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The Future of School Integration: Socioeconomic Diversity as an Education Reform Strategy, Edited by Richard D. Kahlenberg (Century Foundation 2012), 397 Pages

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BOOK REVIEW

**THE FUTURE OF SCHOOL INTEGRATION:
SOCIOECONOMIC DIVERSITY AS AN EDUCATION REFORM
STRATEGY, EDITED BY RICHARD D. KAHLENBERG (CENTURY
FOUNDATION 2012), 397 PAGES**

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The last decade has seen a quiet but steady expansion of interest in using socioeconomic diversity in schools to improve educational outcomes. Ten years ago, only a few school districts around the country used formal strategies to integrate their schools along class lines.¹ Today, over eighty school districts around the United States, together educating around four million students, ensure that poor children are taught alongside middle-class and wealthier children through a variety of voluntary integration programs.² The message of *The Future of School Integration: Socioeconomic Diversity as an Education Reform Strategy*, the important new book edited by Richard Kahlenberg, is simple: these strategies are more educationally effective than other reform strategies; they are more cost effective; and recognizing these facts has important implications for a number of pressing law-reform choices at the federal, state, and local levels.

Kahlenberg, a senior fellow at the Century Foundation, is the country's leading expert in socioeconomic school integration. The compelling research he has assembled in this volume unfolds in three parts. The first part makes the case for the educational and budgetary value of socioeconomic integration. Heather Schwartz's chapter shows that low-income children who had the opportunity through a county public housing program to live in lower-poverty neighborhoods and attend lower-poverty elementary schools significantly outperformed their peers in public housing who remained in high-poverty schools—even though those high-poverty schools were receiving extra funds for academic

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1. THE FUTURE OF SCHOOL INTEGRATION: SOCIOECONOMIC DIVERSITY AS AN EDUCATION REFORM STRATEGY 2 (Richard D. Kahlenberg ed., 2012).

2. *Id.*

interventions, and even though the students in those high-poverty schools with extra funds were outperforming students in demographically similar schools that were not receiving extra funds.³

Jeanne Reid's contribution makes a similar case at the preschool level, finding that low-income children learn more in classrooms that have a greater share of middle-class children, even though high-poverty preschool classrooms are more likely to include valuable social services.⁴ Marco Basile performs a cost-benefit analysis of a hypothetical nationwide effort to reduce socioeconomic segregation by half of its national level through a series of voluntary assignment programs at the local and regional levels. He concludes that the benefits (estimated as the returns on increased high school graduation rates associated with increased academic achievement) significantly outweigh the costs (estimated as the increase in costs to create magnet programs and other incentives to integrate).⁵ The return on investment he calculates surpasses the returns of other widely discussed educational reforms, such as reducing class size, improving teacher quality, or offering vouchers.⁶ Together, the chapters in Part I demonstrate the practical value of socioeconomic integration as educational reform.

Part II turns to the logistics and politics of socioeconomic school integration. Two chapters by different teams of researchers examine a variety of issues associated with the question of whether such integration is even possible nationwide, including the variety of school quality within districts with high-poverty schools, school capacity in neighboring districts with lower-poverty schools, and feasible travel accommodations.⁷ They conclude that a combination of intra-district and inter-district socioeconomic integration efforts could substantially lower the proportion of high-poverty schools and meaningfully increase access to better schools for low-income students around the country. If these chapters demonstrate that these efforts are logistically feasible, the chapter by Sheneka Williams shows that such efforts can be politically feasible, too.

3. Heather Schwartz, *Housing Policy Is School Policy: Economically Integrative Housing Promotes Academic Success in Montgomery County, Maryland*, in *THE FUTURE OF SCHOOL INTEGRATION*, *supra* note 1, at 27-65.

4. Jeanne L. Reid, *Socioeconomic Diversity and Early Learning: The Missing Link in Policy for High-Quality Preschools*, in *THE FUTURE OF SCHOOL INTEGRATION*, *supra* note 1, at 67-125.

5. Marco Basile, *The Cost-Effectiveness of Socioeconomic School Integration*, in *THE FUTURE OF SCHOOL INTEGRATION*, *supra* note 1, at 127-51.

6. *Id.* at 149-50.

