

# SCHOOL INTEGRATION FRAMING & MESSAGING: TOWARD A TRANSFORMATIVE CONVERSATION



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# School Integration Framing & Messaging: Toward a Transformative Conversation

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## I. Introduction

Despite a mounting body of evidence demonstrating the academic, social, psychological and democratic benefits of educating students in a diverse environment, integration has been a tough sell lately. One of the nation's most lauded economic integration programs was disbanded in May 2010, and integration has largely been supplanted by choice programs and in-place strategies under the Obama administration. Despite the tireless efforts of civil rights champions, legal and education advocates, parents, community groups and others, the fight for true integration remains an uphill battle, and ground is slipping beneath our feet daily across the nation. At the outset of this project we thought this may be due to some combination of a general lack of awareness of the benefits of diversity, the perceived costs to achieve it being greater than the benefits, integration exhaustion, or a lack of clarity about what integration means.

When receiving information, people generally have a tendency to boil it down as simply as possible in order to process it efficiently. Information gets distilled into sound bites and complex issues are reframed into pithy segments. Education is no exception and it certainly isn't short on complexity. Newspapers and blogs across the country are daily addressing the achievement gap, schools' and students' academic performance, budget crises, teacher shortages, the role of unions, etc. The list of educational woes goes on and on, and integration is framed as just another drumbeat in the march of educational reform. It is often regarded as an impediment to and/or distraction from reform, rather than a solution to many of the education challenges we face today.

In this era of accountability, nearly everything that isn't a standardized test or rote instruction is being cast aside for fear of lowering standards. Integration is no exception. Despite a broad body of research linking integration to academic achievement, the issue is still framed as achievement vs. diversity. This type of zero-sum thinking isn't limited to academic achievement; it also exists in policy reform along topics such as school choice. We can have integrated schools, or parents can have choices, but not both. Similarly, we can pursue mobility strategies or we can implement in-place interventions, but not both. This type of dichotomous thinking is limiting our nation's ability to reform schools in a way that can bring our education system into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, yet this is the frame that is heard and too often accepted uncritically across the country. Until integration advocates can meet people within their current realm of understanding, we will have little chance to move people toward integration, or even engage people in conversation about the benefits of educating students in a truly diverse setting.

This project sought to understand how the public thinks about diversity and integration in K-12 education in order to begin working toward the development of frames and messages that would extol the benefits of diversity for education in ways even skeptics might find persuasive. To achieve this, we conducted a media analysis and academic literature review. We also reviewed best practices on how to talk about race and education reform. Finally, we conducted focus groups and held roundtable discussions in Montclair, NJ; Pitt County, NC; Minneapolis, MN; Archbold, OH; Cincinnati, OH; Carroll, OH; and Niles, OH. This report summarizes our findings and suggests further framing research on the

concept of integration, as well as some recommendations on the type of work that needs to be done in order to collectively organize at the regional level.

## **II. The Importance of Integration & the Need to Reframe**

Bringing together students of different backgrounds to learn from one another should remain a central objective of American education, especially as we move toward a majority minority society. In today's globalized world, education must increase cross-cultural competence essential to performing in a global marketplace and participating in the ever-growing human conversation. It also must inculcate fundamental values necessary for the construction of an equitable multi-racial and multi-ethnic democracy. If we fail at integration, the country fails; segregation makes it very difficult to develop good citizens. Yet our schools are increasingly segregated, with diminished educational opportunities in the areas of teacher quality, class size, facilities, and availability of advanced courses. Students of color also face disadvantages in desegregated schools where teachers maintain lower expectations of them and often concentrate them in lower achievement tracks.

Segregation lies at the heart of the racial disparities that continue to plague American society. Segregation is not just the spatial exclusion of people, but it is the limitation of their opportunities and resources. This includes all students. As much of the focus on integration has also been on its benefits for blacks, Latinos, and other students of color, little attention has been paid to why whites should care about integration, or how people today talk and/or think about integration. We need to raise up the benefits of integration to whites, as well as to nonwhites, and challenge the discourse that places integration in tension with academic excellence. In order to do this, we need to create a uniform, consistent message on what we mean by true integration and its demands.

The concept of integration has many negative connotations due to its strife-ridden history in America. In fact, many people associate it with desegregation, assimilation, and diversity—none of which capture the true meaning of integration. It is critical, therefore, to begin by exploring how the public thinks about integration, and how to move them from thinking about desegregation to true integration. While there is general agreement that integration is positive, there is much less agreement or even understanding of what it is, and when it is conceptualized, it is often too narrow, and mistaken for desegregation or assimilation. While desegregation, at best, attempts to assimilate "minorities" into the mainstream, true integration transforms and enriches the mainstream and encourages relations based on mutuality, equality and fairness. Desegregation is about achieving numerical diversity while true integration seeks to allow those historically excluded to re-imagine and redesign the education system. True integration has implications for everything that goes on within the walls of the education system - discipline, curriculum, ability grouping, etc. - as well as how those walls are even constructed with school site selection, district boundaries, school openings and closings, and student assignment policies. Desegregation may bring people together, but it lacks the lasting and profound benefits that true integration has for our society and for us as individuals.

Advocates, scholars, practitioners and others must work collectively to define integration in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, distinguishing it from all the other concepts that have been inappropriately associated with the word. It is essential to rearticulate the concept in light of the new realities of a more complex American society. How we talk about integration can entrench, uproot and reconfigure policy preferences and attitudes. Any transformative conversation on race thus has to address this issue and honestly describe the goal American society should strive toward. Unless advocates explicitly articulate the social goal of their efforts—the yet to be fulfilled promise of integration—looking for effective ways of framing their messages could easily “devolve into a search for the frame that best ‘sells’ to the public, limiting the long-term effectiveness of racial justice organizing.”<sup>1</sup>

It is especially crucial to continue talking about integration in fresh, transformative ways given the context of “integration fatigue” that is prevalent among communities of color. Communities of color remain frustrated that, despite all the past efforts and talk about integration, the boats of people of color have not been lifted. More importantly, perhaps, they think that the political will to take on the issue of integration simply does not exist in this country. This is why in-place education strategies that emphasize the need to achieve even in racially segregated high-poverty schools are popular among people of color. Even those who value integration are impacted by this “integration fatigue,” which creates a general confusion about the value of integration. For instance, people who believe in the value of integration often cannot decide whether they value integration as an end in itself or as a means to another end such as equity. Under the influence of “integration fatigue,” they frequently choose to emphasize “equity” over integration, in some cases at the expense of integration altogether. Advocates need to clearly articulate the importance of integration, explaining how and why integration involves something much broader than equity.

In order to create a “political will for integration, we need to define in new, transformative ways what exactly we mean by integration; how it benefits everyone (not just people of color); and why “true integration” is a value in itself that is worth pursuing. Unless we can articulate this strong case for true integration through the development of effective frames and messages, it will be difficult to garner support for student assignment plans that seek to achieve integration and excellence in our schools. Transforming this discourse around integration requires coordinated and extensive research and strategizing to understand where people are, and how to move them to a more complex, comprehensive understanding of integration so that we may begin, for the first time in history, to truly integrate our public system of education.

### **III. Introduction to Messaging & Framing**

Today it is hard to talk about race in the same terms Americans talked about it during the Civil Rights movement. Today’s racism is less visible and implicitly embedded in various institutional arrangements that continue to reinforce social, economic and political disparities. The pervasiveness of these institutional arrangements often makes conversations about race divisive and polarizing.

As a result, people often avoid talking about race or take a color-blind approach, arguing that we should focus instead on class. This approach is based on the notion that bringing attention to race divides people and triggers racist attitudes. The color-blind approach is even popular among some racial equity advocates, who argue that the issue of race will have more public support if policies and communications are framed in more race-neutral terms.

Research reveals, however, that people often think about race unconsciously even when they are not talking about it, and that our implicit racial attitudes are likely to be more biased and negative than our explicit opinions.<sup>2</sup> Since diverting attention from the issue of race is simply impossible, it is better to talk about race than simply to avoid it. But *how* we talk about race matters. For instance, talking about race in race-neutral terms could easily degenerate into ‘color-blind racism,’ which originates from one’s ignorance/denial/minimization of existing racial disparities and the institutional arrangements that maintain these disparities.<sup>3</sup>

Unless effectively challenged by race-conscious messages, this type of racism reinforces existing racial hierarchies by trivializing the social, economic, and political disparities driven by race.<sup>4</sup> Social science research shows that such a race-conscious approach to race is likely to be more effective than a color-blind approach in reducing racial bias.<sup>5</sup> By talking about race in a transformative fashion, we can illuminate the institutional dynamics that generate social, economic and political disparities in our communities, and we can then move toward eliminating these racial disparities.

