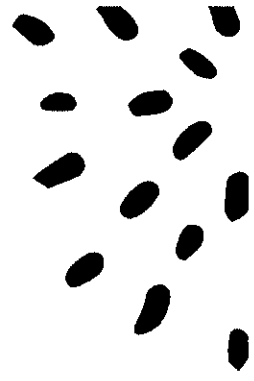


APPENDIX

Salvation and Social Justice Testimony on School Segregation Solutions



Presented by: Austin J. Edwards, Esq.
Senior Policy Counsel, Salvation and Social Justice (SANDSJ)

Date: December 15, 2023

Location: Trenton, New Jersey

Honorable members of the New Jersey Legislature,

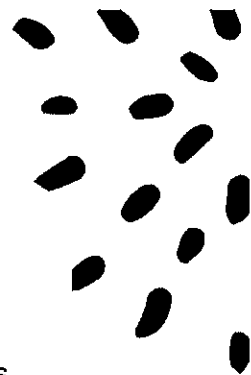
I stand before you today representing Salvation and Social Justice (SANDSJ), a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting racial equity and social justice in New Jersey. We are deeply concerned about the persistent problem of school segregation in our state, which perpetuates educational disparities and limits opportunities for our young people.

The Need for Action

New Jersey faces a stark reality: our schools are deeply segregated, with students disproportionately concentrated by race and socioeconomic status. This segregation leads to unequal access to quality education, resources, and opportunities, ultimately hindering our state's potential and perpetuating systemic inequities.

We cannot afford to ignore this issue any longer. Decades of research have established the devastating impact of school segregation on students' academic achievement, social development, and long-term well-being. It is time for us to take decisive action to dismantle these harmful barriers and ensure that all children in New Jersey have access to a quality education.

1x



Proposed Solutions

1. *Ending the Zip Code Barrier:*

Currently, New Jersey law requires students to attend schools in their home districts, effectively limiting access to diverse and high-performing schools based solely on zip code. This policy perpetuates segregation and hinders students' opportunities. SANDSJ urges the legislature to consider ending the zip code barrier and implementing policies that facilitate school choice across district lines.

2. *Ensuring Full Implementation of the School Funding Formula (SFRA)*

Investing in quality public education is essential to dismantle the harmful effects of school segregation. However, this investment must be distributed equitably across all districts. We urge the legislature to ensure that the School Funding Reform Act (SFRA) is fully implemented and funded every year. This will guarantee that all students, regardless of their background, have access to the resources they need to succeed.

3. *Removal of Zero Tolerance Policies:*

Zero tolerance policies in our schools harm our students, especially students of color. These policies often lead to harsh and automatic punishments for minor infractions, disproportionately impacting marginalized students. Instead of punitive measures, we need to move towards restorative practices that see and lift up the humanity in our youth. These practices focus on building relationships, identifying root causes of behavior, and fostering positive change. By investing in restorative justice programs and training school staff in de-escalation techniques, we can create safer and more supportive learning environments for all students.

4. *Regional or Cross-District Magnet Schools:*

Magnet schools that draw students from multiple districts can be effective in fostering integration and providing access to specialized programs. We urge the legislature to invest in the creation and support of regional or cross-district magnet schools that focus on diversity and academic excellence.

5. *Merging Districts:*

Merging districts in segregated and contiguous municipalities can be a long-term solution for creating larger, more diverse school communities. While this approach requires careful planning and community engagement, it can ultimately lead to more equitable distribution of resources and improved educational outcomes for all students.



6. Stricter Zoning:

Current zoning practices in many New Jersey communities contribute to segregation by limiting the development of affordable housing options. We urge the legislature to enact stricter zoning regulations that encourage mixed-income housing and promote diverse neighborhoods. This, in turn, will lead to more integrated schools.

Conclusion

Addressing school segregation requires a multi-faceted approach that combines bold legislative action with community engagement and sustained investment. By implementing the solutions outlined above, New Jersey can begin to dismantle the barriers that stand in the way of educational equity and ensure that all children, regardless of their background, have the opportunity to thrive.

SANDSJ stands ready to work with this legislature to develop and implement effective solutions to school segregation in New Jersey. We believe that together, we can create a future where all children have access to a quality education and the opportunity to achieve their full potential.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



3x

**TESTIMONY OF CHARLES M. PAYNE
DIRECTOR, JOSEPH C. CORNWALL CENTER FOR METROPOLITAN
STUDIES**

**HENRY RUTGERS PROFESSOR OF AFRICANA STUDIES
RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY NEWARK**

**Testimony on Remedies for Segregated Schooling
In New Jersey
for the Joint Committee on the Public Schools**

December 15, 2023

I appreciate this opportunity to speak to the Joint Committee. I think of desegregation as having two distinct facets: there is the challenge of creating diverse and supportive environments that broaden students' social experience. Then there is the challenge of providing the best possible education for children wherever they are. There are important and distinct benefits to each. We shouldn't treat this as either-or conversation. Nonetheless, I know most about the latter and will focus my remarks there.

This committee is well aware that third grade reading scores are predictive of many important life outcomes. It is past time for reading well by third grade to become a statewide point of emphasis in low-performing schools. This is not just an aspirational goal. Some New Jersey schools are already there, including some schools that would be considered high need. There are about two hundred schools in the state we consider "high" need, another sixty we consider "highest" need. These categories are comparable to the old district factor groups. On average, for instance, high need schools have 79% low-income students, 56% of them coming from schools where English is not the first language and 94 % of them minority. We tend to expect uniformly poor results from these schools, but the facts are otherwise.

How well do the best of these schools do with getting low-income children to read by third grade? The best of them is outperforming the state. Most successful schools are performing at or above state averages for all children. In 2022, about 42% of all students in the state were proficient in reading in third grade but 10 high-highest need schools met or bettered that mark; at least 10 more were within a couple of points.

