

What Social Science Research from the Last 20 Years Says About the Effects of Integrated Education on Achievement Outcomes

Roslyn Arlin Mickelson, Ph.D.
Professor of Sociology, Public Policy,
Women & Gender Studies, and Information Technology
UNC Charlotte
RoslynMickelson@uncc.edu

Remarks to the Minnesota Education Commission Task Force on Integrated Schools
December 20, 2011

Good afternoon. I'm delighted to be here. I wish to thank the Task Force for inviting me to share with you the results of my research findings about integrated education and school outcomes. Since 2005, my research team and I have located, reviewed, and synthesized over 500 studies about the relationship of school racial and socioeconomic status (SES) composition to various outcomes. My remarks today will focus on academic outcomes across the life course and their implications for educational policy.

Primary Findings The most important conclusion of my research is that creating diverse schools and avoiding racially isolated ones can contribute significantly (a) to narrowing the race and SES gaps in educational outcomes and (b) to improving achievement for all students. Here is the basis of my claims:

- The preponderance of social science disseminated in the past 20 years indicates that the racial and SES composition of schools significantly contributes to the quality of their educational opportunities, and
- When compared with their otherwise comparable peers who attend schools with high concentrations of low-income and /or disadvantaged minority youth, students who attend diverse schools are more likely
 - To achieve higher test scores and grades;
 - To graduate from high school;
 - And to attend and graduate from college
- Attending a diverse school promotes achievement in mathematics, science, language and reading.
- Achievement benefits accrue to students in all grades but most markedly those in middle and high school
- Youth from all racial and SES backgrounds can benefit from diverse learning schools—including middle class whites.

- But low-income disadvantaged minority youth appear to benefit the most from diverse schools
- Importantly, there is no systematic evidence that integrated schooling harms any student group.

Reasons Integration Fosters Achievement We know the probable reasons racially and socioeconomically diverse schools are better. Integrated schools are more likely to have

- Stable highly qualified teaching force (Jackson, 2009)
- Supportive professional climate for teachers
- Greater parental and community involvement
- Curricular and pedagogic continuity for teachers and students
- Fewer poor and minority children identified for special education (Skiba et al., 2008).
- Academically oriented peers create a virtuous cycle of positive behavioral and academic performance norms and share their social and cultural capital.
- An academic climate that inhibits automaticity in thinking, and one that triggers deeper, higher order thinking (Gurin et al 2002).

Examples of contemporary studies Four studies that illustrate what I've described.

- In 2009 Eric Hanushek, John Kain and Steven Rivkin focused on how school racial composition affects scholastic achievement with a rich longitudinal dataset from the Texas. They disentangled racial composition effects from other aspects of school quality and from differences in abilities and family background. Their results show that a higher percentage of Black schoolmates has a strong adverse effect on the mathematics achievement of Blacks and, that the negative effects are most powerful for Black youth in the upper half of the skill distribution.
- Douglas Harris (2006) used NCLB test score data to analyze the effects of segregation in more than 22,000 schools across the country that enroll more than 18 million students. He found that African Americans and Hispanics learn more math and reading in integrated schools.
- Stephanie Southworth (2010) examined the effects of racial and poverty composition of schools on North Carolina students' reading and math achievement gain scores from fourth through eighth grade. She found that students who attend racially balanced, low poverty schools have significantly higher achievement than students in any other type of school.
- Dennis Condrón (2009) investigated both school and neighborhood contributions to gaps among 1st graders reading and math achievement gain scores with a nationally representative dataset. He concluded the single most important factor contributing to achievement gap is school racial segregation.

The Bottom Line By relying on two decades of high quality social science research across multiple disciplines, my findings undermine the fiction that integration efforts fail to improve academic achievement and that there is little value in pursuing school diversity.

