

OPINION

BACK TO HAUNT US



School Diversity under Siege

Separate still isn't equal

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN



The South has made more progress in providing children the opportunity to attend desegregated schools. Now, sadly, it's also the region where re-segregation is growing fastest.

When the Supreme Court issued its pivotal *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling in 1954, the percentage of black children in the South attending majority-white schools was just 0.001 percent, or one in 100,000. Six years later, that number had grown to one in 1,000. Integration continued to grow until at its apex, 43.5 percent of African-American kids attended majority-white schools in 1988. Since then the number has steadily fallen. It was down to 27 percent by 2005.

This isn't just happening in the South. In June 2007, when the Supreme Court assaulted both the spirit and intent of *Brown v. Board* by ruling that desegregation plans that assign students to schools on the basis of race are unconstitutional, the lead case in that decision involved opponents of a program in Seattle. Resistance to programs designed to provide more integrated schools—even in “progressive” communities that had voluntarily desegregated—is mounting in every section of the country.

Consider what's happening to the Tinsley Voluntary Transfer Program in California.

That Bay Area program came about as a result of a lawsuit brought by a group of parents, including Margaret Tinsley—who lived in the high-mi-

nority, low-performing Ravenswood City school district and wanted better educational opportunities for their children. Separate is still not equal in many school districts. In 1986, a court order was issued permitting a set number of children to transfer each year from Ravenswood to schools in seven nearby districts, including the Menlo Park City district. The program has been very popular both with parents and students in the Ravenswood district and with many families in the receiving districts. But recently the Menlo Park City superintendent raised the question of whether Menlo Park could continue participating in the program, citing a budget crunch and the district's growing number of children.

Menlo Park parents who value the diversity the transfer program has brought to their schools found themselves clashing with neighbors who wanted the program eliminated. A strong debate took place before the school board agreed not to suspend the program—for now.

What's at stake in these choices? Menlo Park and the other districts that receive students through the Tinsley program have been caring communities helping children move towards successful passage to adulthood—many of whom might otherwise have become trapped in the “cradle-to-prison pipeline” that funnels vulnerable children down life paths marked by school failure, dropping out, and incarceration. At the same time, they also are giving all their students valuable exposure and educational opportunities and a broader education than they may have had otherwise. Studies have

repeatedly found that integration is valuable for all students, as the 2007 Supreme Court decision affirmed.

A recent report by scholars from the Poverty and Race Research Action Council and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte notes students who attend desegregated schools are more likely to live in integrated neighborhoods and make cross-ethnic friendships as adults. It also points out that integrated schools prepare students “for complex social situations and multiethnic workplaces where the capacities to engage effectively, problem solve, plan, and collaborate with people different from oneself are at a premium.” Children need more opportunities like this, not fewer.

Until our neighborhoods are all racially and socioeconomically diverse—a manifestation of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s “beloved community” that is very, very far from coming to pass—children will not have the opportunity to experience racial and socioeconomic diversity in their neighborhood schools. Instead, too many children are still being isolated in high-minority, high-poverty, high-failure schools, where they aren't receiving an equal education or an equal chance to succeed in life.

That struggle was too hard-fought by too many people to continue the erosion of inclusion on our watch. Decisions on whether or not to insist on making these opportunities reality for all children have deep implications for our values as a nation, our commitment to progress, and the true education we want all our children to receive and that all children deserve.

We can't let them down.

Marian Wright Edelman is president of the Children's Defense Fund.

Letter to the Editor

Schools Decision Needed

As a parent of a 7th Grader, I need the Portland School Board and Superintendent to decide what it fiscally needs to do, and then do it!

This two year process and speculation on the high schools redesign have been so confusing to our students and us parents. We cannot make plans or get our kids excited about their future plans. The threats of changes are making folks bail from the PPS District or not attend the schools in consideration for change.

Our kids are resilient and will make (with our help) the school that they are assigned work. We cannot get a thought of what our choices are though! All of these ideas and changes have damaged the schools in the discussions (Marshall, Benson, Jefferson and Roosevelt) already.

Decide what schools you can afford to run at their best and we will react as needed for our student. If we need to move to another area, network with other students to go where we go, or get involved with the school early by canvassing for grants or business partnerships for the school, the parents can help.

We cannot be in a holding pattern any longer. It's not fair to staff, community, families and most of all students.

All of the pride and support is being sucked away from this labored process! If my family needs to get rid of a car to meet our budget, we don't ask the neighbors. You've asked and asked and asked the neighbors, please now just do what you need to do.

Leave us strongly funded, sharply staffed and smartly taught schools when you're done. Load them with sports, activities and arts along with a great curriculum and our kids will succeed! Then the community will thank you and won't that be refreshing.

Paula Sylvester
Boise Eliot Parent

Class of 1970 40th Reunion



JEFFERSON

We need your help locating other classmates
If you have any names, phone numbers, emails, mailing addresses
please contact us.

Friday August 6th, 2010: Place to be announced

Saturday August 7th, 2010: Embassy Suites Portland Airport Hotel
(rooms available for only \$109 + tax)

Cost for reunion: Classmates \$65 spouse or companion \$35

Please R.S.V.P. as soon as possible to:

E-mail to: leilablakely@gmail.com (preferable)

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