District	School	School Need	ECD - % Proficient - School	ECD - % Proficient - State	State - % Proficient
Atlantic City School District	Richmond Avenue School	High Need	57	24	42
Union City School District	Colin Powell Elementary School	High Need	56	24	42
Elizabeth Public Schools	Dr. Albert Einstein Academy School No. 29	High Need	55	24	42
Maria L. Varisco-Rogers Charter School	Maria Varisco Rogers Charter School	High Need	53	24	42
Passaic City School District	Passaic Gifted and Talented Academy School No. 20	High Need	52	24	42
Bridgeton Public Charter School	Bridgeton Public Charter School	High Need	50	24	42
Roselle Public School District	Harrison Elementary School	High Need	49	24	42

Elizabeth Public Schools	Dr. Orlando Edreira Academy School No. 26	High Need	45	24	42
Union City School District	Theodore Roosevelt Elementary School	Highest Need	44	24	42
Passaic City School District	Thomas Jefferson School No. 1	Highest Need	43	24	42
Union City School District	Robert Waters Elementary School	Highest Need	39	24	42
Orange Board Of Education School District	Oakwood Avenue Community School	High Need	38	24	42
Union City School District	Thomas A Edison Elementary School	Highest Need	38	24	42
Newark Public School District	First Avenue School	High Need	36	24	42
Woodlynne School District	Woodlynne Boro Public School	High Need	36	24	42
West New York School District	Albio Sires Elementary School	High Need	36	24	42
Newark Public School District	Wilson Avenue School	High Need	36	24	42

Dover Public School District	North Dover Elementary School	High Need	36	24	42
Englewood Public School District	Dr. Leroy McCloud Elementary School	High Need	35	24	42

The twenty lowest scoring schools don't have as much as 15% of ECD students at proficiency.

District	School	School Need	ECD - % Proficient - School	ECD - % Proficient - State	State - % Proficient
Irvington Public School District	Thurgood Marshall Elementary School	High Need	10	24	42
Lindenwold Public School District	Lindenwold School Four	Highest Need	10	24	42
Franklin Township Public School District	Pine Grove Manor School	Highest Need	10	24	42
Camden City School District	Cooper's Poynt Family School	High Need	10	24	42
Vineland Public School District	Gloria M Sabater Elementary School	Highest Need	11	24	42

Wildwood City School District	Glenwood Avenue Elementary School	High Need	11	24	42
Newark Public School District	Salome Ureña Elementary School	High Need	11	24	42
Paterson Public School District	School 10	High Need	11	24	42
Trenton Public School District	Franklin Elementary School	High Need	11	24	42
Trenton Public School District	Washington Elementary School	High Need	11	24	42
Paterson Public School District	School 15	Highest Need	11	24	42
Mastery Schools of Camden, Inc.	Mastery Schools of Camden, Inc.	High Need	11	24	42
Newark Public School District	Roberto Clemente Elementary School	High Need	12	24	42
Passaic City School District	William B. Cruise Memorial School No. 11	Highest Need	12	24	42
Elizabeth Public Schools	Joseph Battin School No 4	High Need	12	24	42
Elizabeth Public Schools	Jerome Dunn Academy No 9	Highest Need	12	24	42

LEAP Academy University Charter School	Leap Academy University Charter School	High Need	12	24	42
Paterson Public School District	School 26	High Need	13	24	42
Elizabeth Public Schools	John Marshal School No. 20	High Need	13	24	42
Plainfield Public School District	Dewitt D. Barlow Elementary School	Highest Need	13	24	42

If we look just at Hispanic students attending high-need schools, we find the same patterns, some schools strongly outperforming state averages , while others are far below

District	School	School Need	Hispanic - % Proficient - School	Hispanic - % Proficient - State	State - % Proficient
Union City School District	Colin Powell Elementary School	High Need	58	28	42
Maria L. Varisco-Rogers Charter School	Maria Varisco Rogers Charter School	High Need	55	28	42
Elizabeth Public Schools	Dr. Albert Einstein Academy School No. 29	High Need	53	28	42

Passaic City School District	Passaic Gifted and Talented Academy School No. 20	High Need	51	28	42
Elizabeth Public Schools	Dr. Orlando Edreira Academy School No. 26	High Need	47	28	42
Union City School District	Theodore Roosevelt Elementary School	Highest Need	44	28	42
Roselle Public School District	Harrison Elementary School	High Need	41	28	42
Elizabeth Public Schools	iPrep Academy School No 8	High Need	41	28	42
North Bergen School District	Robert Fulton Elementary School	High Need	40	28	42
Union City School District	Robert Waters Elementary School	Highest Need	39	28	42
Atlantic City School District	Richmond Avenue School	High Need	39	28	42
Union City School District	Thomas A Edison Elementary School	Highest Need	39	28	42
North Bergen	John F Kennedy Elementary School	High Need	38	28	42

School District					
Elizabeth Public Schools	Elmora School No. 12	High Need	38	28	42
West New York School District	Albio Sires Elementary School	High Need	38	28	42
West New York School District	Public School Number Two	High Need	37	28	42
Bridgeton Public Charter School	Bridgeton Public Charter School	High Need	36	28	42
Dover Public School District	North Dover Elementary School	High Need	35	28	42
Newark Public School District	Wilson Avenue School	High Need	34	28	42

Here the bottom twenty high-highest need schools in the state don't so much as reach the 12 percent mark:

District	School	School Need	Hispanic - % Proficient - School	Hispanic - % Proficient - State	State - % Proficient
Passaic City School District	School No. 5	Highest Need	10	28	42