The two law review articles I distributed to the Task Force illustrate the meticulous and painstaking analysis I conducted to obtain the results on which I base my claims. In addition, I have developed a user-friendly electronic database into which I have entered detailed abstracts of the 500 studies on which I base this testimony. It is available at: <http://sociology.uncc.edu/people/rmickelson/spivackFrameset.html>

Integrated K-12 Schools and the Life Course As a sociologist of education, I am interested in situating schools in their social context, across time and space, and in relationship to other social institutions. I find it useful to consider integrated K-12 education in a life course perspective as illustrated by Figure 1.

Figure 1. Heuristic Model of Dynamics of Integrated Schooling, Life Course Outcomes, and Social Cohesion in Multiethnic Democratic Societies

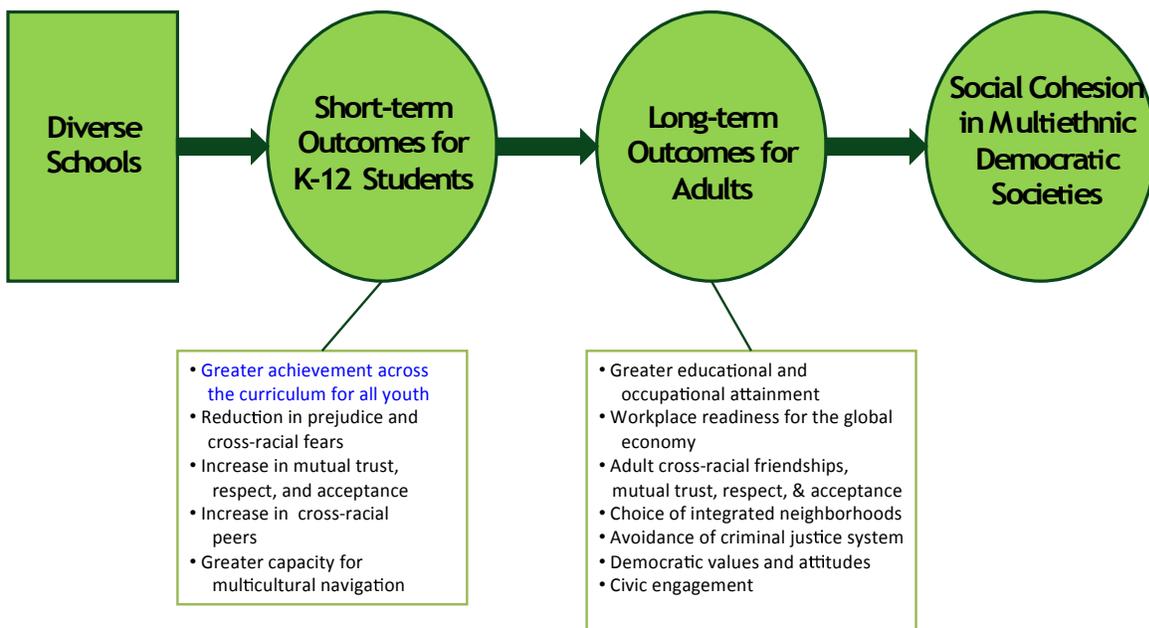
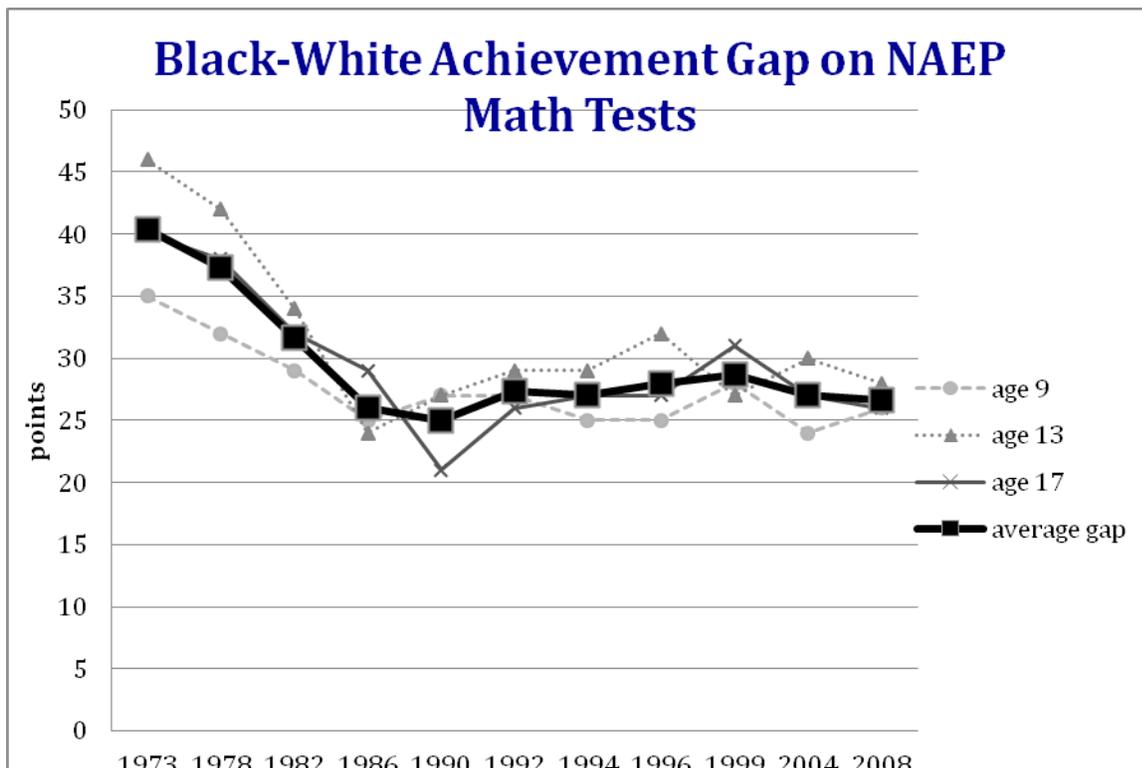