Moreover, social psychology research on multiculturalism shows that it is possible to talk about race without triggering prejudice and discrimination.<sup>6</sup> In fact, an effectively constructed race-conscious message could foster awareness of racial and ethnic differences and promote an appreciation of diversity as a component of societal health. As researchers demonstrate, when a multicultural approach to race is used, people often replace the pride they take in being a member of the “best” group with the pride that comes with membership in a group with something unique and valuable to contribute to the larger society.<sup>7</sup>

Framing research also shows that people often have conflicting frame systems, especially when it comes to “high level moral frames.”<sup>8</sup> Framing researcher George Lakoff identifies two main competing frame systems –progressive and conservative frame systems, noting that the activation of “the conservative frame system weakens the progressive frame system—both individual frames for particular issues, but also the system as a whole.”<sup>9</sup> Lakoff describes the importance of this notion for contemporary American politics:

For important domains of thought, like morality, religion, and politics, it is commonplace for people to have two inconsistent frame systems that inhibit each other. When those frames apply to different issues and in different contexts, we speak of ‘bi-conceptuals.’ When you can shift back and forth on an issue, you are bi-conceptual on that issue. That is, you can frame the issue in two ways, using inconsistent higher-level frame systems...Important political concepts are ‘contested,’ overlapping in some classic cases, but diverging in content depending on the

moral system. Thus, vital political concepts like life, freedom, responsibility, government, accountability, equality, fairness, empathy, property, security, and so on are contested. A major goal of political framing is to get your version of contested concepts accepted by the voters. Messaging can then use these concepts and their language freely and effectively. That is how framing works generally—independent of whether the frames are used in politics. In politics, bi-conceptual voters can shift back and forth on an issue, depending on how the issue is framed in terms of higher-level political systems.<sup>10</sup>

What does that mean for political messaging? Lakoff explains:

Messages use words. The words activate frames. In political messages, you have a double intention: to get voters to think using your frames and to keep voters from thinking using the other side's frames, which contradict yours. Your message will be more effective if it fits existing high-level frames in the brains of voters, and less effective if it contradicts such high-level frames. Your goal, with bi-conceptual voters, is to activate your system of political frames and inhibit the other side's system of political frames. Your message should, therefore, fit your high-level frame system and it should not fit the other side's high-level frame system. If it fits the other side's high-level frame system, your message will be helping the other side, because it will tend to make voters think using their frame system.<sup>11</sup>

This means that racial justice advocates cannot simply preach to the choir. They need to recognize the reality of “bi-conceptuals” and make sure to constantly work to trigger the progressive frames in their minds. Advocates can only begin to create a transformative racial discourse in America when their progressive high-level moral frames are more readily invoked than the conservative ones. This means that they need to work relentlessly to set up an elaborate messaging system which can compete effectively with the successful system created by conservative advocates.<sup>12</sup> To do so, it is critical to first examine the dominant messages being presented through various media and academic outlets, to the public regarding integrated education.

#### **IV. Media Review**

In working to understand how the broader public conceptualizes any issue, it is important to conduct a media analysis to identify the predominant messages that are being communicated through traditional and online news outlets. While media cannot in and of itself tell us what to think, it can influence what we think about, and how we think about it.<sup>13</sup> An individual constructs their schemas around a given topic through multiple sources, one of which is the frames presented in the media. Intentionally or not, the media shapes how people think about integration by selecting the angle of the story, and connecting stories to the public's own existing schemas.<sup>14</sup> Research across the past thirty years on information-processing theory helps us better understand how existing frames dynamically interact with incoming information. People may be more attentive to information that is of interest to them, and most are able to incorporate incoming information, even if it conflicts with existing beliefs, that is, as long as the information is deemed relevant. One other item of note regarding cognitive research demonstrating the



impact of media on existing beliefs, if the information presented is relatively new to an individual, the more likely it is to be able to change the person's perception or views on the topic.<sup>15</sup> This is salient to this analysis as desegregation has been extensively discussed across the past half-century, and the less novel a news piece is, the more likely an individual is to fit it within an existing schema. This suggests a need to analyze the dominant frames that exist in the media around integration and an evaluation of how the issue can be reframed through strategic messaging to move people from their current schemas of school desegregation.

To examine the representation of desegregation, integration, and diversity in education, the Kirwan Institute reviewed news articles published nationally across the past 3 years. Given the 2007 Supreme Court Case *Parents Involved*, the resulting scramble to revise student assignment plans, the election of President Obama, and the economic downturn, this search resulted in hundreds of articles discussing integration. In addition, we also included in our review a number of online blogs including The Huffington Post, Education Week, Education News, EduWonk and This Week in Education. While these blogs represented a theoretical straddle between the news outlets and professional literature, they were included in this section as the audience for these blogs tends to be wider and more inclusive than journal articles or policy reports.

Certainly the issue of integration is complex, and the articles and blog entries reflected this. Focus within the articles and blog entries ranged from the short-term impacts on individuals to the long-term implications for the nation. While the complexity captured within the articles and blogs is difficult to boil down to a few generalizations, after the systematic review a few dominant themes emerged, though these themes varied between the "traditional" and the "new" media. Thus, these two mediums are discussed separately below.

## News Reports

News pieces and reports from periodicals were identified utilizing a number of online databases, using a combination of words and phrases including integration, school integration, economic integration, desegregation, school desegregation, and economic desegregation. Across these articles and reports there were far more frames used to promote or justify a return to neighborhood (segregated) schools than there were to support integration. The bulk of the articles identified the impediments to achieving integration. Though some attention was paid to why integration was necessary, there was little coverage highlighting encouraging examples or schools or districts successfully desegregating. The following represents an overview of the most prominent themes.

## Bussing/Neighborhood Schools

First, by and large the most oft-mentioned aspect related to integration was bussing. Bussing is





mentioned in the vast majority of articles as the one true impediment standing in the way of successful integration and a lack of support was demonstrated across a variety of groups. Articles cite parents opposed to long bus rides for their children as well as school board members who are adamant that the district cannot afford the transportation costs.

These messages include a focus on the expressed desires of parents and community members to return to neighborhood schools. The issue of local control is raised consistently, and many articles cite suburban parents' reluctance to "import outsiders" and urban parents' concerns about their children not fitting into a suburban school. While civil rights advocates are cautioning against the return to "separate but equal" (the latter never being the case), both suburban and urban parents alike are expressing a desire to have high quality schools regardless of the racial or class composition. African American families lament the loss of teachers and administrators of color who can relate to their children and serve as role models while white parents express their concern about resources being filtered to other schools and the impact of bussing students on community support and local ownership of the schools.

### Integration v. School Choice

A separate but related frame woven throughout the media coverage is the focus on school choice-be it vouchers for private education, charters or public school competition. Rarely, if ever, is the focus on how integration could be a successful component of school choice, but rather how instead of integration, parents are opting for other options.<sup>16</sup> A sub-dialogue about the impact that teachers' unions had in stifling creativity and innovation in the classroom was present throughout these articles as well. Few mentions were made of the role of charter schools in creating a more segregated system of education or the possibilities of creating a system of controlled choice.<sup>17</sup>

### Integration v. Academic Achievement

Not surprisingly, most discussions of integration centered on the issue of raising academic achievement. Achievement has become more narrowly defined over the years, and public discourse around high quality education focuses on this one component to a fault. The relationship between academic achievement and integration was set up most often as a binary one. Examples were often highlighted of diverse schools with a corresponding cautionary tale of how the school is in decline or suffering from depressed academic performance.<sup>18</sup> Parents quoted in articles often expressed their desire to send their children to a high quality school, regardless of whether it was integrated.

### Individual Agency

The source for the existing achievement gap most often was not attributed to segregation, or disparate educational opportunities between different segments of the population, but rather to individual agency. Academic achievement was suggested to be the result of neighborhood composition, familial status, or it was cloaked in subtle references to differences in cultural norms. Similarly, individual agency was also implicated in residential segregation. News articles reported on the ideology that it's an

"Schools can only work with what they have, there's already an achievement gap before the children put their first foot in the kindergarten door."  
*Linda Lanier, Florida Times Union.*

individual's choice to live where he or she wanted to, and that schools or the government do not have the right to intervene when personal preference was at play.

### Political/Legal Impediments

Not surprisingly given the recency of the *Parents Involved (PICS)* case, the political and legal impediments were emphasized in many articles. Coverage on *PICS* overwhelmingly identified it as a decision that limited school districts' powers to racially desegregate.<sup>19</sup> While this isn't wholly inaccurate, little if any mention was given of the legally permissible ways that race could still be used. Similarly, many news outlets highlighted the countless ways that school boards, teachers' unions and other federal education policies impede integration. Also included within this frame was a discussion of the achievement of "unitary status" by previously segregated districts. While occasionally this was examined critically, often articles celebrated the achievement of unitary status as a decisive move toward equality in education, even if the district statistics didn't reflect integration.

### Multiculturalism

In defense of integration, multiculturalism was often raised as a justification for the need for diversity.<sup>20</sup> Authors recognized the growing populations and shifting demographics that require schools and districts to address language barriers, and to ensure teachers are trained to work with culturally and racially diverse populations. A few articles recognized that the issue cannot be ignored, and that this is a critical issue that will have long term economic impacts for our nation if not fully addressed.