Paterson Public School District	School 5	High Need	10	28	42
Plainfield Public School District	Clinton Elementary School	Highest Need	10	28	42
Irvington Public School District	Madison Avenue	High Need	10	28	42
Plainfield Public School District	Dewitt D. Barlow Elementary School	Highest Need	11	28	42
Franklin Township Public School District	Pine Grove Manor School	Highest Need	11	28	42
Camden City School District	Octavio V. Catto Community Family School	High Need	11	28	42
LEAP Academy University Charter School	Leap Academy University Charter School	High Need	11	28	42
Elizabeth Public Schools	Joseph Battin School No 4	High Need	11	28	42
Newark Public School District	Louise A. Spencer Elementary School	High Need	11	28	42
Paterson Public School District	School 20	High Need	11	28	42
Trenton Public School District	Washington Elementary School	High Need	11	28	42
Paterson Public School District	School 10	High Need	11	28	42

Trenton Public School District	Franklin Elementary School	High Need	11	28	42
Vineland Public School District	Gloria M Sabater Elementary School	Highest Need	11	28	42
Passaic City School District	William B. Cruise Memorial School No. 11	Highest Need	11	28	42
Elizabeth Public Schools	Mabel G. Homes School No. 5	High Need	11	28	42
Lindenwold Public School District	Lindenwold School Five	High Need	11	28	42
Newark Public School District	Roberto Clemente Elementary School	High Need	11	28	42
North Plainfield School District	Stony Brook School	High Need	11	28	42

Statewide in NJ, only 26% of Black students are reaching proficiency but the best high-highest need schools are doing anywhere from 12 to 22 percentage points better than that. In state least 8 of them, Black students are at the state average for all students or within a couple of points of it:

District	School	School Need	Black - % Proficient - School	Black - % Proficient - State	State - % Proficient
College Achieve Central Charter School	College Achieve Central Charter School	Highest Need	48	26	42

Orange Board of Education School District	Forest Street Community Elementary School	High Need	45	26	42
Paterson Arts and Science Charter School	Paterson Arts and Science Charter School	High Need	43	26	42
Roselle Public School District	Harrison Elementary School	High Need	40	26	42
Jersey City Public Schools	Julia A. Barnes School	High Need	40	26	42
Red Bank Borough Public School District	Red Bank Primary School	Highest Need	40	26	42
Plainfield Public School District	Jefferson Elementary School	Highest Need	40	26	42
Orange Board Of Education School District	Oakwood Avenue Community School	High Need	40	26	42
Irvington Public School District	Madison Avenue	High Need	39	26	42
Orange Board Of Education School District	Park Avenue Elementary School	High Need	38	26	42
Plainfield Public School District	Cedarbrook Elementary School	High Need	38	26	42

Newark Public School District	Mt Vernon Place School	High Need	36	26	42
New Brunswick School District	Mckinley Community School	High Need	36	26	42
Plainfield Public School District	Emerson Community School	High Need	36	26	42
Orange Board Of Education School District	Rosa Parks Community School	High Need	33	26	42
Elizabeth Public Schools	Winfield Scott School No. 2	High Need	31	26	42
John P Holland Charter School School District	John P. Holland Charter School	High Need	30	26	42
Paterson Public School District	Dr. Hani Awadallah School	High Need	30	26	42
Englewood Public School District	Dr. Leroy McCloud Elementary School	High Need	30	26	42

The lowest scoring high -highest need for Black students are, again, reaching 10- 15% proficiency.

District	School	School Need	Black - % Proficient - School	Black - % Proficient - State	State - % Proficient
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Long Branch Public School District	A A Anastasia Elementary School	High Need	10	26	42
Elizabeth Public Schools	George Washington Academy School No. 1	High Need	10	26	42
Paterson Public School District	School 5	High Need	10	26	42
North Plainfield School District	East End School	High Need	10	26	42
Paterson Public School District	School 2	High Need	10	26	42
Franklin Township Public School District	Hillcrest School	High Need	11	26	42
Paterson Public School District	School 10	High Need	11	26	42
Camden City School District	Cooper's Poynt Family School	High Need	11	26	42
Lindenwold Public School District	Lindenwold School Five	High Need	12	26	42
Lindenwold Public School District	Lindenwold School Four	Highest Need	12	26	42

Elizabeth Public Schools	Dr. Antonia Pantoja School No. 27	High Need	13	26	42
Asbury Park School District	Thurgood Marshall Elementary School	High Need	13	26	42
Plainfield Public School District	Clinton Elementary School	Highest Need	13	26	42
Elizabeth Public Schools	Mabel G. Homes School No. 5	High Need	14	26	42
Irvington Public School District	Thurgood Marshall Elementary School	High Need	14	26	42
LEAP Academy University Charter School	Leap Academy University Charter School	High Need	14	26	42
Orange Board of Education School District	Lincoln Avenue Elementary School	High Need	15	26	42
Hamilton Township Public School District	George E. Wilson Elementary School	High Need	15	26	42
Long Branch Public School District	George L Catrambone	High Need	15	26	42

Irvington Public School District	Florence Avenue Elementary School	High Need	16	26	42
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The point of this is that the third grade performance among traditionally underserved groups is highly variable. Reading by third grade is achievable and we have clear proof. Note that some schools, including some in Union City, Elizabeth, Passaic, have been high performing for a decade or more.

How do we do this work at a greater scale? We are just beginning a systematic study of these schools but we know from previous work (Kirp 2013; MacInnes 2008) that among the strategies we are likely to find are:

- Strong use of Abbott pre-school.
- Helping language learners become fluent in their own language before becoming fluent in English.
- A common curriculum across classrooms; integrating pre-school and early grades curriculum and pedagogy.
- Collaborative professional culture.
- Data-driven instruction, including frequent formative assessments.
- Combining cultures of high expectations with cultures of caring, the latter possibly supported by community schools.

(There is some interesting research that implies the best way to ensure a strong start for the maximum number of students might be to have the best teachers in a building teach consecutively, kindergarten, first and second grade, to minimize the possibility of early failure (Hahnel and Jackson 2012). We don't know yet if any New Jersey schools are utilizing this strategy, but it is worth thinking about.) While there is much to learn, we know enough to shape more effective practice right now especially if we rely on the expertise of the people who are leading good work now, people like Superintendent Silvia Abbato in Union City, to name just one.

