

The Stronger Together School Diversity Act of 2016: Why Promoting Racial and Socioeconomic Diversity in our Public Schools is Vitaly Important

Description of Stronger Together School Diversity Act of 2016

The Stronger Together School Diversity Act of 2016 has been introduced in both the House of Representatives and the Senate in July 2016. It authorizes \$120 million for a competitive grant program that promotes racial and socioeconomic diversity within our schools.

- The program is completely voluntary, and diversity plans would be locally developed.
- Applicants for funds would have to demonstrate strong family and community involvement in plan development.
- Grants are available for both planning and implementation.
- Up to \$6 million would be available for National Activities, which would include technical assistance and evaluation.

The Need for Programs Promoting Diversity is Significant

We should be preparing all students to excel academically and should be cultivating students' capacity to engage and interact with all Americans. By fostering bonds among students from different backgrounds, schools prepare them to succeed in a country that will be majority-minority by the middle of this century. Racial diversity is a compelling governmental interest, as stated by Justice Anthony Kennedy in his concurring opinion in *Parents Involved In Community Schools v. Seattle School Dist. No. 1*: "This Nation has a moral and ethical obligation to fulfill its historic commitment to creating an integrated society that ensures equal opportunity for all of its children. A compelling interest exists in avoiding racial isolation, an interest that a school district, in its discretion and expertise, may choose to pursue. Likewise, a district may consider it a compelling interest to achieve a diverse student population."¹ Furthermore, the Supreme Court has re-affirmed the positive impact of diversity in education: "As this Court has said, enrolling a diverse student body promotes cross-racial understanding, helps to break down racial stereotypes, and enables students to better understand persons of different races Equally important, student body diversity promotes learning outcomes, and better prepares students for an increasingly diverse workforce and society."²

The Research on the Benefits of Diversity Are Clear

- Students attending socioeconomically and racially diverse schools have better test scores and higher college attendance rates than peers in more economically and racially segregated schools.³
- Racial diversity in schools also carries long-term benefits. These include subsequent reduced segregation in neighborhoods, colleges and workplaces, higher levels of social cohesion, and a reduced likelihood of racial prejudice.⁴

¹ *Parents Involved In Community Schools v. Seattle School Dist. No. 1*, 551 U.S. 701, 797-98 (2007) (Kennedy concurring), <http://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/boundvolumes/551bv.pdf>

² *Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin, et al.*, No. 14-981, slip op. at 12 (U.S. Sup. Ct. June 23, 2016) (internal quotation marks and citations omitted), http://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/15pdf/14-981_4g15.pdf

³ National Coalition on School Diversity Research Brief 2, "How the Racial and Socioeconomic Composition of Schools and Classrooms Contributes to Literacy, Behavioral Climate, Instructional Organization and High School Graduation Rates," *National Coalition on School Diversity* (October 2010), <http://school-diversity.org/pdf/DiversityResearchBriefNo2.pdf>

⁴ National Coalition on School Diversity Research Brief 3, "The Impact of Racially Diverse Schools in a Democratic Society," *National Coalition on School Diversity* (October 2010), <http://school-diversity.org/pdf/DiversityResearchBriefNo3.pdf>

Despite these benefits, 25% of public school students attend schools in which more than 75% of students are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch; and in urban areas, nearly half of all students attend high-poverty schools.⁵ These trends have been getting worse over the past decade. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) recently found that the percentage of K-12 public schools with high poverty and African-American or Hispanic students increased from 9% in 2000-01 to 16% in 2013-14.⁶ The Stronger Together School Diversity Act of 2016 would empower communities to counter the encroaching re-segregation we are facing.

Educators across the country have recognized the benefits of racial and socioeconomic diversity and are taking proactive steps to foster it.

- In 1996, only two school districts consciously employed a plan using socioeconomic factors to pursue integration.⁷
- Today, 91 districts and charter school chains, educating over 4 million students, use socioeconomic status in school-assignments plans.⁸ This represents approximately 8 percent of all public school students, living in 32 states. Many of these districts are pursuing both racial and socioeconomic integration. Other districts have plans that primarily seek to achieve racial integration consistent with constitutional guidelines, but that also have the effect of creating socioeconomic integration.
- The Stronger Together School Diversity Act would offer communities the ability to improve and implement such locally developed and approved plans.

Full text of the bill is available at www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/5738/text.

Supporters (list in formation)

This legislation is supported by the following organizations:

- American Federation of Teachers (AFT)
- Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD)
- Campaign for Educational Equity at Teachers College
- Center for Civil Rights, UNC School of Law
- Center on Law, Inequality, and Metropolitan Equity at Rutgers Law School
- Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race and Justice, Harvard Law School
- Civil Rights Project, UCLA
- Education Law Center
- Girls, Inc.
- IntegrateNYC4me
- Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
- Magnet Schools of America
- NAACP
- National Coalition on School Diversity
- National Council of Jewish Women
- National Education Association
- National Urban League
- National Women's Law Center
- New York Appleseed
- The Office of Transformation and Innovation at the Dallas Independent School District
- Poverty & Race Research Action Council
- Voluntary Interdistrict Choice Corporation

For further information, please contact James Colligan at The Raben Group, at jcolligan@rabengroup.com or (202) 930-6813.

The National Coalition on School Diversity (NCSD) is a network of national civil rights organizations, university-based research centers, and state and local organizations working to expand support for government policies that promote school diversity and reduce racial and economic isolation. <http://school-diversity.org>

⁵ FY 2017 Department of Education Justifications of Appropriation Estimates to the Congress, F-86, <http://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/budget17/justifications/f-ii.pdf>

⁶ K-12 Education: Better Use of Information Could Help Agencies Identify Disparities and Address Racial Discrimination (GAO-16-345), <http://www.gao.gov/assets/680/676745.pdf>

⁷ Halley Potter, Kimberly Quick, and Elizabeth Davies, "A New Wave of School Integration: Districts and Charters Pursuing Socioeconomic Diversity," *Century Foundation* (February 9, 2016), <http://apps.tcf.org/a-new-wave-of-school-integration>

⁸ *Id.*