"...a model for  
resegregation will  
damage not only our  
state, but the basic  
principles of our nation."  
Rev. William Barber II  
CNN.com

### Sources of Continued Segregation

A few more nuanced articles covered the historical legacy of segregation and discussed the defacto segregation present in our neighborhoods and reflected in our schools, or the more recent return to segregation due to the *PICS* decision. Articles covering *Parents Involved* discussed many school districts' focus on socioeconomic integration, or their abandonment of student assignment policies altogether.

### Factors Excluded

Surprisingly, despite the multitude of articles dedicated to the topic of integration, there were a number of factors largely absent from their analyses. Statistics documenting the degree of segregation within and/or across districts were scarce and segregation was discussed more as an accepted fact about the state of education as opposed to a measurable phenomenon.<sup>21</sup> Despite the inherent racial implications in discussing segregation, authors often steered clear of specific mentions of race and focused instead on socioeconomic status.<sup>22</sup> Finally, there was little acknowledgement that true integration has never been achieved. Integration was conceptualized narrowly with an almost singular focus on student assignment plans. There was little to no recognition of integration plans or diversity best practices within buildings. Similarly, largely absent in the literature is the recognition of practices that function to separate students within buildings.

A cursory glance at the above frames illuminates the fact that the predominant message about integration in the media is that it is difficult, if not impossible, to achieve due to family/cultural values, neighborhood structures, political and legal forces, the need for high performing schools, whether public or private (a need that is in competition with, and supersedes, diversity), and the steep social and economic costs of integration. While some sources name the causes, benefits, and successful models of integration, the emphasis is more often placed on the challenges. Taken together, these messages interwoven throughout the media are contributing to a 20<sup>th</sup> century understanding of desegregation, not a 21<sup>st</sup> century vision of integration. The emphasis is placed on a historical idea of desegregation, not a modern day one of true integration. It feeds into a frame that pits integration against choice, against academic achievement, and against political will.

## **New Media**

Not surprisingly, given the increased sophistication of the authors and audiences, the blog entries represent a much more nuanced look at school desegregation which includes the complexities and challenges schools and districts face, but also places greater emphasis on its importance.

### **Recognition of the Complexity of Integration**

Among the blog posts there seemed to be a greater recognition of the complexity of integration, without the dismissiveness or pessimism found in the news articles. Authors did identify some of the challenges including legal, political, and social ones. Authors also often framed the issue of school desegregation as a controversial one, discussing how certain school officials and politicians specifically avoid conversations around integration because this topic is too politically charged. Nonetheless, with some school districts declared to have achieved unitary status and cries that assigning students to school on the basis of race is actually discriminatory, there was a sense of urgency in some posts that seemed to be saying this issue is on the brink of being rendered obsolete or unimportant. There was discussion as to how some argue for “race-neutrality” and say instead the focus should be on socioeconomic integration, which would help achieve racial integration. However, others argue that schools are clearly losing ground with respect to diversity by being “race-neutral.”

### **Language & Framing**

A myriad of terms were used in discussing desegregation in schools. Some posts focused on terms like “busing” and “neighborhood schools,” terms which carried negative connotations in their discussion. Others talked about school choice, income-based magnet plans, public charters, and student reassignment plans and the promise these practices held for integration. In discussing the merits of integration efforts, most framed it as an issue of ethics and equal opportunity, or emphasized the social value that integration holds. Others focused on the academic achievement of students and how integration is a necessary component to further equalizing student outcomes.

### **In-school & Residential Segregation**

Some blog posts framed this issue in a wider lens, discussing other factors that contribute to segregation in schools. For example, multiple posts discussed the larger problem of residential segregation and the importance that holds for schools. There were also discussions about the need to ensure segregation

did not happen within school buildings. Authors supported the idea that desegregation efforts within school districts were of little worth if students within a school were segregated through tracking practices or course assignments.

### **Legal analysis**

One trend present in posts about school integration related to the centrality of legal mandates to enforce desegregation efforts. Numerous authors briefly mentioned the social or academic arguments for desegregation, but then framed this as an issue that ultimately lies with the courts. If school districts were no longer under desegregation orders or federal court supervision, several authors felt that districts would not willingly continue to carry out integration plans. The extent to which school districts work toward integration appears directly linked to court mandates as opposed to the best interest of students.

Generally speaking, the blog posts present a more nuanced argument for school integration, and authors framed integration as a necessity to ensure the opportunity for equal outcomes for all students. Authors also cautioned against returning to a segregated system of education. Many expressed a fear that schools are moving backwards and returning to the era of widespread segregation, and illustrated this point with statistics showing some schools are more segregated now than they were a few years ago. Concern was consistently voiced about the return to neighborhood schools and what that would mean for integration.

Looking at the media both on and off line is incredibly useful, however it cannot tell the entire story. As mentioned previously, individuals have ideas and schemas that filter the incoming information, and they process it through many filters, including both implicit and explicit cognitions. Furthermore, people are complex. They can support integration in theory, but still place their child in a segregated school. They can even acknowledge the benefits of diversity, while still insisting that we maintain a system of neighborhood schools. The media is only as influential as its consumers. Thus, to understand the public's perception of integration, we have to turn to the people.

## **V. Focus Group Results**

To engage this question of how people think and feel about diversity, we conducted a number of focus groups across the country. In Montclair, NJ; Pitt County, NC; Minneapolis, MN; Archbold, OH; Cincinnati, OH; Carroll, OH; and Niles, OH we engaged over 250 people with a variety of different relationships to the public education system. In homogenous and heterogeneous groups we facilitated discussions between students, teachers, parents, school administrators, school board members, business leaders, policy makers, lawyers, religious leaders and more. We deliberately worked to ensure participants were racially, ethnically and economically diverse as well as from rural, urban and suburban areas. We also trained more than 20 focus group facilitators, with a deliberate effort to ensure the facilitators reflected the diversity of the participants.

The views expressed in the focus groups were widely divergent, though nearly every participant voiced appreciation for the opportunity to engage in the dialogue. The influence of regional particularities was visible across all focus groups; participants frequently contextualized the conversations with historical or recent lawsuits, student assignment plans, local politics, school closures, the presence of different racial and ethnic subgroups, etc. The following represents some of the dominant themes that emerged from the dialogues, and some of the variances expressed therein. A more in-depth examination of the Minneapolis focus groups appears in section VII of this report.

## Defining Diversity

Focus group participants broadly defined diversity with the recognition that it is multivariate and complex. Individuals mentioned race/ethnicity, gender, religion, socioeconomic status/poverty, culture, ability level, sexual orientation, language and familial characteristics such as education level, blended families and single-parent households.<sup>23</sup> While some defined diversity as the ability to recognize and



tolerate differences, others pushed back on this language and insisted that diversity includes respecting differences, not just tolerating them. One particularly interesting aspect of these conversations was the assertion and recognition that diversity is fluid; the meaning of diversity shifts within any given region, and a school can never have “achieved diversity” but rather it must be an ongoing process that is periodically revisited.

## Integration vs. Academic Achievement

As in the media review, the tension between diversity and academic achievement also arose in the focus groups.<sup>24</sup> Either because facilitators had given a brief presentation on the positive relationship between the two, or because focus group participants hold a more sophisticated analysis than the media messages convey, the understanding of the connections between diversity and academic achievement were much more nuanced. Overwhelmingly, participants mentioned the need for all schools to be high performing as one of their leading priorities. Parents also emphasized the importance of school ranking when making a decision about where to send their child. Other parents, however, recognized that the current conceptualization of “high performing” is limited, and doesn’t formally recognize the role that diversity plays in preparing students for living and working in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

“Diversity is overhyped, the focus should be on the quality of education for all students.”

## Diversity/ Cultural Competency in Schools

Nearly every focus group spent some time discussing the importance of having a culturally competent teaching force, administration, and school staff. For many, this was even prioritized over integration, as they felt culturally relevant/responsive teaching was a more important factor in raising academic

achievement. Participants discussed the role that a lack of diversity/cultural competency played in lowering expectations, sorting students of color and low income students into lower academic tracks, and increasing the number of students of color, particularly males, who are disciplined.

### **Limitations to Achieving Integration**

Given the varied experiences and backgrounds of participants, it is not surprising that they were able to list a wide range of limitations to achieving integration. Many of these participants have been involved in the efforts “on the ground” for decades. Focus group members acknowledged the financial costs of integration, not only for bussing, but also for resources and support to meet the needs of a diverse student body such as academic support, skillful school counselors, and trained social workers. Individuals spoke openly about racial and ethnic stereotypes and how they impede integration efforts as well as the ways in which prejudice and resistance are couched in “race neutral” terms. Those more familiar with the interworkings of the school also mentioned the sorting mechanisms in place within schools that limit integration even when numerical diversity is achieved. Finally, focus group participants recognized that schools were largely reflecting residential segregation. People expressed a frustration about the inability to disrupt residential segregation, and how entrenched racial isolation in neighborhoods necessitates some level of bussing. Some discussions focused on inter and intra district segregation as well, and the difficulties some school districts have in achieving diversity without regional integration plans.