If you want to come closer to my ideal, embed strong third grade reading initiatives in the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program. IB programs are intended not so much to get kids passing tests as educating them to international standards. The problems we are dealing with are fundamentally problems of adult expectations and IB tries to institutionalize high expectations for everyone. For a long time, IB programs were considered appropriate only for children from elite backgrounds. We now know that to be false. Many children of average ability benefit

in important ways – greater academic self-confidence, greater likelihood of going to and graduating college, going to better colleges, more likely to graduate and so forth (Coca et al 2012). Since IB programs are attractive to middle-class parents, they can be a strong component of a desegregation package, possibly as magnet schools. Salem City, with a poverty rate of about 45%, has turned its high school into an IB school and I'm sure you would find it interesting to talk with their leadership. (Although it is probably much better to start IB in the primary years so that children get accustomed to the workload.)

If you want to get closer still to my ideal intervention, low-performing schools would also be community schools, giving children a chance to discover their gifts and bring schools and communities closer together. You will be hearing from many voices in support of community schools. I will only add that the best available syntheses of evidence, based on 140 studies, concludes “The evidence base provides a strong warrant for using community schools to meet the needs of low-achieving students in high-poverty schools and to help close opportunity and achievement gaps for students from low-income families, students of color, English learners, and students with disabilities (Maier et al. 2017, p. vi).” Some of the long-running high performing schools in New Jersey see community schools as central to their culture-building.

So far, I have said that state policy should emphasize preventing early failure, maintaining high expectations for all students, and giving young people a chance to discover their gifts and see beyond their environments. If one wanted three guiding principles to move us toward more equitable schools, one could do worse than those three.

Educators around the state are doing more than that, though. High school graduation remains a crucial hurdle. Some cities around the country have seen improvements of 30 or more percentage points in graduation rates in the last decade (Phillips 2019; <https://ncs.uchicago.edu/>), usually by establishing early warning systems that let adults know as soon as a student starts sliding off track. In Newark, which has seen a 24-percentage point increase in on-track freshman over that period the work centers on improving the quality of freshman year, partly by addressing the problematic mind-sets of adults. The Newark principals who are leading that work would be happy to share what they are learning.

It is not necessary to say anything about how the state's low scores in math represent a danger to future economic growth. I would urge you to convene a taskforce, with the state's best math teachers and supervisors heavily represented, to study the problems of math instruction and develop a set of recommendations for

improvement. This should include close study of the districts currently doing the best work with disadvantaged students.

Whatever you do requires leadership and New Jersey seems to be behind many states in thinking about developing a robust pipeline of strong leadership for schools serving disadvantaged students, students who usually get the weakest principals. Some of the fastest improving cities and states have invested heavily in strategic staffing policies centered on Next Gen principals, people trained specifically to work in those environments (including a heavy emphasis on instructional leadership, evaluating instruction, data analysis, a year-long paid residency with a master principal and on-going consultation with University faculty). Good principals seem to be associated with 3 months more growth in reading and almost that in math, compared to weaker principals (Grissom et al. 2021), and the greatest impact is in schools serving disadvantaged students.

One of the reasons leadership is important is that we know the best ideas do not implement themselves. Take Amistad as a cautionary tale. The research base for the legislation is sound, with one review finding evidence that well-executed programs are associated with greater sense of agency among students, more engagement in school, more higher order thinking, better graduation rates, better grades and better democracy skills (Sleeter 2011). I think we all know the execution in New Jersey leaves much to be desired. I hope that whatever comes out of your deliberations this time will pay attention up front to the problematics of implementation, which means minimally thinking about better ways to monitor progress and identify potholes.

Again, I hope we will reject the false choice between desegregating schools and improving them. Strong research tells us that desegregated schooling is associated with improved academic achievement, higher lifetime earnings, higher professional status, and longer, healthier lives. Some of these positive benefits seem to continue in the next generation. Students report a lasting impact on their comfort with social diversity (Johnson 2011; Wells 2009).

Make no mistake, school desegregation is the right path, morally civically, and educationally. But make no mistake again, it is just one tough battle in a larger war. In the main, given past experience, desegregated schools will still funnel students of color into lower academic tracks with less challenging curriculum and weaker teachers; students will still face disproportionate levels of exclusionary discipline; some of them will never come to feel at home in school. Desegregation is an important step forward

but only a step. (If we want actual integration, that again takes us back to the importance of building-level leadership.)

Finally, I urge you to take your time with this one. Take time to make a prominent place in these discussions for the voices of affected communities. Take time to allow for input from the most successful practitioners across the state. I have tried to stress that they are an invaluable and underutilized resource. The extraordinary investments NJ has already made in educational equity position the state to do things that would be more difficult elsewhere. I hope we go into this conversation with the attitude that it is time to stop chipping away at the problems of underperformance. It is time to put an end to them.

Readings

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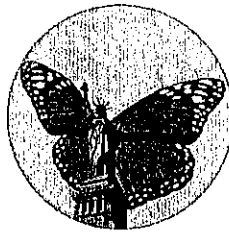
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A document that summarizes some of the research cited here will be available from the Cornwall Center in January. Please contact Irene Welch at irenew@rutgers.edu and request the research supplement for Payne's testimony.



**New Jersey Consortium
for Immigrant Children**

The Latinx Experience in Schools: A Policy and Action Agenda



Introduction

On January 14, 2023, the Latino Action Network Foundation (LANF) and the New Jersey Consortium for Immigrant Children (NJCIC) partnered to host an education roundtable centered around the Latino/a/x experience in New Jersey Schools. The Latino Action Network Foundation (LANF) and their partners at the New Jersey Consortium for Immigrant Children (NJCIC) have long advocated for educational equity within New Jersey. Unfortunately, alongside their Black peers, Latinx students in New Jersey face deep educational inequities, which can have long-standing effects on their self-view, and future trajectories, amongst various other consequences.

