcare services, and additional material resources to school systems, families, and students in diverse settings can bolster student outcomes.²² In some ways the City’s diversity strategies use similar inducement to incentivize diversity. For example, the NYC DOE’s recent addition of a “Family Resource Center” and new representative enrollment priorities in Community School District 1 are important policy steps aimed at encouraging diversity in some of the City’s schools. However, such policies must do more than tinker at the surface of the system; they must also foster structural conditions that redesign our unspoken ideological commitments to segregation. That is, there is a need for policies that will foster conditions that will make not only diversity more likely but also segregation less probable. Kirkland has termed such conditions “integratable.”²³

For Kirkland, segregated schools persist because schooling in the U.S. is too often defined by what he sees as a zero sum compromise—a “false choice” between (a) Third World school conditions or (b) the patterning of a peculiar class of students exiled from their communities.²⁴ The structural dynamic of these false choices resists interaction, particularly when the only schools deemed “desirable” are controlled by elites and are, more often than not, hostile to vulnerable students. The hostility of these so-called desirable schools makes them non-integratable. By association, the undesirability of underfunded and mismanaged schools makes such schools also non-integratable. Unless conditions are established where true integration can be achieved—integratibility (i.e., structural conditions that might encourage diversity)—then it is unlikely that the integration of New York City schools will be realized. Much of the work of integratibility must be about shifting narratives, mindsets, policies, and practices, addressing the fundamental nature of such things as they have been patterned to reinforce the outcomes that have become so apparent in the data. In this light, Noguera has called for a “broader and bolder approach” to school transformation,²⁵ which for Noguera means enlisting allies from multiple community agencies to coordinate strategies to promote diversity while simultaneously discouraging segregation.

21. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Noguera, 2011
Critical cultural theorists in education such as Ladson-Billings argue that achieving equity in education requires reframing of education, as the current framings of education norm whiteness and middleclassness. As mentioned earlier, there are internal advantages baked into the system for more economically advantaged and White students, in that schooling is usually about them and almost exclusively reflective and reinforcing of their lives. Further, the frames of schooling, its motives and its drives, not only favor the privileged, they also castigate the vulnerable. According to Gay,

> The achievement patterns amongst ethnic groups in the United States are too persistent to be attributed only to individual limitations. The fault lies well within the institutional structures, procedures, assumptions, operation styles of schools, classrooms and society.

From Gay’s perspective, education cannot only be framed by individual ability but chiefly institutional structures. Thus, the existing system and mechanisms of segregated schooling not only actively promote the success of some students, they also actively promote the demise of other students (see data patterns above).

There is evidence that an intentional reframing of education grounded in principles of culturally relevant education, what Kirkland has called a pedagogy of the culture of the oppressed, can interrupt narratives of inequity in American Schools. Since segregated schooling displaces opportunity in a system fixed to achieve racialized and class-driven disparities, culturally responsive education works to open the system and close differentials in achievement. Here, culturally responsive education comes to mean “the deliberate recognition and inclusion of all forms of student diversity as a pool of resources from and toward which curriculum, instruction, and all aspects of school policy should be designed.” By practice, it would mean the “alignment of curriculum and instruction with students’ backgrounds, life experiences, and cultures.” This reframing of education imagines diversity as something beyond bodies, and proliferates the properties of knowing and being inclusive of diverse student backgrounds.

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27. See Heath, 1983.
29. Unpublished manuscript, A Pedagogy of the Fugitive.
31. Ibid.
4. RECRUIT AND RETAIN HIGHLY EFFECTIVE TEACHERS OF COLOR

Post-Brown, perhaps the most important shift in education was the nation’s shift from a majority White teacher workforce to a predominately White teacher workforce. Conservative estimates suggest that tens of thousands of Black teachers were fired between 1954 and 1964 because they were not deemed suitable to be in front of White children.³² Thus, among the many causalities of Brown was a potentiality for integrated teaching. While White teachers preserved their jobs, the Black teacher workforce was decimated and has never recovered.³³ Given what we now know of the importance of racial matching between student and teacher to student achievement,³⁴ recruiting and retaining a highly effective and diverse workforce of teachers must be part of a bigger strategy to interrupt school segregation. Moreover, there is compelling evidence that diversity in teaching will not only benefit vulnerable students; it can also benefit all students.³⁵ In fact, there is evidence that all students might even prefer (and learn better when) being exposed to a diverse teacher pool.³⁶ Thus, a plan to desegregate NYC schools must be imagined alongside a plan to promote diversity among the NYC teacher workforce.