7. Ann Mantil, Anne G. Perkins, & Stephanie Aberger, *The Challenge of High Poverty Schools: How Feasible Is Socioeconomic School Integration?*, in *THE FUTURE OF SCHOOL INTEGRATION*, *supra* note 1, at 155-222; Meredith P. Richards, Kori J. Stroub, & Jennifer Jellison Holme, *Can NCLB Choice Work? Modeling the Effects of Interdistrict Choice on Student Access to Higher-Performing Schools*, in *THE FUTURE OF SCHOOL INTEGRATION*, *supra* note 1, at 223-256.

Williams presents case studies of several districts that have successfully introduced and retained socioeconomic integration strategies, analyzing how the stakeholders in those districts worked through a variety of political challenges that arose.⁸

Part III, Kahlenberg's own contribution to the collection, relates the book's findings to an ongoing policy debate of central importance in Washington and beyond: how to improve high-poverty, low-performing schools.⁹ Kahlenberg dismisses as inadequate the two most popular reform strategies: replacing the principal and teachers on the one hand and attempting to scale up successful high-poverty charter schools on the other. Both of these options, he explains, ignore the lessons about the educational value of socioeconomically integrated schools, and thus won't work. Indeed, despite the well-publicized successes of a few admirable high-poverty charters and charter networks, these schools have certain design features that limit their scalability. The book thus ends where it began, with a call for serious attention to socioeconomic school integration as the best hope of the education reform movement.

The empirical evidence marshaled in the book is persuasive. There are, of course, other useful ways to approach the question of school integration—for example, a moral one grounded in ideas about equality or human capabilities, or a historical one rooted in this country's sorry legacy of racial prejudice and conflict—but the book's approach provides a valuable perspective in this technocratic, budget-conscious moment. And this is an important moment for the possibility of socioeconomic integration, with increasing academic and popular attention to its importance and feasibility¹⁰ and with the erosion of voluntary racial integration efforts.¹¹ It is also a critical moment of policy choices, as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act will likely be reauthorized soon. *The Future of School Integration* speaks directly to a number of the choices that will need to be made, one way or another, in that Act, and recommends a way forward. Creating socioeconomically integrated

8. Sheneka M. Williams, *The Politics of Maintaining Balanced Schools: An Examination of Three Districts*, in *THE FUTURE OF SCHOOL INTEGRATION*, *supra* note 1, at 257–279.

9. Richard D. Kahlenberg, *Turnaround Schools and Charter Schools That Work: Moving Beyond Separate but Equal*, in *THE FUTURE OF SCHOOL INTEGRATION*, *supra* note 1, at 283–308.

10. See, e.g., MICHAEL J. PETRILLI, *THE DIVERSE SCHOOLS DILEMMA: A PARENT'S GUIDE TO SOCIOECONOMICALLY MIXED PUBLIC SCHOOLS 2012*; JENNIFER BURNS STILLMAN, *GENTRIFICATION AND SCHOOLS: THE PROCESS OF INTEGRATION WHEN WHITES REVERSE FLIGHT; WHITHER OPPORTUNITY?: RISING INEQUALITY, SCHOOLS, AND CHILDREN'S LIFE CHANCES* (Greg J. Duncan & Richard Murnane eds., 2011).

11. *Parents Involved in Cmty. Schs. v. Seattle Sch. Dist. No. 1*, 551 U.S. 701 (2007) (limiting, although not entirely banning, use of race in public school assignment); James E. Ryan, *The Supreme Court and Voluntary Integration*, 121 *HARV. L. REV.* 131 (2007).

schools through means such as magnet programs should be the Act's first choice to fix failing high-poverty schools, the book argues, rather than keeping the student body in place and tinkering with the staff and governance model.¹² More generally, the book contends, funding structures in the ESEA and competitive grant programs such as Race to the Top should incentivize states and districts to pursue socioeconomic integration in a variety of ways, from setting broad priorities to providing specifically allocated funds for strategies such as inter-district transfers and regional magnet programs.¹³

Other federal policies are implicated as well. For example, Head Start has long focused only on children in poverty, despite the hope of some of its founders that it would provide a measure of socioeconomic integration. But the research in the book suggests that children would be better served in a program that either included middle-income families as well or that was entirely reimagined as a support structure to complement state pre-K programs.¹⁴ And there are many things states and districts can do on their own, without federal incentives or policy changes. Magnet programs, regional school districts, and voluntary choice programs are, at bottom, state and local decisions.¹⁵ So are affordable housing programs, and, as the contribution by Heather Schwartz shows so dramatically, "housing policy is school policy."¹⁶