For this reason, LANF gathered various stakeholders, ranging from students and teachers to educational leaders and advocates, to determine what the key issues were facing New Jersey Latinx students. In addition, the roundtable discussion resulted in key policy recommendations and actionable items to guide our collective advocacy.

Summary of Roundtable Proceedings

Prior to the roundtable, participants were presented with various resources to consider in order to help facilitate discussion (See Appendix A).

On the day of the roundtable, Mark Weber, from the New Jersey Policy Perspective (NJPP), and Lady Jimenez-Torres, from NJCIC, provided brief presentations. At this point, participants were invited to ask questions about the presentations or the resources that were shared in advance. This portion of the roundtable produced fruitful discussions regarding the many issues facing Latinx students, which the policy recommendations and action items would subsequently address.

Afterward, participants joined Zoom breakout sessions to discuss potential recommendations to address the issues and barriers Latinx students experience in New Jersey schools. This discussion was guided by the following questions:

- After reviewing the research and data resources provided, what are the unique challenges currently impacting Latino/Latina/Latinx/Latine students in today's school system?
- On a State level, what new policies should we advocate for with the gubernatorial administration – and what legislation and programming efforts should we advocate for?
- What sorts of deficiencies exist in schools and for students and how can we best address those issues?

Upon returning from breakout sessions, participants were able to share their recommendations with the larger group and vote on whether or not they supported the recommendations as written, or with proposed modifications. Any recommendation that did not receive a yes vote from all participants was removed from the final agenda. LANF seeks unanimous approval of all recommendations to ensure that all roundtable participants fully stand by our finalized agenda.

What are the issues facing Latino/a/x students?

This round table report was drafted during a time in which educational equity has been threatened multiple times by various state and federal entities. For example, most recently, several Supreme Court rulings have been overturned which have been significant in helping Latinx students and other students of color achieve a higher education. In *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College*, decided on June 29, 2023, the Supreme Court's majority decision overturned the precedent of affirmative action, which allowed colleges and universities to consider race when granting admissions to their institution. In understanding the issues facing Latinx students, the roundtable participants were provided with the following information to understand some of the conditions in the New Jersey School system.

LAN v the State of NJ

LANF's advocacy around educational equity often centers around an insidious issue that impacts all students in New Jersey but has the greatest detrimental effect on Black and Latinx youth. That issue is De Facto Segregation in New Jersey schools. While many believe school segregation to be a thing of the past, left behind with the landmark Supreme Court Ruling in *Brown v Board of Education of Topeka* (1954), the issue persists to this day. According to a 2017 UCLA report, New Jersey was ranked the 6th most segregated state for black students and 7th for Latinx students¹. This is because, as they further reported, a majority of students of color attend schools that are non-white; between 2016-2017, 107,709 students of color attended 99% non-white schools¹. Unfortunately, segregated schools have various impacts on all students. For example, diverse school environments have many positive impacts, such as combatting prejudiced views and enhancing a student's ability to interact in a diverse society. Diverse schools have also been shown to improve test scores and grades for low-income black and Latinx students and enhance their likelihood to graduate and attend college¹.

Many historical and present-day factors contribute to present-day segregation in New Jersey schools. For example, currently, New Jersey institutes zip code barriers, requiring students to attend schools in the municipality in which they live, with some exceptions. The municipalities, and as a result these schools, are often very homogeneous with individuals in the communities often being very similar in terms of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic characteristics, et cetera. While residential segregation continues to be perpetuated to this day, it is largely rooted in historically racist housing policies and practices, such as redlining and block-busting. In fact, a recent report from NJPP even revealed an overlap between the current racial composition of New Jersey School Districts and a 1939 redlining map².

While segregation in schools is not legally mandated today, it is, in effect, still happening. This is known as De Facto Segregation. *LAN v the State of NJ* is a lawsuit filed in 2018 that challenges segregation in New Jersey schools and calls on the commissioner of education to prepare and submit to the court a remediation plan for school segregation in New Jersey.

NJCIC Report

In November 2021, NJCIC and partner organizations released the report - English Learners In New Jersey Exposing Inequities And Expanding Opportunities In The Wake Of The Pandemic. The report shares the experiences of New Jersey English Learners (ELs), immigrant students and immigrant parents, and English as a second language (ESL) and bilingual teachers, administrators, and counselors within the public education system in New Jersey, thus illuminating the need for change in districts across the state. This report was only a small glimpse into some of the inequities English Language Learners face. The trend continues to show that the Latinx student population has steadily increased in New Jersey³.

Some of the insights based on the surveyed population, which included ESL and bilingual educators, administrators, and counselors and focus groups with students and parents of ELs include:

- Lack of compliance with state regulations for the Bilingual Education Code
- Reports of lack of language accommodations for ELs and lack of meaningful communication with parents
- No attendance recovery policy at their school and schools failing to communicate their policy to ELs parents/ guardians
- Lack of or incorrect reporting of drop-out rates for ELs (small suburban districts)
- Lack of cultural and language-accessible Mental Health Services for ELs.

This report included some policy recommendations such as:

- Develop an accountability process to make sure every school district complies with the Bilingual Education Code
- Create a "complaint investigation" system to react to reports of violations
- Revise the Code to require and improve language accommodations for parents and students.
- Mandate professional development for educators and their staff
- Create career pathways for Mental Health Practitioners and Bilingual Educators.

Many of the findings from this report resonated among conversations during the Education Roundtable event. Particularly, both emphasized the lack of diversity in the teaching profession and other professional services offered in school.