Figure 1 indicates integrated K-12 education is positively related to short-term outcomes that include academic achievement and intergroup relations (about which Prof. Tropp will speak).

The short-term outcomes, in turn, positively influence a host of long-term outcomes that a part of the adult life-course trajectory. These include higher educational and occupational attainment, workforce readiness for the global economy, and avoidance of the criminal justice system, greater civic participation, and greater likelihood of choosing to live in an integrated neighborhood. Together these long-term outcomes contribute to greater social cohesion in our multiethnic, democratic society—an outcome most Americans cherish (Mickelson & Nkomo 2012).

Contemporary School Reform Approaches to Closing the Achievement Gaps Current efforts to improve educational outcomes generally focus on improving curricula, enhancing teacher quality, school choice, and the big three: standards, assessments, and accountability. Today policy makers pay much less attention to the role of racial segregation and concentrated school poverty than in the past. In my view, this is shortsighted because of the mounting body of research that shows students who attend integrated schools make much more academic progress than their counterparts in segregated ones.

Recent history reflects this relationship: Race and SES gaps in school outcomes were once much worse than they are at present. Beginning in the 1970s they systematically narrowed. This closure of the gaps coincided with the period when public schools were desegregating. The narrowing gaps has stagnated. This cessation overlaps with the period when the trend toward greater integration faltered and began to reverse. While correlation is not causality, there is striking evidence to suggest that the two phenomena are, in fact, related (Vigdor & Ludwig, 2008). The figure below illustrates these trends with NAEP math scores since 1973.



Policy Implications of Resegregating Schools Should we be concerned about the resegregation of our schools? My answer is a resounding “Yes.” I find resegregation deeply alarming for three reasons.

1. The scientific record indicates integrated education is beneficial
2. It is unlikely that any child can receive a high quality and equitable education in a racially segregated school.
3. Segregation undermines many, if not most, of the benefits brought by other reforms designed to achieve excellence and equity in public education.