³³ Ibid.
³⁴ See Dee, 2004; Egalite, Kisida, & Winters, 2004.
³⁶ Ibid.
5. HIRE AND/OR DEVELOP CULTURALLY COMPETENT EDUCATORS

Hiring teachers of color alone will not create more equitable schools because disparities in student achievement is rooted in systems fueled by entrenched institutional biases.³⁷ In many ways, the issues dividing student outcomes in New York City are the same issues dividing New York City into segregated schools and classrooms. These issues fester in the mindsets of individuals and are made visible in the workings of institutions.³⁸ They breed consequences for vulnerable students such as the over-referral/disproportionate suspensions of Black and Brown students; the over-representation of Black and Brown students in special education; the under-representation of Black and Brown students in AP courses, gifted and talented and honors courses; and so on.³⁹ Critical scholars locate these disparities in biased belief systems (e.g., deficit thinking and culture of poverty logics). Hence, part of the problem maintaining uneven schooling in NYC goes beyond the color of a teacher’s skin but to the measure of a teacher’s mindset.⁴⁰

Research points to two related recommendations for interrupting calloused institutional thinking that promotes mindsets that engineer, for example, the “soft bigotry of low expectations,” the punitive climates of surveillance and governance targeted at vulnerable students, and the open disregard that some educators hold for some youths’ socioemotional state, to name a few.⁴¹ These are just examples of how mindset is elemental in the maintenance of schisms in education, including segregation. Moreover, there are two ways to shift the collective mindset of a system: (a) through anti-bias interventions that work at the individual level (i.e., cultural competence trainings),⁴² and (b) through hiring apparatuses that set the stage for more culturally competent hires.⁴³ The latter, here, should take precedent over the former. While developing a teacher’s culturally competency has merit, for as long as a teacher lacks cultural competence she or he will pose a threat to vulnerable students.⁴⁴ Thus, systemic shifts in institutional mindsets must be pursued through the hiring of culturally competent educators mixed with a continued effort to provide ongoing development and assessment of teacher cultural competency, using cultural competence measures, inventories, scales, and other data systems.

³⁸ See Milner, 2012.
⁴² Ibid.
⁴³ Ibid.
⁴⁴ Ibid.
To be fair to those who have worked for equity in school systems across NYC, we must note that some of these recommendations have been taken up, at least in part, within NYC. For example, the NYC DOE, as part of its “Equity and Excellence” portfolio, has taken up “AP for All” (including its work with Lead Higher) and “Computer Science for All,” which focuses on students of color and historically under-served schools. Also worth noting is the Universal Literacy Framework, which in its initial launch targeted pockets of the City that are highly segregated. In addition to its Equity and Excellence, the NYC DOE has instituted what it calls “Fair Student Funding” policies meant to break up opportunity monopolies by providing more resources to schools that serve higher needs population. Finally, it should be mentioned the NYC DOE has instituted its NYC Men Teach initiative in an honest effort to recruit and retain highly effective teachers of color.

Our recommendations, thus, are not meant to imply that things aren’t being done across the City to interrupt school segregation. Rather, they suggest that more can be done. For example, some have argued for a “diversity czar” or an “office of diversity” as evidence of other efforts the City can engage to achieve equity. Those in favor of a diversity office or position argue that having a dedicated unit to oversee school integration is necessary for achieving the ends of equity across NYC schools. In some ways, the NYC DOE has created such a position to oversee the implementation of its diversity plan; however, we are hesitant in this report to assuage such a recommendation, as there is little evidence that a position or even an office can calm and reverse the momentum of segregation within systems as complex as those in NYC. Our fear is that such a position “tokenizes” the issue of diversity by suggesting that one office or one person can undo realities that are deeply political, social, and historical. The five recommendations offered here are research-based and are solely meant to frame what more can be done in NYC and beyond it to end segregation and promote equity in education.
Evidence on school diversity in New York City is complex. While it suggests that younger students, as a whole, do not reap large benefits from attending the City’s most diverse schools, it also suggests that older students do. This is important because the data offers evidence of the long-term effects of diversity and an empirical rationale for expanding diversity across the City’s school systems. However, expanding diversity across New York City will not be easy because there are many more “least diverse” (or segregated) schools in the City compared to the City’s most diverse schools. The City remains plagued by a pattern of hyper-segregation, as revealed in the 2014 “Brown at 60” report released by UCLA. This condition of hyper-segregation influences student outcomes across the City, limiting access to opportunity for the City’s most vulnerable students—those whose achievement and graduation differences can be directly correlated with not just achievement or opportunity gaps, but also access and opportunity barriers. Within the City’s most diverse schools, these barriers begin to fracture, as differences in achievement and graduation rates across the City begin to close. Thus, there are real, if even modest, benefits to school diversity in New York City. There are also very real patterns in the City that epitomize a tale of two school systems, separate and unequal. These patterns suggest that while the goal of integration is a desirable one, the real work of educational equity in New York City must also involve expanding opportunity because the opposite of segregation is not integration; the opposite of segregation is access. Segregated schooling in the City limits access to opportunities for less economically advantaged students and students of color. To achieve equity, the City must address a very frank question—a question that deals with not only how to expand diversity, but importantly how to expand opportunity.
REFERENCES


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