NJPP Presentation

In addition to NJPP articles shared with participants in advance of the roundtable (see Appendix A) Mark Weber from NJPP presented for the roundtable participants. Mark's presentation discussed how, because it relies so heavily on property taxes, there is deep inequity in school funding. Mark also covered NJPP's aforementioned work discussing systemic racism and educational inequity, specifically how practices such as redlining, blockbusting, and infrastructural development have had a deep impact on property wealth and, in turn, also impact school funding inequity. Additionally, regarding funding, Mark discussed how, according to the funding standard established by the School Funding Reform Act, many New Jersey students are in underfunded schools. While many schools in New Jersey are underfunded, those that are severely underfunded (by over \$5,000) are largely majority Black and Latinx schools. Mark also discussed the consequences of underfunding which included the following:

- “Smaller staff salaries per pupil”
- “Less competitive staff salaries”
- “Lower test scores”
- “Less student ‘growth’”
- “Fewer staff per student in non-tested subjects (arts, PE, foreign languages)”
- “Less experienced teachers”

This also included limited mental health resources for students of color, such as school counselors.

Finally, regarding funding gaps, NJPP data revealed gaps in COVID-19 school readiness. The following statements were determined using data from September and December 2020. Their findings revealed that Black and Latinx students were likelier to be receiving education in remote-only school districts, while White students were likelier to have experienced hybrid education settings (ie. a combination of in-person and remote learning). They also found that severely underfunded schools (by over \$5,000) were likely to be experiencing remote learning environments.

This presentation also covered the New Jersey and nationwide teacher shortage, with fewer teaching candidates in New Jersey than there were a decade ago. NJPP’s data revealed that there were 6,587 completers of teacher preparation programs in New Jersey in 2008-2009 versus just 2,883 in 2018-2019 and 3,017 in 2019-2020. Additionally, there are fewer teacher candidates per student in New Jersey, fewer potential teachers of color, and fewer college students choosing to study to become a teacher, amongst several other factors. In understanding some potential reasons for this shortage, NJPP also uncovered that there is a substantial pay gap between teachers and “college-educated non-teachers”.

Issues Raised by Participants

Aside from the issues that were presented prior to the roundtable discussion, the following issues were raised by participants during the discussion portion of the roundtable.

Lack of Resources and Information

Roundtable participants raised several concerns regarding accessibility, especially in terms of language access and the availability of several in-school services. Specifically, participants highlighted the need for increased access to information, language services, role models and mentors, and mental health services as it relates to Latinx students and their parents or guardians. While some of these services already exist, they have limited adaptability to meet the unique needs of Latinx communities. For example, to be equipped to handle specific stressors faced by Latinx individuals in school settings, language accommodations, and cultural competency training are necessary for mental health providers.

While terms like “access” and “accessibility” will be widely used throughout this report, participants indicated that accessibility alone will not solve such issues. Along with accessibility, we need the availability and acceptability of resources and services. This is to ensure that they are not only provided but can also be effectively utilized by parents and students. In addition, outreach is a vital component of this framework. Participants shared several community stories regarding limited awareness of state-specific programs and resources which community members may qualify for, such as Cover All Kids. As such, enhancing awareness of these programs is necessary. Access to existing resources and information is further limited due to language barriers for parents or guardians whose first language is not English, as this information is publicly presented and widely available in English. And even when information is released in languages other than English, it is frequently not presented comprehensively, especially for parents or guardians with little to no formal education.

Lastly, participants delved into systemic barriers impacting the educational experience of the Latinx student population. For example, participants emphasized the lack of a compliance framework within the bilingual education code, which impacts Latinx students as many are bilingual. There were also discussions about the lack of a protected complaint system for students, parents, and staff, regarding inadequacies for Bilingual Education Programs. Furthermore, they discussed the lack of language-appropriate, school-based services as a workforce development issue due to a lack of career pathways for bilingual educators, special education educators, clinical support staff, and student support services staff. As part of community stories, participants shared that the lack of a significant number of bilingual educators, specialists, and student support staff, can lead to staff burnout as these staff often become the go-to person for all matters related to language access, even if they are not fully trained or certified as bilingual service providers.

Higher Education Preparation

Another example of the lack of resources that participants have observed in schools includes the lack of resources devoted to preparing students for higher education. This is especially crucial for first-generation students, who may be less familiar with the processes and need more guidance. Greater resources devoted to this can also motivate students to apply to and consider higher education as an option.

Special Education Processes

Participants further highlighted a lack of information regarding specific school procedures. For example, they specifically discussed how processes related to IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), can be particularly intimidating. Special education processes are littered with technical jargon. A process that is, in general, already very difficult to understand can be complicated if resources and communications are not available in your native language. Additionally, there are not many staff members that can effectively evaluate students in their native language or communicate results, and discuss educational plans with parents or guardians in their preferred language.

Parent or Guardian Involvement

In addition, participants discussed that parents and guardians specifically tend to be underinformed, especially in their primary language, regarding their children's needs at school. This is further exacerbated by studies that reveal that a large proportion of US adults tend to have relatively low literacy rates, which can impact their ability to comprehend informational forms that are sent home with students⁴. In addition, while several school resources and information may be available online, participants discussed that not everyone will have access due to a lack of technology equipment, and consistent wifi, among other issues. And, even when they do have access to such resources, participants identified their own experiences with state and government websites as being confusing and difficult to navigate.

Teaching to the Test

Furthermore, available resources need to be better allocated. For example, participants discussed the influence of testing and other metrics on how schools allocate their resources. They mentioned that schools tend to teach to the test and funnel all their time and resources into preparing for state standardized tests as they draw near, thus valuing scores and rankings over actual student learning. This issue is further exacerbated by the media attention that school rankings receive, such as USNews School Rankings. Meanwhile, other non-academic programs and courses suffer from diminishing funding and attention.

Needs of Various “Sub-groups”

While many Latinx students and parents tend to experience similar needs within schools, participants also identified specific sub-groups within the Latinx community with unmet needs and barriers.

