

MARSHALLIANCE



The Thurgood Marshall Alliance

Strengthening Schools and Communities through Diversity

“Unless our children begin to learn together, there is little hope that our people will ever begin to live together.”

– Justice Thurgood Marshall, Milliken v. Bradley dissent (1974)

The last several decades have seen a dispiriting retreat from school desegregation as public policy: the hard-won advances made in the post-*Brown* era have yielded to white flight, middle class flight and an unsympathetic Supreme Court.¹

Yet research shows that poor and minority children who are segregated in high-poverty schools apart from others are disadvantaged, both educationally and in their later life prospects. Also disadvantaged are the non-poor and non-minority children who are separated from them, if only by virtue of that separation.²

Now, though, is an opportune time to reverse course. The shamefully high levels of school segregation existing today, and the damage caused by them,³ have begun attracting considerable media interest⁴ and advocates for a renewed commitment to desegregate America’s public schools have a passionate ally in Secretary of Education John King: “...the best thing we can do for all children – black or white; rich or poor – is give them a chance to attend strong, socioeconomically diverse schools.”⁵

There is movement on the ground as well – still small relative to the task at hand, but real momentum nonetheless.⁶ Many of today’s parents are more cosmopolitan than their parents and grandparents ever were. They value the vitality and amenities of urban life, including an embrace of the diversity that is 21st century America.

But while many say they want a diverse school experience for their children, these parents also have high standards.⁷ That is why recent diversity initiatives have prioritized making schools more attractive to the kinds of families who have been abandoning them. Magnet schools with themed curricula were created with that goal in mind. They had some success in pushing back against the tide of resegregation and a new vision has begun gaining traction: magnet schools paired with across-district enrollments. Hartford, Connecticut has been at the vanguard,⁸ and here in Maryland,

a like initiative, coined “Next Generation Schools,” has attracted considerable interest.⁹ Another strategy involves charter schools of choice with an explicit diversity agenda.¹⁰ There is also the Moving to Opportunity program, and others like it, that enable poor families to relocate from high-poverty communities to ones with much lower poverty rates, where their children have access to what are thought to be better schools.¹¹

These commendable initiatives are grounded in parental choice, not coercion, and that is a good thing, but they oblige parents to move their children to schools outside their local or original communities. This risks disrupting the communities those families are leaving and weakening their neighborhood schools (neither, though, is inevitable).

The Thurgood Marshall Alliance (TMA) advances a radically different approach, encouraging parents who have choices to remain in place and opt into their neighborhood zoned school. Promoting diversity at the local level has the potential to be truly transformative, as the vast majority of the nation’s public school children attend neighborhood schools.

For Horace Mann, whose leadership in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts helped establish our system of universal, free public education (the first such system throughout the world), diversity in the schoolhouse was an embodiment our democratic ideal: “Education is best provided in schools embracing children of all religious, social, and ethnic backgrounds.”¹² Sadly, Mann’s vision today is more aspirational than real. Partly this is owing to the high levels of residential segregation that prevail throughout the United States,¹³ but even in communities that encompass families of diverse background, that diversity rarely is reflected in the makeup of their schools.

In Baltimore, the vast majority of public elementary school students attend zoned neighborhood schools, but many of Baltimore’s middle class families send their children to charter, private, or parochial schools. As a result, 84% of the Baltimore public school enrollment is low-income, even though only 61% of children in Baltimore live in low-income households.¹⁴

Half of Baltimore families with preschool age children move out of the city by the time their children are kindergarten age.¹⁵ And at least half of Baltimore’s middle income families who choose to stay in the city send their children to independent schools¹⁶ or hope for a favorable lottery draw so their children can attend one of the well-regarded public charter schools (these schools have waitlists that number in the thousands).

The challenge for Baltimore, and other cities like Baltimore, is how to retain these families; to encourage them to commit to their local communities, to bring to bear their considerable resources and influence in support of the city’s children and their schools, and to help strengthen the social fabric. TMA believes there is a viable path forward.

An inspection of Baltimore’s neighborhoods reveals that many of the city’s public schools would be economically and racially integrated if more middle-income residents living in or near the school zone enrolled their children in the zoned school that serves their community. To encourage more families to stay local and to improve the educational experiences of the students already attending those schools, TMA will work with local partners to help sustain a set of zoned schools that offer everything families of means expect of an excellent school and that Baltimore’s needy families and their children deserve.

TMA will provide technical assistance to schools whose leaders commit to prioritizing economic and racial diversity. This vision combines social justice with educational efficacy: children attending TMA member schools will experience authentic integration in a setting that embraces children of all backgrounds and employs research-validated best practices to support their academic and social development. As centers of excellence, TMA schools will appeal to parents of all backgrounds who want their children to be part of a diverse school community.

TMA will offer a broad range of supports to partner schools, including:

- technical assistance for implementing best practices around academics and school climate;
- as in many community schools, supplemental resources for family wraparound services (e.g., health screening and wellness programming; trauma-related supports);
- help securing high-quality extended time learning opportunities, including after-school and summer programming; and
- assistance with outreach and communications to meet diversity enrollment targets.