### **Conflict between Personal & Professional Values**

One of the more under-theorized areas of integration, and one that appears to be critical to framing and messaging strategies, is the conflict many people have expressed between their personal and professional values. Overwhelmingly, participants expressed an appreciation for diversity, and the need for a more integrated, equitable system of education. However, many parents spoke up as well and admitted that, despite their support of and desire for diverse environments, ultimately they would and/or do choose to send their child to a high-performing, but segregated school. Unfortunately, the poor implementation of desegregation historically has parents feeling that a diverse school with the presence of a high need population may have too many challenges and not enough resources, therefore concluding that it may not be the best option for educating their child. This suggests a need to further explore this issue, and better understand parents’ perspectives, and their decision-making mechanisms.

### **The Appeal of Choice**

Parents and community members alike included vouchers, charters, and private schools in their discussions, though their support for or opposition to them varied widely. Some participants expressed concerns about the ways in which choice further segregates education both along lines of race/ethnicity, class or ability level by “cherry picking” the best students from the schools. Others lauded the increases in choice. Many parents felt that, when given choices, they were better equipped to find a school that could meet the needs of their child and increase his or her likelihood of academic success. We saw no racial or ethnic differences regarding the overarching support for or opposition of vouchers, charters, or private schools, though the reasons for support did vary. White parents were more likely to support



charters or magnets because of the curriculum flexibility and theme variability within the schools. Black parents more often mentioned the academic performance levels of the school, and the idea that their children would be more comfortable in a school where the student body and school staff more closely reflected their racial or ethnic background.

## Disagreement on Messages

As part of this process we set out to understand how people felt about and reacted to the various terms utilized when talking about desegregation, integration and diversity in education. Here's what we found:

- *Desegregation* is a politically charged term with a rich history. To many it implies bussing (i.e., reduced choice and/or forced integration), public resistance and our nation's failure to fulfill its promise.
- While *integration* has been defined by the social and education justice community much more inclusively, and is used to indicate numerical as well as transformative diversity, these connotations are not widely shared among the public.
- Importantly, we found that to most people, the terms *desegregation* and *integration* are interchangeable and there was no meaningful difference between the two.
- Finally, regarding *diversity*, most participants felt this was a hollow word with no real meaning behind it. People rejected it as a "catch phrase" that integration gatekeepers use to hide behind.

"Integration is a forced environment; people don't want to go there."

White Parent, Montclair  
New Jersey

## VI. Review of Professional Literature

Examining media reports of integration and focus group participants' perspectives gives us insight into the dominant schemas of the public. However, it is also critical to examine the frames the social justice field (broadly defined) is employing. In essence, it is important to review whether academics and policy organizations are effectively communicating to their targeted audiences by meeting them where they are cognitively and emotionally. It could be well argued that the outputs of these individuals and organizations are not directed to the larger public but rather to other academics or policy makers, but nonetheless, they are in part responsible for setting a national agenda on integration, defining the frames that are used, and the messages that ultimately are communicated. While certainly the conversation among these audiences can be more sophisticated and nuanced, there is a real need to ensure that targeted, effective messages are nonetheless developed that can bring the broader public into the conversation.

## Focus on Race

As compared to the media, research articles and policy reports are much more upfront about race, the racialized component of segregation, and the historical and present day contributors to it. Not surprisingly, there is also no lack of data or statistics utilized to support the authors' points about the extent or nature of segregation. Finally, in regards to race, some authors have become increasingly critical of the focus on racial integration being primarily on black/white populations. These authors recognize the complexity of diversity and argue that our integration policies should be much more inclusive and comprehensive.

## Recognition of the Role of Neighborhoods

The articles and reports reviewed identified the challenges that residential segregation presents and how it contributes to segregation within and across districts and schools. Furthermore, they also recognized the racialized processes involved in the historical (and even present day) drawing of district and school boundaries. Despite this clear linkage, these writings stop short of suggesting policy solutions to link residential and educational integration. When residential integration has been attempted, they examine the impact of housing mobility and school choice programs, typically reporting mixed results. One study published in the *Annual Review of Sociology* in 2009, highlighted some of the limitations of these programs, including the fact that students involved in the mobility programs are often not relocated to higher performing schools.<sup>25</sup>

## Focus on Class

Despite the more frank discussions about race as related to segregation, and the recognition of the racialized nature of the link between residential and school segregation, recent trends in the literature seem to be moving toward increased support of class-based integration.<sup>26</sup> This may be a result of a poor understanding of the *PICS* decision or because the research literature is more conclusive about the impact of socioeconomic integration on academic achievement, though racial integration has also demonstrated positive outcomes on academic achievement. Regardless, focusing solely on the academic benefits of integration inherently limits the conversation regarding the purpose of education in a democracy. The benefits of racial integration have also demonstrated long-term, positive social and psychological impacts, and integration has been linked to the development of a more stable and secure nation. The body of literature reviewed, however, seems to be much more narrowly focused on academic achievement.

Overall, the academic literature takes a much more critical and analytical approach to integration that emphasizes broadening options. This includes opening access through housing mobility and school choices for disadvantaged families in low opportunity areas, but also ensuring middle-class students can benefit from integrated environments as they grow into adults and begin working in increasingly diverse workplaces. Authors describe options: for families currently residing in districts where desegregation plans are being implemented; for districts to adopt comprehensive desegregation plans; and for evaluating the progress that such plans experience. The academic literature strongly dismisses the

media's perceived limitations to integration and isn't apprehensive to study what solutions are possible, though to date, the proposed solutions have not taken us far enough.

Taken together, these analyses represent the dominant frames and messages that are being communicated across multiple levels to a wide range of audiences. They give us some insight as to where people are, cognitively and emotionally, regarding the topic of school desegregation and true integration. Some preliminary conclusions can be drawn by examining the multiple channels of information being filtered and how they are being incorporated into peoples' existing schemas. First, clearly people are much more sophisticated than just idle recipients of the news. Their understanding of integration does not mesh squarely with the messages being communicated in the media, although there is some overlap. Their perspectives are much more nuanced and complex, by and large because of their experiences and the regional contexts and history of the areas where they reside.

This examination is inherently limited, however, because we are looking solely at what people willingly self-report in conversations with their peers, which may prompt them to give more socially desirable responses. This also does not take into account implicit or explicit bias, or the complexity of factors taken into consideration when people must take actions pertaining to integration, either in selecting a school for their child or in the voting booth. This analysis is not exhaustive enough to draw concrete, prescriptive conclusions about what messages should be employed to move people towards supporting integration, but they do represent a critical foundation upon which to begin building a more comprehensive understanding of how integration is conceptualized and acted upon. While we cannot yet prescribe specific language that should be utilized regarding integration, there is a body of literature pertaining to how to talk about race more broadly. An exploration of this can suggest possible next steps for researchers and advocates alike.

## **VII. Talking about Race & Integration: The Importance of Framing**

In order to move people and convince them to mobilize resources to reduce and eventually eliminate racial disparities in accessing opportunities, researchers, advocates, and policy makers need to shape their messages more effectively. Framing research shows that values and emotions, and not necessarily facts and reason, shape these frames. People frequently encounter a message that is framed in a way that does not resonate with their basic values. When this happens, they are more resistant to receiving the facts that pertain to the message, no matter how persuasive the facts are. It is, therefore, crucial for advocates to frame an issue effectively for it to gain traction in the political arena.

### **Basic Rules of Effective Framing**

Framing research reveals a number of rules for effective framing, which also apply to the issue of race. Effective frames lead with widely held values that cue people to what is at stake. Since people filter facts through their values, advocates need to signal a shared value system. This gives their audience permission to reach the conclusion advocates want them to reach with the facts that they provide.<sup>27</sup> In addition to leading with widely held values, effective frames also lead with solutions. Cognitive research shows that when people articulate a solution, their brains prepare a categorical schema within which

received information is stored and recalled.<sup>28</sup> In the absence of an articulated solution, listeners could reach a vastly different conclusion with the same facts. Articulating a solution also makes the problem look manageable, encouraging the listeners to act to solve the problem.

Framing research advises against leading with conflicting facts or statements. Research shows that doing so creates cognitive dissonance in the listener, triggering the “conflicting facts” frame. A person with this frame of mind discards conflicting facts as erroneous, choosing instead to affirm her/his pre-existing convictions on the issue.<sup>29</sup>

Framing research also suggests that listeners are more receptive to a solution if they can identify the problem as one that they could themselves face. Therefore, defining the problem as something that could happen to “us” rather than to some “other” makes it easier for listeners to identify with the issue. For this reason, it is important to define and control the “we” and to make it as inclusive as possible.<sup>30</sup>

The following section reviews many of the frames about racial inequality that compete with each other in the political arena. The review sifts through these frames, identifying those that enable us to talk about race in a constructive, transformative fashion. Based on the latest framing research, the section concludes by compiling the elements that work toward creating a transformative frame that could effectively move people and resources to remove structural barriers to expanding opportunity for all.

## Empirical Research On Effective Frames Regarding Race

### “Opportunity for All” Frame

FrameWorks Institute found a number of values that work well in making people receptive to a conversation about racial equity. Framing tests show that opportunity seems to be a value that most Americans hold. Talking about “opportunity for all,” especially removing the barriers that prevent all people from realizing a better life, seems to make audiences more receptive to hearing about the structural barriers to opportunity.<sup>31</sup> By suggesting that the country’s ability to achieve is undermined when not enough people have access to the resources and social networks needed to succeed, this frame suggests that enhancing opportunity will result in a better quality of life for all.