Immigrant Students

One sub-group identified by participants was immigrant students. These students need different levels of support, depending on how long ago they arrived in the United States and their familial support at the time of their arrival. Even in this group of recently arrived immigrant students, there is a varying degree of trauma associated with their journey to the United States. Thus, participants discussed a lack of trauma-informed resources and training for school staff and other professionals working with students. They also mentioned their lack of general knowledge about immigration processes and different ways to arrive. Other issues specific to this group include bullying due to a broad variety of factors, such as their literacy skills, language proficiency, and stereotypes. Furthermore, this sub-group may experience circumstances that require further support or different levels of support. Such circumstances include arriving in the United States as a teenager or adolescent, being an independent student with no parental support, or experiencing homelessness.

English Language Learners

The following subgroup discussed were English Language Learner (ELL) students. Because they are still learning English, this provides unique needs for ELL students throughout K-12 education. Participants highlighted High School ELL students as they may experience additional challenges. In particular, first-generation students interested in a college education, face barriers as they are not familiar with navigating financial aid, college courses, and college life.

Students with Disabilities and Special Education Students

Students with Disabilities and Special Education students also have specific needs. Students with physical disabilities have infrastructural needs which are crucial to navigating and their comfort on school grounds. As for mental health needs, NJPP has documented existing gaps in the availability of mental health resources for Black and Latinx students as compared to White students⁵. This indicated that schools with a majority of Black and Latinx students lack adequate resources to meet the mental health needs of their students. While lacking these resources more deeply impacts special education students, the effects will impact other students as well who may at times need additional support or mental health support as well.

Opportunity Youth

Participants also discussed how certain sub-groups tend to be stigmatized. Specifically, they discussed the stigma associated with the term “drop-outs” and the stigma attached to students who decide to or are unable to continue their education. For this reason, participants discussed the importance of referring to these students as “opportunity youth” and potentially highlighting paths other than just higher education.

Data Needs

Participants also discussed a greater need for disaggregated data, which is important for understanding the effectiveness of programs, education policy, et cetera. Additionally, participants considered how various programs are implemented with no cost-benefit analysis or evidence of their effectiveness. Furthermore, they discussed the importance of collecting broader geographical data so that the entire state is covered, both urban and rural areas alike.

Funding

Because a lot of the issues experienced by Latinx students in New Jersey are systemic, funding is only a part of the puzzle. However, it is still an important issue that needs to be addressed. One concern participants raised was that of transparency, with participants wondering how money is spent. Participants specifically questioned how schools allocated dollars from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2023. Additionally, participants also mentioned that it is important to consider whether schools have the funding to feasibly implement programs that will be discussed within our policy recommendations.

Pandemic Learning Loss

Of course, participants also discussed the recent COVID-19 global pandemic and how it impacted student learning, especially with students having to learn behind a computer screen instead of in a typical classroom setting. Studies have shown how the pandemic has had any effects on Latinx students, and students of color. For example, one UCLA study exploited how the pandemic caused many Latinx and other students of color to cancel their plans for higher education⁶.

Defining Success

It is also important to consider how schools define success and the culture that this breeds. In reality, success varies from person to person. Individuals may define success in many different ways whether that be learning English, getting an associate's degree at a community college, obtaining post-graduate degrees, or seeking career and technical education (CTE), amongst a variety of other definitions of success. For this reason, all pathways to success need to be considered and valued within a K-12 education system. Unfortunately, this is not often the case. Schools tend to have a single view of success, with test scores and pathways to higher education being at the forefront of the typical definition of success within the education system.

Future Outlook and Academic Trajectory

Additionally, when considering a student's future outlook, it is vital to ensure that schools are properly equipping them with adequate resources catered to their specific needs to meet certain benchmarks. Various aspects have been shown to be vital in influencing students' future outlooks and achievements. For example, early education has been shown to influence high school graduation, job earnings, and homeownership, amongst a variety of other aspects⁷. This is why it is important to ensure that, from early education on, schools provide students with the proper tools and environment to meet their educational benchmarks. For Latinx students, especially those who are foreign-born, it is often rarer that schools have resources readily and easily available to them to ensure that they can meet these benchmarks.

Intersectionality

Finally, participants acknowledged the interconnectedness of all of the issues that Latinx students face in school. There tends to be a ripple effect where one issue influences another. Participants provided examples, such as how some schools with greater resources provide their students with greater opportunities to engage in dual enrollment courses, while this is not even an option in other schools. This results in students in schools with dual enrollment courses having greater opportunities to graduate with an associate's degree through their high school program, and in turn, save time and money. Considering the interconnectedness of such issues and how they can influence other areas, it is important that such issues are not addressed in isolation. Broad, systemic changes are needed to ameliorate all of the barriers that impact Latinx students in the school environment. As we move forward to the recommendations, this is crucial to remember.

Participant Recommendations

After discussing these issues, participants began to consider multiple recommendations to address some of the identified barriers and concerns. Below is a list of recommendations that participants unanimously agreed upon.

Civil Rights and Advocacy

One of the recommendations was centered around creating an Office for Educational Equity within the Division of Civil Rights/ Office of the Attorney General. As opposed to going to the Department of Education (DOE) to report any complaints regarding education equity or civil rights concerns, students, parents, guardians, and others can directly submit complaints to this new, specialized office. Thus, this would remove the DOE's involvement in such proceedings in favor of a more impartial office.

Additionally, participants re-emphasized that civil rights can be a "murky" area, with parents sometimes not understanding its full capabilities or that they have the option to file complaints. As such, part of this recommendation would include enhancing awareness so that individuals understand that they can file complaints within this office. This office would also have the task of creating resources and disseminating information to enhance clarity around what civil rights are, how to file complaints, et cetera.