My conclusions differ sharply from those of Prof. Armor. One reason for the discrepancies in our reading of the scientific literature may be that I rely on research from the last 20 years. This body of research shows clear and consistent evidence of the benefits of integrated education. In fact, prior to the late 1980s, much of the research was equivocal about the benefits of desegregation efforts. But beginning in the late 1980s, social science on the topic changed dramatically. Newer studies emerged that have these qualities:

- Data are from nationally representative samples or statewide populations.
- Assessments of desegregation plans are done long after they were implemented.
- Valid and reliable measures of key concepts are employed.
- Often data are longitudinal.
- Advanced statistical models are used to capture the fact that students were nested in classrooms, in schools, and so on.
- Advanced statistics effectively disentangle school race effects from school socioeconomic status effects.

Perhaps Prof. Armor’s conclusions rely on an incomplete review of current research or they draw primarily from older studies. His amicus brief in support of the petitioners in *Parents Involved* suffered from both of these shortcomings. I provide details of his amicus brief’s shortcomings in my *Ohio State Law Review* article (Mickelson 2008), but for today, I draw your attention to Table 1 which compares the number and age of the citations in five of the most important social science amicus briefs filed in *PICS*.

As you can see, amici who support integrated education as a compelling state interest relied on many more studies and more recent research than the amici who found no value in integrated education—a point also noted by the National Academy of Education’s analysis of *PICS* amicus briefs.

Table 1 PICS Social Science Amicus Briefs by Number of Sources Used and Age of Studies Cited

Author	N of Studies	% since 1990
Murphy et al.	20	45
Armor et al	29	48
APA	57	80
AERA	54	79
553 Social Scientists	213	73

Source: Mickelson, 2008 ($\chi^2 = 51.181, p < .001$)

Creating Integrated Schools Let me return to my findings: I trust I have persuaded you of the potential of integrated to improve education for all children. While there are obstacles to creating integrated education, they are surmountable.

First, educators and policy makers often are hamstrung by a widespread public misperception that diverse schools are at best mediocre and at worst a chaotic mess. The public narrative needs to distinguish between schools that are truly in crisis and the majority that are successful, or even exemplary—many of which are integrated by race and SES.

Second, districts that desire to create diverse schools frequently do not have resources to do so. Resource deficits range from insufficient transportation funds to inadequate technical expertise. This fact highlights the importance of this Task Force’s work!

Third, educational decision-makers too often misuse or ignore research if empirical findings do not support their favorite policies. For reforms to be successful, they must be based on scientific evidence, not anecdotes, or ideology.

Fourth, continued efforts to make segregated schools ‘work’ are rarely successful and even more rarely sustainable beyond the first year. None are scalable. Such efforts’ almost certain failures reinforce negative public perceptions of the students who attend segregated schools. This dynamic makes it difficult to convince skeptical parents that their own children will thrive in an integrated middle-class school if “those children from the projects and the trailer parks” are also enrolled.

What Policy-Makers Can Do to Build Support for Integrated Education Social science evidence may be necessary but it is far from sufficient for influencing public policy, judicial decisions, or changing public opinion on controversial issues like school diversity. One key thing for policy-makers to consider is changing the dominant narrative about integrated schooling. Leadership is needed to disseminate the evidence that racially and socioeconomically diverse schools are desirable placed to send all children

Given that achievement is ‘the coin of the realm’, publicize that diverse schools benefit all students academically---including middle-class whites.

Point to the corporate world and the military where diversity is considered essential for success and efficiency. In fact, according to the latest NAEP results, students in the fully integrated Department of Defense schools outperform public school students overall, and racial gaps are much smaller than in public schools even though the poverty rates are comparable (Winerup, 2011).

Coordinate housing and education policies. Given the demographic homogeneity of many of our residential communities and the widespread use of a neighborhood basis of school assignments, housing policy is *de facto* education policy. Attempting to create education policies for diversity without developing housing policies for diversity is akin to cleaning the air on one side of a screen door.

As Figure 2 illustrates, coordinating housing and education policy will foster greater residential and educational diversity and assist in breaking the intergenerational transmission of racial and socioeconomic disadvantages that segregated schools and segregated housing both reflect and perpetuate.

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