Framing research, however, suggests that the opportunity frame seems to work best when it refers to opportunity in symbiotic, collective ways such as the “opportunity for all” frame. For instance, the opportunity frame fails to become effective if opportunity is described only in terms of personal networks. When described like this, the opportunity frame runs the risk of “pushing the discussion back into the dominant frame of an individual-level understanding of racial disparities (‘who you know’).”<sup>32</sup> Without the “opportunity for all” frame, the opportunity frame may also invoke people to think that the issue is all about certain groups not taking advantage of opportunities that already exist—effectively triggering a “blame frame.”<sup>33</sup>

Focusing on who or what is responsible for present inequities can similarly trigger a “blame frame” and is not a constructive place to start a conversation on race. Social psychology research reveals that most people generate “blame frames” to deal with the tension between their sense of fairness and the

painful realities of injustice.<sup>34</sup> People frequently resort to the blame frame of “personal responsibility” to short-circuit discussions of structural racism in favor of the explanation that individuals are to blame for their station in life.<sup>35</sup>

“Blame frames” often devalue the concerns of marginalized groups in society by explaining racial disparities in access to opportunities and resources by the individual choices and behaviors of the members of these groups, making any structural analysis of these unequal outcomes impossible.<sup>36</sup> By framing opportunity in symbiotic and collective ways, advocates could preempt individualistic choice frames that put the blame squarely on the very people who are marginalized by structural racism. By doing so, they can also avoid the trap of pitting people up against each other, emphasizing the collective good that results from expanding “opportunity for all.”

### **“Fairness Between Places” Frame and the “Prosperity Grid” Model**

Research similarly shows that when starting a transformative conversation on race, the generic notion of fairness could be a problematic value to lead with unless it is specifically framed in non-individualistic terms. People have a tendency to have an individualistic approach to fairness and they tend to equate fair with equal. When the playing field is not level, this notion of fairness as equality can be used to reinforce and legitimize existing inequalities. For instance, many of the participants in the Minneapolis focus groups expressed that they struggled to explain to their constituents the fact that fair is not equal, suggesting the importance of equitable over equal. Even when explicitly framed in non-individualistic terms, the concept of fairness creates many impediments to a transformative conversation on race. Especially when framed by appealing to the value of fairness between groups, a racial conversation quickly degenerates into zero-sum thinking in which scarce resources are redistributed from one group to another.<sup>37</sup>

When framed by appealing to the value of fairness between places however, a racial conversation tends to generate support for race-based policies. In its investigation of rural issues and community health, FrameWorks Institute found that “situating the issue of fairness not in persons, but in places or systems, improved support for redistributive policy.”<sup>38</sup> The Institute’s findings suggested “the fairness between places frame is imbued with systems thinking, and identifies solutions that will reduce disparities across communities. When framed as being about place, in other words, the concept of fairness works to structuralize the issue of disparities.”<sup>39</sup> The “fairness between places” frame suggests that certain communities are struggling because programs and services are not fairly distributed across communities. The solution provided by this frame is to level the playing field so that all communities have equal access to the resources they need in order to thrive.

Further research by FrameWorks Institute also shows the effectiveness of a “prosperity grid” model in encouraging consideration of disparities in access to resources based on place.<sup>40</sup> This model, which draws from FrameWorks’ investigation of simplifying models, provides a metaphorical idea of communities being on or off the grid.<sup>41</sup> FrameWorks research revealed that the simplifying model of the “prosperity grid” allowed research participants to discuss structural differences among communities.

The model also increased the likelihood of these participants to support the redistribution of social resources in ways that would plug all communities into the grid.<sup>42</sup>

The “opportunity index” model developed by the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity is very similar to this model in expressing “the need to increase the flow of opportunity through the grid of American institutions, such as schools, hospitals, banks, etc.”<sup>43</sup> The “opportunity index” model is very compatible with the prosperity grid model: both of these models emphasize “the notion of ensuring that all areas of the country are plugged into the grid—or have strong connections to the institutions that support communities” as “a way to reduce racial disparities.”<sup>44</sup> These findings confirm the usefulness of the “opportunity index” model as a regional approach to opportunity—a model that smoothly lends itself to a spatial analysis of inequality.

Research also documents that most Americans still believe in the ideas of individual choice and meritocracy and view success as something that comes through the exercise of personal responsibility and good choice.<sup>45</sup> Explicitly challenging these widely held beliefs often prevents the audience from hearing the facts of the case as people tend to shut down when their closely held values are too forcefully challenged. Steering the conversation toward the positive results and outcomes being sought (e.g., quality education for all) and offering an alternative framework that can help reduce the intensity of this challenge instead, could be more effective in jumpstarting a transformative conversation on race.

### **“Shared Fates” Frame**

Another frame that seems to trigger a transformative conversation on race is the value of interdependence. Talking of America as “a nation of shared fates” moves people to see the reduction of disparities as critical to the common good and beneficial for all members of the society. Conversations framed through the lens of interdependence and “shared fate” also encourages people to envision solutions and changes.<sup>46</sup> By focusing on the notion of “shared fate,” advocates can overcome the limitations imposed by individualistic thinking pervasive among Americans. This allows them to talk about the instances when the systems all people rely on break down, and to offer solutions to fix those systems.

### **Toward a Transformative Discourse on Race & Integration: True Integration**

John Powell offers the concept of true integration as the focal point of a transformative conversation on race.<sup>47</sup> In the tradition of Martin Luther King, Jr., he describes integration as the positive acceptance of desegregation and the welcomed participation of people of color into the total range of human activities. Powell distinguishes true integration from desegregation, describing the latter as merely negative and eliminative.

For Powell, desegregation, at best, attempts to assimilate people of color into the mainstream. In contrast, true integration is transformative, rather than assimilative. It both transforms and enriches the mainstream. True integration is not just about representation. It constitutes the structures we inhabit and make us who we are—forming both “the table and the people at the table.” True integration is creative; it respects inter-group relations based on mutuality, equality, and fairness.



True integration does not merely mean the presence of diversity. Diverse environments can still be segregated. For instance, diversifying schools through simple desegregation efforts often result in assimilation, in-school segregation, and tracking of students into different academic paths in schools. Simply seating a white student next to a student of color might achieve diversity but not integration. powell conceptualizes integration both as an external and internal process, emphasizing the “need to integrate not only the students inside the building but the hearts and minds of the students as well.”<sup>48</sup>

True integration is an important societal value worth pursuing in itself for a number of reasons. True integration is crucial because continuing segregation makes it very difficult to cultivate effective citizens and social cohesion. The American education system needs to bring together students from different backgrounds, expand their opportunities, and prepare them for the multicultural realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. America will lose its prominence in an increasingly global world if its education system fails to achieve this.

True integration in education also has a number of benefits that improve the chances of all students to succeed in an increasingly multicultural, global society. True integration improves critical thinking; raises academic achievement and graduation rates; fosters inter-group contact; avoids tracking and disproportionate discipline and special education designations across racial and ethnic groups; increases parental involvement; and reduces residential segregation.

## **Minneapolis Focus Group Findings: How To Frame The Concepts of Race and Integration?**

### **How can we make the concept of integration more relevant to the 21<sup>st</sup> century?**

In focus groups held in Minneapolis, some advocates of color argued that the word integration felt too anachronistic in this day and age and held too many negative connotations to be helpful in the future. They suggested that the term referred to a black and white era and did not adequately speak to the multicultural realities of 21<sup>st</sup> century America.

Many expressed the need to find another concept that could capture the essence of integration without triggering the frames associated with desegregation, assimilation, and diversity. Some of the focus group participants suggested the concept of “inclusion” or “inclusive communities,” while others offered the concept of “equity” or “equitable communities.”

### **Equity or integration?**

Among those who proposed the “equity” frame, there was some confusion as to whether they valued integration as an end in itself or not. Some of these participants viewed integration not as an end in itself; instead, they conceptualized it as simply one component, among many, of a more equitable education system. It might be useful in the future to test the effectiveness of the “equity” frame and explore what it means to have an instrumental approach to integration within the “equity” frame.

Other participants, in contrast, reiterated the importance of holding on to the concept of integration, suggesting that it is a value in itself worth striving for—a value that we have not yet achieved. Some

participants of color stressed that the concept of integration and its benefits were tenuous and vague in people's minds. These participants expressed the urgent need to better define the concept and its benefits for the public in an attempt to proactively make it part of the public discourse.

### **How can we resuscitate the notion of integration in the current political discourse?**

Some participants also emphasized the urgency of having an explicit statewide conversation on race and integration, especially in light of coming elections. One participant of color concurred, reiterating the need to make race part of the current political domain in proactive yet strategic ways. She suggested, for instance, that focus group members generate a list of questions that could be posed to political candidates prior to upcoming elections to shed light on their stance on race and integration.