To be sure, there are some difficulties associated with socioeconomic school integration that the book does not address. While the book recognizes the existence of geographic and demographic constraints in some areas of the country, as well as the complexities of political and design challenges associated with achieving integration, the book says very little about the educational, cultural, and social challenges *within* socioeconomically diverse schools. The book notes in passing that the

12. Kahlenberg, *supra* note 9, at 308.

13. Mantil et al., *supra* note 7, at 208. In a forthcoming article, I explain that congressional modifications to entrenched spending programs and congressional creation of standalone grant programs are unlikely to succumb to the Supreme Court's new coercion analysis under the Spending Clause. See generally Eloise Pasachoff, *NFIB v. Sebelius, the Spending Clause, and the Future of Federal Education Law*, 62 AM. U. L. REV. __ (forthcoming 2013). All of the reforms discussed here should therefore face no serious constitutional hurdle.

14. Reid, *supra* note 4, at 120-21. I have previously written about the politics of reforming Head Start. Eloise Pasachoff, *Block Grants, Early Childhood Education, and the Reauthorization of Head Start: From Positional Conflict to Interest-Based Agreement*, 111 PENN. ST. L. REV. 349 (2006). The strategies I discussed in that article are applicable to the types of reforms Reid presents in her chapter.

15. Mantil et al., *supra* note 7, at 184-85, 210-11.

16. Schwartz, *supra* note 3, at 27 (quoting David Rusk, *Trends in School Segregation*, in *DIVIDED WE FAIL: COMING TOGETHER THROUGH SCHOOL CHOICE: THE REPORT OF THE CENTURY FOUNDATION TASK FORCE ON THE COMMON SCHOOL* 2002).

poor children in Schwartz's study did better in socioeconomically diverse schools even when they were congregated in lower-track math classes,¹⁷ but it could have done more to address research on segregation within schools. What if children from different backgrounds are regularly or exclusively tracked into identifiably different classes or self-select to sit at different lunch tables? What if tension arises between different parent groups? What are the factors within socioeconomically diverse schools that make integration work? And what does the research say about the effect of socioeconomically diverse schools on the performance of middle-income, higher-achieving students? These are questions to which policy makers (and parents) might want answers before adopting or advocating for socioeconomically diverse schools, and the absence of attention to these questions in the book renders it a useful but not comprehensive source on the matter.¹⁸

Such gaps, however, do not undercut the book's critical contributions on the subjects it addresses. These contributions provide reason to hope that the socioeconomic integration that has been successful in eighty districts serving four million students can expand to more of the nation's thirteen thousand districts serving fifty million students.¹⁹ While the scope of such a scale-up is large, the current programs are hardly isolated phenomena: they exist in large districts and small, in red states and blue, in every region of the country.²⁰ Moreover, the number of children served by socioeconomic integration programs exceeds the number of children educated in charter schools,²¹ which receive so much attention as an education-reform strategy. As the book explains, "[t]he problem is . . . not a lack of innovative ideas on how to reduce socioeconomic isolation at the district and regional levels. Rather, the main barrier is the assumption that school segregation is an ugly but unchanging reality, impermeable to policy intervention."²² The material in this impressive book should go a long way to exploding that assumption.

17. Schwartz, *supra* note 3, at 40, 52.

18. Some of these questions are addressed in PETRILLI, *supra* note 10; see also MARTHA MINOW, *IN BROWN'S WAKE: LEGACIES OF AMERICA'S EDUCATIONAL LANDMARK* 150-62.

19. NAT'L CTR. FOR EDUC. STATISTICS, NUMBERS AND TYPES OF PUBLIC ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCIES FROM THE COMMON CORE OF DATA: SCHOOL YEAR 2010-11 tbl. 1 (2012); NAT'L CTR. FOR EDUC. STATISTICS, THE CONDITION OF EDUCATION 2012 tbl. A-3-1 (2012).

20. THE FUTURE OF SCHOOL INTEGRATION, *supra* note 1, at 309-311.

21. Kahlenberg, *supra* note 9, at 289.

22. Mantil et al., *supra* note 7, at 208.