TMA will partner with zoned neighborhood schools that pledge to follow a set of core principles and practices, including:

- Setting an enrollment goal that is majority or near majority middle class with the balance low income families and no single race/ethnicity comprising more than 60% of the enrollment;
- Prioritizing inclusive educational programming, so that the school's diversity infuses children's daily experience;
- Providing holistic student and family supports, including health and mental health services and afterschool and summer learning opportunities; and
- Committing to fully serve all children, including those with special needs and those for whom English is a second language.

TMA is projected to launch in the 2018 – 2019 school year with three schools initially and adding three schools annually thereafter. During this developmental phase, TMA is forging the many partnerships that will be needed to effectively provide its services. When operational, it will:

1. coordinate and deploy technical expertise from within Hopkins and the wider Baltimore community in the areas of programming and practice that require strengthening in its member schools;
2. draw on the experience of other schools in the area - zoned, charter and independent – that have created and sustained inclusive learning communities;
3. engage with parents in TMA schools and communities so that its work will be informed by a deep understanding of their needs and interests.

Strong schools can anchor strong communities and strong communities will support strong schools. A successful Thurgood Marshall Alliance will benefit the children who attend its schools and foster a shared sense of community by bridging communities that, in segregated America, rarely intersect. A successful diversity initiative centered on neighborhood schools in Baltimore can be a model for cities across the country that face similar challenges.

¹ G. Orfield & S. Eaton. 1997. *Dismantling Desegregation: The Quiet Reversal of Brown v. Board of Education*. The New Press; G. Orfield & C. Lee. 2007; *Historic Reversals, Accelerating Resegregation, and the Need for New Integration Strategies*, Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Civil Rights Project.

² R. Mickelson. March 2015. "School Integration and K-12 Educational Outcomes: A Quick Synthesis of Social Science Evidence," The National Coalition on School Diversity. Research Brief No. 5; A. S. Wells, L. Fox, & D. Cordova-Cobo. February 2016. "How Racially Diverse Schools and Classrooms Can Benefit All Children," The Century Foundation; G. Siegel-Hawely. ND. "How Non-Minority Students Also Benefit from Racially Diverse Schools," Research Brief No. 8, The National Coalition on School Diversity; A. Kamenetz. 2015. "The Evidence that White Children Benefit from Integrated Schools," <http://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2015/10/19/446085513/the-evidence-that-white-children-benefit-from-integrated-schools>.

³ G. Orfield & C. Lee. 2005. *Why Segregation Matters: Poverty and Educational Inequality*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University.

⁴ E.g., G. Theoharis, October 2015. "Forced Busing Didn't Fail. Desegregation is the Best Way to Improve Our Schools," *The Washington Post*, 2015; R. Rothstein, April 2014. "How, after 60 years, Brown v. Board of Education succeeded — and didn't," *The Washington Post*, 2014; N. Hannah-Jones interview with Ira Glass. "The Problem We All Live With." *This American Life*, NPR, July 31, 2015.

⁵ J. King, January 2016. "What We Ought to Be: Educational Opportunity, Civil Rights, and the Every Student Succeeds Act". <http://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/what-we-ought-be>

⁶ A. Semuals. March 2015. "The City that Believed in Desegregation: Integration Isn't Easy, But Louisville, Kentucky Has Decided that It's Worth It," *The Atlantic*; H. Potter & K. Quick. February, 2016. *A New Wave of School Integration: Districts and Charters Pursuing Socioeconomic Diversity*, The Century Foundation.

⁷ A. S. Wells, L. Fox, and D. Cordova-Cobo. February 2016. "How Racially Diverse Schools and Classrooms Can Benefit All Children," The Century Foundation.

⁸ <http://www.newhavenmagnetschools.com/index.php/interdistrict-program>

⁹ http://www.newdealleaders.org/leader_ferguson_bill; S. Eaton. June 26, 2013. "Years After a Landmark Court Decision, Connecticut's Solution to Segregation Shows Promise: Can It Inform Action in Baltimore?," The Abell Report.

¹⁰ See, for example, National Coalition of Diverse Charter Schools, <http://www.diversecharters.org/>

¹¹ See Moving to Opportunity for Fair Housing at <http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/programdescription/mto>

¹² H. Mann (1838) "Six fundamental Propositions of Education," *The Common School Journal*.

¹³ D. S. Massey & N. A. Deaton. 1993. *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*. Harvard University Press; S. D. Massey & S. Brodmann. 2014. *Spheres of Influence: The Social Ecology of Race and Class Inequality*. NY: Russell Sage Foundation.

¹⁴ Baltimore City Public Schools. 2014. "By the Numbers." Retrieved from http://www.baltimorecityschools.org/about/by_the_numbers; J. Malter. April 29, 2015. *Baltimore's Economy in Black and White* retrieved from: <http://money.cnn.com/2015/04/29/news/economy/baltimore-economy/>

¹⁵ F. Connolly, J. Gregg, C. Cronister & S. D'Souza. December 2015. "Born in Baltimore." Baltimore Educational Research Consortium.

¹⁶ American Community Survey 2006 – 2010. Accessed through the National Center for Education Statistics, School District Demographics System at <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/edge/tables.aspx?ds=acs&y=2010>