Many participants agreed that publicly engaging the candidates specifically on racial issues could be an effective strategy to place racial integration on the current political agenda. One participant, however, warned the group about the reluctance of individual candidates to make honest statements about race in public. He noted, instead, the strategic usefulness of bringing racial issues to the political platform in a systematic fashion without putting individual candidates on the spot. He encouraged racial justice advocates to create innovative and constructive public platforms where candidates could articulate their position on integration in the safety of a collective setting.

### **Challenging and overcoming the context of No Child Left Behind: the need to replace "achievement vs. integration" with "achievement through integration"**

Another participant observed the difficulties that the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) policy and the accompanying achievement gap discourse created for those who want to talk about integration. She claimed the achievement gap discourse has negatively framed the integration conversation by pitting integration against academic achievement. In a similar vein, a participant of color noted that the achievement gap discourse created a deficiency frame for students of color by portraying them as less than white students. Many agreed on the need to challenge the achievement gap discourse, which inappropriately portrays integration and academic achievement as mutually exclusive goals.

Others went beyond the need to challenge this discourse and emphasized the importance of transforming this frame. They emphasized the need to shift the current educational conversation from the deficiency frame implied by the achievement gap lens to a new, more positive frame about integration and achievement. They claimed that reframing integration as a means to academic achievement might be an effective way to frame and introduce existing evidence on the academic benefits of integration.

### **Can integration survive the dominant frame of school choice in the new century?**

One participant brought up the notion of school choice, suggesting that it makes any meaningful integration impossible in contemporary school environments. Others, by contrast, noted the need to come to terms with school choice in talking about integration. They stressed the need to acknowledge the importance of school choice for many families, especially families of color who are trapped in segregated neighborhoods. It might be worthwhile in future research to explore some specific frames that advocates could use when the values of choice and integration clash in people's minds.

This is especially important in cases where the dominant frame sets up the discourse as one where choice trumps integration. For instance, within the dominant frame of current political debate on charter schools, school choice has often implicitly trumped integration as a value. Charter school advocates often refer to school choice as the “civil rights issue of the 21<sup>st</sup> century,” explicitly appealing to the popularity of school choice among parents of color who continue to be dissatisfied with racially segregated, failing public schools while simultaneously suffering from integration fatigue.

### **How can we overcome integration fatigue?**

Conservative charter school advocates have been effective in using the “choice as the new civil rights issue” frame to advocate for the steady expansion of school choice in public education, and to tap into the indignation felt by many in communities of color who experience integration fatigue. They have been especially successful in using this frame to promote in-place educational strategies that send the message that students of color should be able to achieve wherever they are, even in racially-segregated, high-poverty schools. They have thus aggressively challenged the relevance of mobility-based educational strategies that emphasize the need to move students of color to high-opportunity schools, which are often predominantly white.

By effectively using the “civil rights” frame, conservative charter school opponents have undermined a transformative race conversation in three significant ways:

First, by framing school choice as the exclusive means to realize civil rights and to access educational opportunities, they have almost sealed the fate of choice and integration as mutually exclusive notions that cannot be reconciled. Second, they have almost entirely displaced integration from the existing civil rights discourse, replacing it with a frame that suggests that only school choice, not integration, can deliver civil rights for all. Third, they have reinforced existing inequalities by effectively pitting in-place and mobility-based education strategists against each other, undermining their ability to work in tandem in attacking the structures that shrink opportunity for all.

By reducing civil rights to choice, these conservative advocates have effectively limited the political agenda of addressing racial equity to one solution- the unlimited expansion of school choice even when this means intensifying racial segregation in public schools. They have, therefore, rubberstamped the simple policy of moving students of color from racially segregated traditional public schools to equally, if not more, segregated charter schools.

To this day, this policy continues to undermine the access of all students to high-quality educational opportunities. If racial justice advocates do not at once reframe the many frames that pit integration against school choice (often at the total expense of integration), it will continue to do so. There is an urgent need to offer a new frame where the concepts of choice and integration can coexist. Many participants in the focus groups expressed the urgency of this need in sophisticated and elegant terms.

### **Can we have choice *and* integration?**

One participant suggested voluntary integration through magnet schools as a possible way out. Another one disagreed by claiming that voluntary integration through magnet schools is often conceived as

“moving chairs on Titanic’s deck” if it cannot eliminate existing structural barriers to opportunity. Many others expressed the need to make sure that magnet schools are not simply putting students of different colors next to each other without truly integrating them.

Participants emphasized the importance of additional policies to achieve true integration. Noteworthy among these suggestions were: diversifying the teaching force; offering effective professional development to teachers to enhance their cultural competence; providing a truly integrated curriculum that can engage students from a wide variety of backgrounds; and creating opportunities that could promote social interactions among students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds outside of schools.

### **Should we discuss integration in “moral” or “economic” terms? Which one is more effective?**

Another interesting theme that came up during the focus group discussions concerned the use of “economic” vs. “moral” frames in discussing integration. Participants disagreed about which of these frames was more effective. One participant argued that integration is primarily a moral issue and should be framed as such. In contrast, another participant noted that it was impossible in his experience to change people’s minds on education policy simply based on moral arguments. Quite the contrary, he stated the need to frame integration exclusively from an economic point of view to convince skeptics, especially in the context of the current economic recession.

Based on their experiences working within religious communities, other participants emphasized the usefulness of the concept of integration in enabling white people to root out their privilege and giving them an opportunity to confess. Along similar lines, one participant who specialized in training people in cultural competence stressed the spiritual dimension of racial justice. She argued that racial justice advocates would not be doing anyone a service by avoiding a religious frame on integration. Eventually, one participant explicitly refused to formulate the two frames as mutually exclusive ones, suggesting instead the need to use both in a complimentary fashion. The same participant, who originally suggested the exclusive use of a moral framework, expressed the group’s consensus elegantly: “We need to provide people with reasons to do the morally right thing.”

Another important thread within this conversation was the potential effectiveness of the “economic frame,” especially when it was expressed in global terms. Many participants expressed their skepticism of a simple global economic frame that poses integration as something beneficial to national economies operating in an increasingly global market place. Some participants of color suggested that white people did not really buy this frame. Other participants doubted that this global frame was necessarily effective for transforming the minds of those who do not really understand the importance of integration for a healthy society. They argued that it was difficult for people to imagine the complex global system of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Can a visually oriented, specific “regional economic frame” be more persuasive than an abstract and generic “global economic frame?”**

It might be useful to further explore the effectiveness of this global framework in future framing research. While the effectiveness of a global economic framework might be limited due to the difficulty

of imagining a complex global system, framing the economic importance of integration from a metropolitan perspective could be easier to comprehend. By using regional real estate value maps that show eroding real estate values in racially segregated communities, for instance, advocates can visually demonstrate the real economic harms racial segregation imposes on inner-ring suburbs and urban cores of metropolitan areas. By visually demonstrating the growing economic costs of racial segregation for metropolitan areas, advocates of racial justice could then discuss how these costs undermine metropolitan growth.

They can carefully interpret these maps for their audience, making sure to clarify that it is not the presence of people of color but the prevalence of structural racism in a region that suppresses real estate values in these communities. They can attribute these economic costs specifically to the racially motivated exclusive zoning policies of suburban communities and to the federal public housing policies that lead to a disproportionate concentration of low-income housing in racially segregated communities. They can show that these very real costs result from continuing racial segregation in a region's schools that concentrate poverty in racially segregated schools and neighborhoods.

Advocates can talk specifically about the racially biased lending practices that deprive communities of color from acquiring their fair share of loans in the region—loans that they need to fix their homes, to build their business, and to improve their communities. They can establish the indisputable responsibility of real estate agents in imposing these costs on the region by highlighting their steering practices.

National fair housing studies suggest that real estate agents in numerous communities still continue to steer white families away from racially diverse neighborhoods while steering families of color into these very same neighborhoods. These real estate practices make it inevitable that racially diverse communities eventually become racially segregated. Racial justice advocates can discuss specific steering instances from their own regions to demonstrate the continuing presence of these destructive practices. Leading with these instances, they can advocate for the need to establish regional institutions that could monitor these steering practices through paired testing studies.

## **VIII. The Way Forward**

True integration is far from being the reality of the 21<sup>st</sup> century America. Much work remains to be done to make it a reality. The Ford Foundation could play a significant role in laying the foundation of this work by sponsoring three types of activities:

### **Need for Further Framing Research**

Framing helps us navigate the flow of information and satisfies our need to make sense of the world, particularly when we are conflicted over issues like integration. Racial justice advocates still have a long way to go in figuring out how to talk about race in transformative ways.

For instance, the findings of the focus groups confirmed the urgent need to challenge the achievement gap discourse, which inappropriately portrays integration and achievement as mutually exclusive goals. We need to talk about academic excellence and integration in new ways, reframing integration as a means to academic achievement. This might be a very effective way to introduce existing evidence on the academic and societal benefits of integration. But we cannot be sure until future framing studies confirm this.

In future research, it might be useful to further explore the effectiveness of a global vs. regional economic framework in framing integration. Expanding the repertoire of racial justice advocates, especially by exploring new frames such as religious ones, could also be a useful strategy. After all, the Civil Rights Movement was born in faith organizations and it is most likely to flourish in these organizations in the near future. Future framing research could, for instance, explore the effectiveness of a redemption frame in talking about integration.

