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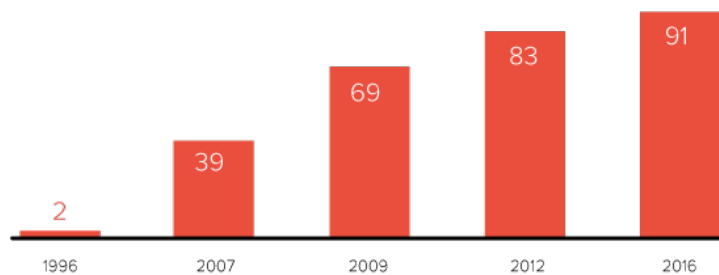
How to Achieve Socioeconomic Integration in Schools

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Across the United States, ninety-one school districts and charter networks—enrolling over 4 million students total—intentionally use socioeconomic status as a factor in student assignment (as of January 2016). This represents a large increase: just nine years earlier, in 2007, the number of class-conscious districts was only thirty-nine. The districts identified in the report are rural and urban, small and very large, and found in both “red” and “blue” states.

Districts that have a desire to improve educational equity and achievement through socioeconomic integration can use several methods to achieve this goal. These methods, the most popular of which are discussed below, can be used individually or in combination with one another to realize greater levels of diversity America’s public schools.

NUMBER OF IDENTIFIED DISTRICTS AND CHARTERS WITH SOCIOECONOMIC INTEGRATION POLICIES, 1996–PRESENT



Source: Authors' research.



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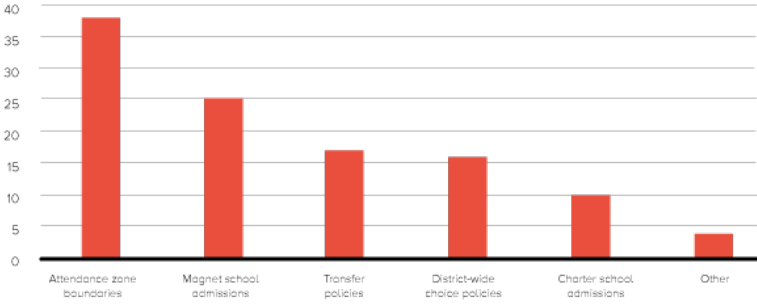
Attendance Zone Changes: Aligning nicely with existing school enrollment protocol, districts can choose to redraw attendance boundaries with consideration for socioeconomic balance among schools. Rearranging school zone boundaries reminds us that neighborhoods are far from fixed geographic divisions. Rather, they are most often constructed through political and economic processes, and unfortunately, many neighborhoods still remain haunted by legacies of racial and economic segregation that precipitated their construction. Districts that choose to integrate by reconstructing neighborhood school boundaries in ways that encourage racial and economic interaction can create policies that affect every school in the district. In terms of general good practice, districts—particularly those that are growing or developing in significant ways—should be prepared to readjust population boundaries as demographics shift.

Examples of this method in action: Eden Prairie Schools (MN), La Crosse School District (WI), McKinney Independent School District (TX)

Controlled Choice Policies: District-wide controlled choice policies explicitly consider diversity in program design while shifting student enrollment to a choice-based policy. Under controlled choice, districts shift entirely away from student assignment based on geographic zones to a system in which all families rank their choices of schools from across the district. Students are then assigned to schools based on their preferences and an algorithm that ensures a relatively even distribution of students by socioeconomic status across all schools. It's worth emphasizing that school choice alone rarely produces more diverse school, and it may even have the opposite effect. But successful district-wide controlled choice policies are those with clear and defined diversity goals for student enrollment that devote resources to student and family recruitment, monitor diversity during the application phase, focus on school designs that attract a diverse populations, and consider socioeconomic factors in the algorithm that determines school assignment. Thus, even as community demographics shift, controlled choice remains effective. Moreover, in well-designed programs, the overwhelming majority of families typically receive their first choice school in the kindergarten enrollment process.

Examples of this method in action: Cambridge School District (MA), Champaign Unit 4 Schools (IL), White Plains Public Schools (NY), Lee County Public Schools (FL), Berkeley Unified School District (CA), Montclair Public Schools (NJ), Jefferson County Public Schools (KY)

NUMBER OF IDENTIFIED DISTRICTS AND CHARTERS USING SELECTED SOCIOECONOMIC INTEGRATION STRATEGIES



Source: Authors' research.



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Magnet School Admissions: Magnet schools are often a component of controlled choice plans, but they can stand alone from district-wide initiatives. Magnets are schools with specific themes that seek to draw students from across geographic areas. While some magnets are “selective” in nature, seeking to admit students based on extraordinary academic performance or auditions, many other magnet schools are formed for the purpose of desegregation and

diversity. Successful, integration-minded magnet schools strive to create diverse enrollments by factoring diversity into the admissions lottery, selecting themes that appeal to a broad range to families, and enrolling students from across a district or multiple districts. Research shows strong academic outcomes for students who, through an admissions lottery, win the chance to attend a racially and socioeconomically diverse magnet school.

Examples of this method in action: Duval County Public Schools (FL), Hartford Public Schools (CT, operating an interdistrict integration program), Omaha Public School District (NE).

Charter School Admissions: Charter schools—schools that are publicly funded and privately managed—can enroll students from geographic areas larger than typical neighborhood school attendance zones. If designed with the goal of diversity in mind, charter schools can promote integration through use of a weighted lottery that considers socioeconomic status, or through reserved seating for low-income or at-risk students. Successfully integrated charter schools often have robust recruitment strategies to ensure that they reach families of varying backgrounds.

Examples of this method in action: Blackstone Valley Prep Mayoral Academy (RI), Brooklyn Prospect Charter School (NY), Citizens of the World Charter Schools (CA), DSST Charter School (CO)

Transfer Policies: Some districts seek to increase diversity by giving preference to school transfer requests that would increase the socioeconomic balance of affected schools, or by giving a priority to economically disadvantaged students when reviewing requests. While integration via transfer policy is limited in scope—that is, unlikely to reach across the entire district or produce consistently balanced schools—it can serve as an important check on inter-district open enrollment policies that tend to benefit higher income children and families.

Examples of this method in action: Beaumont Independent School District (TX), Lafayette Parish School System (LA), Postville Public Schools (IA), San Diego Unified School District (CA)

School districts and charter schools can employ several methods to advance equity in their schools through integration. The most successful integration programs require planning: careful consideration of community demographics, research into the types of programs that would appeal to diverse families, and attention to the roles of transportation and changing residential patterns in the area. But school integration is worth the work. Middle-class schools are twenty-two times more likely than high-poverty schools to be persistently high-performing, and they provide critical social advantages for students of all backgrounds, including confidence, critical thinking, and creativity. School integration is a highly effective educational innovation.



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