Future framing research should also specifically focus on the following questions:

- How does the “equity” frame interact with the “opportunity for all” frame in people’s minds?
- Does the “equity” frame undermine or reinforce “the opportunity for all” frame?
- In what form might the “equity” frame run into the risk of triggering a zero-sum mindset? How could the concept of “equity” be framed to avoid such a mindset?
- How can we frame the conversation effectively when the values of “choice” and “integration” clash in people’s minds to make sure that school choice does not trump integration as a value?

## The Need for a Specific Agenda

Framing must go hand in hand with many other social investments to bring about the institutional changes necessary to achieve true integration.

- We need to start out by defining what a truly integrated curriculum, classroom, school, district, region, state, and nation look like and then work to make these a reality.
- We need to create challenging, engaging, and culturally relevant curriculums.
- We need to equip teachers with the skills and knowledge to create safe, supportive, and inclusive classrooms and schools.
- We need to train teachers, administrators and staff to be culturally competent in order to make them more responsive to the needs of an increasingly diverse student body.
- We need to harness the genuine benefits of diversity within and across schools.
- We need to realize meaningful diversity goals in all educational institutions by aggressively recruiting teachers/administrators/staff of color and by working with teachers’ unions to eliminate union rules that discourage the hiring of teachers of color.



- We need to continue to clarify, in the post-*Parents Involved* era, the options that are legally available to school districts in pursuing truly integrated schools; and we need to disseminate this information widely. Post-*Parents Involved*, school districts are still free to pursue socioeconomic integration, using indicators such as income, wealth, and any indicator of parental education levels. According to the Supreme Court, school districts can also be race conscious when they draw school boundaries, choose sites for new schools, and direct money to particular programs. But they are limited to taking into account the racial composition of a *neighborhood* rather than the race of an individual student. Post-*Parents Involved*, school districts still have access to numerous race-conscious policies and practices including: the use of race-conscious programs (such as magnet schools) or attendance zones; the targeted recruiting of students and faculty; the tracking of enrollment and performance by race; and the option of tying integration plans closely to educational goals. They can also use inter-district transfer programs or develop inter-district magnet schools to alleviate racial isolation and increase educational performance.

Thanks to a generous grant by the Ford Foundation, the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity already surveyed institutions/individuals to identify those who are working on integration in school districts. It has also begun taking stock of the numerous ways integration has been used by different constituencies. In this project, the Institute ran focus groups in multiple communities to better articulate the understanding of desegregation and the messaging and framing of true integration. Among these communities, we have achieved many indicators of success; the work in the Twin Cities metropolitan area has been especially promising.

### **The Need for an Exemplary Case To Demonstrate Possibilities**

In order to capitalize on the extensive work it has done in the Twin Cities, the Kirwan Institute is proposing to run a pilot project in this region. This pilot project would involve the following activities:

1. Training regional racial justice advocates on framing and messaging based on the results of the focus groups held in the Twin Cities.
2. Assisting racial justice advocates in constructively creating avenues to use this training in educating parents, elected community leaders, and other activists to promote true integration in upcoming school board and general elections.
3. Keeping the important links between housing and schools in the front end of current political discussions. After all, eliminating segregation from communities will remain a challenge unless we address it simultaneously in schools and neighborhoods.
4. Assisting racial justice advocates in stubbornly reiterating a regional frame that clearly states that as long as housing and job markets remain regional, we need to keep seeking solutions to segregation that are appropriately regional in scope. The Kirwan Institute will also provide them with assistance in making the case that solutions that fall short of this scope tend to trigger the re-segregation of neighborhoods and schools, wiping out any significant gains toward true integration.

## **The Twin Cities Metropolitan Area: “The Right Place at the Right Time” to Facilitate Collective Action around Integration**

The Twin Cities metropolitan area is a particularly appropriate region for a pilot project. The region already has three unique inter-district integration districts that continue to make efforts to promote integration in the urban core and the increasingly diverse inner-ring suburbs. Moreover, the State of Minnesota has a unique Integration Revenue Program, which allocates state aid to school districts and the three inter-district integration districts to assist them in their voluntary integration efforts. The program, which distributes more than \$80 million in education dollars statewide, provides significant resources to these school districts.

In addition, the pilot could yield positive results immediately due to the specific circumstances in the State of Minnesota. Recently, the very existence of the Integration Revenue Program is jeopardized and this provides unique opportunities for the region’s racial justice advocates to bring up and reframe the issue of integration in a transformative fashion. In the last legislative session, state representatives took on the program in response to a state audit of the program by the Office of the Legislative Auditor (OLA). The OLA noted the persistence of some significant conceptual and implementation problems associated with the program and urged the legislature to restructure the program.

Given the recent severe recession and the accompanying state budget cuts, many in the Capitol moved to kill this program. Racial justice advocates managed to stall these moves by requesting, instead, the formation of a task force that could improve the existing program. But so far, the formation of this task force has been delayed, and it is not certain to happen. Many consultants and advocacy organizations working with the Kirwan Institute (including Caty Royce and members of ISAIAH—a regional faith-based organization that works for social justice) and various Kirwan staff members are collectively working to make sure that the task force is convened.<sup>49</sup>

In addition, they are also currently arranging meetings with many of the focus group participants in order to ensure that the make up of the task force reflects the opinions of the region’s racially diverse community. The buy-in of these focus group participants (important members of the community) will also help the Kirwan Institute impact the framing of the message that will come out of this task force. The Kirwan Institute also has close ties with the Institute on Race and Poverty in Minneapolis—another institutional ally in the region which recently proposed a comprehensive regional, incentive-based plan to integrate the region’s schools.

Funding from the Ford Foundation to support these activities could make a crucial difference in building crucial momentum and moving the region toward ‘true integration’. The Twin Cities metropolitan area can become an exemplary region to demonstrate the possibility of realizing ‘true integration’ at the nation’s metropolitan areas with generous help from the Ford Foundation. The nation urgently needs such an example to really turn America into a ‘post-racial’ society.

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Rudd, Annette Johnson, Cheryl Staats, John A. Powell, Andrew Grant-Thomas, "Toward a Transformative Agenda: Resource Notebook," *Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity*, Working Paper, August 2009, pp. 7-8.

<sup>2</sup> Drew Westen, *The Political Brain: The Role of Emotion in Deciding the Fate of the Nation*. (New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> For details of 'color-blind racism', see Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> For a study that shows that 'color-blind racism' was an extremely powerful predictor of opposition to programs such as affirmative action, see Philip J. Mazocco and D. W. Newhart, "Color-Blind Racism and Opposition to Progressive Racial Policy: A New Scale and Supportive Findings," 2006 (unpublished manuscript available upon request from the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity). For a study that shows that race-conscious messages will be resisted by some, especially conservative groups, but only if these messages are not carefully constructed, see Philip Mazzocco, "The Dangers of *Not* Speaking About Race: A Summary of Research Affirming the Merits of a Color-Conscious Approach to Racial Communication and Equity," (Columbus, Ohio: Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, May 2006). The study shows that merely talking about racial disparities actually reduces support for progressive policy among conservatives. However, when all the color-blind frames are addressed simultaneously, opposition declines appreciably.

<sup>5</sup> For more research on the ineffectiveness of race-neutral strategies and examples of actual political campaigns that succeeded with race-conscious messages, see The Center for Social Inclusion, *Thinking Change: Race, Framing and the Public Conversation on Diversity. What Social Science Tells Advocates About Winning Support for Racial Justice Policies*. (New York, NY): 2005.

<sup>6</sup> Philip Mazzocco, "The Dangers of *Not* Speaking About Race: A Summary of Research Affirming the Merits of a Color-Conscious Approach to Racial Communication and Equity," (Columbus, Ohio: Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, May 2006), p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Philip Mazzocco, "The Dangers of *Not* Speaking About Race: A Summary of Research Affirming the Merits of a Color-Conscious Approach to Racial Communication and Equity," (Columbus, Ohio: Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, May 2006), p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> 'High-level frames,' which are deeper values in an individual's cognitive system, tend to matter more to people. George Lakoff argues that "in politics, the high-level frames are the moral systems that define what is 'right' for a conservative or progressive." For more on 'high-level moral frames' and 'frame systems,' see George Lakoff, "Disaster Messaging," *Huffington Post*, July 8, 2010, available at [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/george-lakoff/disaster-messaging\\_b\\_639040.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/george-lakoff/disaster-messaging_b_639040.html) (accessed 07/23/2010).

<sup>9</sup> George Lakoff, "Disaster Messaging," *Huffington Post*, July 8, 2010, available at [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/george-lakoff/disaster-messaging\\_b\\_639040.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/george-lakoff/disaster-messaging_b_639040.html) (accessed 07/23/2010).

<sup>10</sup> George Lakoff, "Disaster Messaging," *Huffington Post*, July 8, 2010, available at [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/george-lakoff/disaster-messaging\\_b\\_639040.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/george-lakoff/disaster-messaging_b_639040.html) (accessed 07/23/2010).

<sup>11</sup> George Lakoff, "Disaster Messaging," *Huffington Post*, July 8, 2010, available at [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/george-lakoff/disaster-messaging\\_b\\_639040.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/george-lakoff/disaster-messaging_b_639040.html) (accessed 07/23/2010).

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- <sup>12</sup> For a discussion of what this successful conservative messaging system entails, see George Lakoff, "Disaster Messaging," *Huffington Post*, July 8, 2010, available at [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/george-lakoff/disaster-messaging\\_b\\_639040.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/george-lakoff/disaster-messaging_b_639040.html) (accessed 07/23/2010).
- <sup>13</sup> Robert M. Entman. How the Media Affect What People Think: An Information Processing Approach. *The Journal of Politics* (1989), 51 : 347-370 Cambridge University Press.
- <sup>14</sup> Robert M. Entman. 2007. Framing bias: Media in the distribution of power. *Journal of Communication*, 57(1):163–173.
- <sup>15</sup> Robert M. Entman. 2007. Framing bias: Media in the distribution of power. *Journal of Communication*, 57(1):163–173.
- <sup>16</sup> See for example: Hacker, Holly K., Hobbs, Tawnell D. (2010, June 6). Black flight changing DISD makeup. *The Dallas Morning News*. <http://www.dallasnews.com>.
- <sup>17</sup> One place this did appear was in a review of an academic report at: Chang, C. (2010, June 8). Minnesota report blasts racial segregation in New Orleans public schools. *The Times-Picayune*. [http://www.nola.com/education/index.ssf/2010/06/minnesota\\_report\\_finds\\_racism.html](http://www.nola.com/education/index.ssf/2010/06/minnesota_report_finds_racism.html)
- <sup>18</sup> See for example: Poulou, P. (2010, June 10). Diverse High School Battles Low Test Scores, High Drop-out Rate. *Voice of America*. <http://www1.voanews.com/english/news/education/Diverse-High-School-Battles-Low-Test-Scores-High-Drop-out-Rate-95789904.html>
- <sup>19</sup> See for example: Lawsuit challenges JCPS student assignment plan. June 16, 2010. [www.fox41.com](http://www.fox41.com).
- <sup>20</sup> See this well represented by two high school students at: Durrani, Haris, Manely, Cole. (2010, June 14). Bubble-Wrapped: Beyond Staples, Students Face Higher Levels of Diversity. *Inkling News*. Retrieved from: <http://inklingnews.com/archives/6786>
- <sup>21</sup> For an example of an article documenting school disparities more comprehensively see: Palka, Mary Kelli. (2010, June 18). One Duval school gets left behind, while another thrives. *The Florida Times Union*. Retrieved from: <http://jacksonville.com/news/metro/2010-06-04/story/one-school-gets-left-behind-while-another-one-thrives>.
- <sup>22</sup> See for example this article which suggests race is a factor but never directly addresses it: Buist, Steve. (2010, June 17). Income integration needs to be addressed. *TheSpec.com*. Retrieved from: <http://www.thespec.com/printArticle/790583>.
- <sup>23</sup> The Kirwan Institute. Final Report on Diversity Strategies to the Ohio State Board of Education. Draft in progress.
- <sup>24</sup> See a full discussion of this at: The Kirwan Institute. (2010, March 10). Montclair Public Schools: Focus Groups Final Report. Online at: <http://kirwaninstitute.org/publicationspresentations/publications/>.
- <sup>25</sup> DeLuca, Stefanie, Dayton, Elizabeth. (2009). Switching Social Contexts: The Effects of Housing Mobility and School Choice Programs on Youth Outcomes. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 35, 457-491.
- <sup>26</sup> Kurlaender, Michal, Yun, John T. Measuring. (February 2007). Measuring School Racial Composition and Student Outcomes in a Multiracial Society. *American Journal of Education*, 113, 213-242.
- <sup>27</sup> Bill Kennedy, Emily Fisher and Colin Bailey, "Framing in Race-Conscious, Antipoverty Advocacy: A Science-Based Guide to Delivering Your Most Persuasive Message," *Clearinghouse Review Journal of Poverty Law and Policy* (Jan/Feb 2010): 408-421, p. 414.
- <sup>28</sup> Bill Kennedy, Emily Fisher and Colin Bailey, "Framing in Race-Conscious, Antipoverty Advocacy: A Science-Based Guide to Delivering Your Most Persuasive Message," *Clearinghouse Review Journal of Poverty Law and Policy* (Jan/Feb 2010): 408-421, p. 419.

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<sup>29</sup> Bill Kennedy, Emily Fisher and Colin Bailey, "Framing in Race-Conscious, Antipoverty Advocacy: A Science-Based Guide to Delivering Your Most Persuasive Message," *Clearinghouse Review Journal of Poverty Law and Policy* (Jan/Feb 2010): 408-421, p. 420.

<sup>30</sup> Bill Kennedy, Emily Fisher and Colin Bailey, "Framing in Race-Conscious, Antipoverty Advocacy: A Science-Based Guide to Delivering Your Most Persuasive Message," *Clearinghouse Review Journal of Poverty Law and Policy* (Jan/Feb 2010): 408-421, p. 420.

<sup>31</sup> Bill Kennedy, Emily Fisher and Colin Bailey, "Framing in Race-Conscious, Antipoverty Advocacy: A Science-Based Guide to Delivering Your Most Persuasive Message," *Clearinghouse Review Journal of Poverty Law and Policy* (Jan/Feb 2010): 408-421, p. 416.

<sup>32</sup> FrameWorks Institute, "Talking About Disparities: The Effect of Frame Choices on Support for Race-Based Policies: A FrameWorks Institute Message Brief," p. 8.

<sup>33</sup> FrameWorks Institute, "Talking About Disparities: The Effect of Frame Choices on Support for Race-Based Policies: A FrameWorks Institute Message Brief," p. 8.

<sup>34</sup> Jon Hanson and Kathleen Hanson, "The Blame Frame: Justifying (Racial) Injustice in America," *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review*, vol. 41 (2006), especially pp. 413, 416-417, 427-428.

<sup>35</sup> Bill Kennedy, Emily Fisher and Colin Bailey, "Framing in Race-Conscious, Antipoverty Advocacy: A Science-Based Guide to Delivering Your Most Persuasive Message," *Clearinghouse Review Journal of Poverty Law and Policy* (Jan/Feb 2010): 408-421, p. 414.

<sup>36</sup> Bill Kennedy, Emily Fisher and Colin Bailey, "Framing in Race-Conscious, Antipoverty Advocacy: A Science-Based Guide to Delivering Your Most Persuasive Message," *Clearinghouse Review Journal of Poverty Law and Policy* (Jan/Feb 2010): 408-421, p. 414.

<sup>37</sup> FrameWorks Institute, "Talking About Disparities: The Effect of Frame Choices on Support for Race-Based Policies: A FrameWorks Institute Message Brief," p. 10.

<sup>38</sup> FrameWorks Institute, "Talking About Disparities: The Effect of Frame Choices on Support for Race-Based Policies: A FrameWorks Institute Message Brief," p. 10.

<sup>39</sup> FrameWorks Institute, "Talking About Disparities: The Effect of Frame Choices on Support for Race-Based Policies: A FrameWorks Institute Message Brief," p. 10.

<sup>40</sup> FrameWorks Institute, "Talking About Disparities: The Effect of Frame Choices on Support for Race-Based Policies: A FrameWorks Institute Message Brief," p. 10.

<sup>41</sup> For a definition of simplifying models and an explanation of FrameWorks' research methods, see <http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/methods.html>.

<sup>42</sup> FrameWorks Institute, "Talking About Disparities: The Effect of Frame Choices on Support for Race-Based Policies: A FrameWorks Institute Message Brief," p. 10.

<sup>43</sup> FrameWorks Institute, "Talking About Disparities: The Effect of Frame Choices on Support for Race-Based Policies: A FrameWorks Institute Message Brief," p. 10.

<sup>44</sup> FrameWorks Institute, "Talking About Disparities: The Effect of Frame Choices on Support for Race-Based Policies: A FrameWorks Institute Message Brief," p. 10.

<sup>45</sup> Bill Kennedy, Emily Fisher and Colin Bailey, "Framing in Race-Conscious, Antipoverty Advocacy: A Science-Based Guide to Delivering Your Most Persuasive Message," *Clearinghouse Review Journal of Poverty Law and Policy* (Jan/Feb 2010): 408-421, p. 415.

<sup>46</sup> FrameWorks Institute, "Talking About Disparities: The Effect of Frame Choices on Support for Race-Based Policies: A FrameWorks Institute Message Brief," p. 8.

<sup>47</sup> John Powell, "A New Theory of Integrated Education: True Integration," in John Charles Boger and Gary Orfield (eds.) *School Resegregation: Must the South Turn Back?* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), pp. 281-304.

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<sup>48</sup> john powell, "A New Theory of Integrated Education: True Integration," in John Charles Boger and Gary Orfield (eds.) *School Resegregation: Must the South Turn Back?* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), pp. 281-304.