Participants also emphasized independent students' needs in this area. In creating this office and associated resources, it is essential to consider how students who do not have parents or guardians can advocate for themselves. This is especially important because they tend to have limitations in their ability to be heard, for example, by not being able to be involved or have representation on the school board. As such, as part of this conversation, participants considered the importance of allowing non-citizen parents and independent students to have the right to vote in school board elections.

Another recommendation participants discussed was having a legal advocate and ombudsman for students across district levels. As such, this would not be a single office at the state level, but the ombudsman would be paid for at the state level and would be present state-wide. A state-wide office, ideally the aforementioned Office for Educational Equity would be tasked with supervising the ombudsmen by having individuals at each district report to them. Having advocates coupled with the new Office for Educational Equity, participants hope that students would have multiple pathways for complaints that are free of retaliation. In fact, within these pathways, participants envisioned these advocates being one level below filing a complaint to the Office for Educational Equity in terms of escalating concerns.

However, this option would allow individuals to bring a third party in to help navigate and speak with the school district. Another option that would reduce retaliation would be creating a Student Advocacy and Empowerment Office. This would create pathways for educating students, teachers, and administrative staff so that they can prioritize concerns around discrimination and ensure that such concerns are properly elevated. Based on personal experiences, a student participant highlighted that complaints tend to be more effective when they have teacher support. Thus, this would create a complaint process that is more effective for students and a protected framework for teachers and school staff who are reporting incidents as well.

Similarly, another recommendation was creating an Office for Parent Advocates within every school district, which would also be state-funded. This would be someone who advocates for the interests of parents and guardians. Typically, if parents and guardians have financial and social capital, they could have lawyers advocate for them. Being that this is not feasible for all parents, Parent Advocates could ensure that all parents and guardians, regardless of what resources they have available, have someone to advocate for them.

This, as well as the Office for Educational Equity, were highlighted as methods to enhance student empowerment, especially considering that many students, such as independent students, need to be their own advocates. To enhance trust in these advocates as well as in the Office for Educational Equity, participants discussed that it is important to make it clear that these are on the civil side of the Attorney General's Office and are not related to law enforcement. Additionally, integrating the ombudsman into the school environment and community could help to that end. Finally, it is important for the ombudsman and the Office for Educational Equity to provide a confidentiality disclaimer so anyone who needs their services knows that information will not be shared or used against them.

Implicit Bias Training at a School District Level

Participants discussed the need for various types of professional development training beyond educators. These trainings should focus on a variety of subjects to expand their knowledge and awareness of the intersectionality of experiences students face. Focusing on the Latinx student population, which can also include immigrant students and students of mixed-status families, participants also discussed the importance of trauma-informed approaches. In offering the following recommendation, we focus on approaches to education, establishment, and implementation of these recommendations at a school district level.

Educate

Mandatory Training for Teachers and School Staff on Bias Training and Cultural Humility

Recommendation: We propose the implementation of specific training for all teachers and school staff members as part of their professional development. This training should focus on raising awareness about implicit bias, promoting cultural sensitivity, and fostering equitable practices in the classroom. Equipping educators and school staff with the necessary tools will lead to a more inclusive learning environment that takes into account the diverse needs and backgrounds of students.

Enhance Understanding of Trauma-Informed Approach

Recommendation: It is crucial to support teachers and school staff in better understanding the impact of community violence, societal stressors, and trauma on students. By providing professional development and resources, schools can help educators and school staff respond to inquiries using a trauma-informed approach that recognizes signs of distress. Understanding the community's history, changing situations, and other societal stressors will equip school staff to provide appropriate support to students who have been or are currently exposed to adverse environments.

Micro-aggressions and Intersectional Experiences

Recommendation: It is important to educate staff and students on the impact of microaggressions and intersectional experiences students of color and immigrants face. Further, it is vital to develop strategies to address microaggressions experienced by students from teachers, peers, and the school environment. Schools should prioritize creating safe spaces for students to discuss these experiences and implement proactive measures to prevent and respond to micro-aggressions.

Establish

Establish a Protected Framework for Reporting Incidents

Recommendation: Schools must create a protected framework that encourages teachers, school staff, and students to report incidents without fear of retaliation, as was discussed in previous recommendations. This recommendation would work in conjunction with others. It is important to establish uniform protocols for reporting that ensure confidentiality for those reporting incidents. By fostering a safe reporting environment, we can address issues promptly, promote transparency, and maintain accountability in school districts.

Enhance the Complaint Process for Students

Recommendation: This framework also requires strengthening the effectiveness of the complaint process for students by providing clear guidelines, accessible channels, and additional support. It also recognizes that complaints are more impactful when supported by teachers and possibly involve multiple teachers in the resolution process. Improving the complaint process ensures that students' voices are heard and promotes a sense of accountability within the school system.

Implement

Implement Restorative Justice Approaches for Accountability

Recommendation: We encourage school districts to adopt restorative justice approaches as an alternative to punitive disciplinary measures. Restorative justice emphasizes accountability, healing, and repairing the harm caused by incidents. It starts by creating an environment where students can openly discuss their experiences and in doing so, foster a sense of community with fellow students. In specific incidents, a conversation is fostered between involved students led by school leadership, through the use of open-ended questions, open dialogue, and reflection of actions. Finally, the re-entry of a student, after disciplinary action, is led by a welcoming mode that focuses on wraparound support and promotes student accountability and achievement⁸.

These measures will promote equity, foster cultural understanding, and ensure that all students have a safe and conducive learning environment.

Higher Education and Alternative Pathways

Participants also discussed recommendations for making higher education more accessible to Latinx students. Specifically, they discussed that this is important to enhance the number of dual language future professionals. They suggested that states create incentives, including tuition reimbursement and loan forgiveness, for students who commit to going into bilingual education and teaching, since there is a shortage. They also suggested that forgiveness be expanded to other school staff as well, such as evaluators or Learning Disabilities Teacher Consultants (LDTC) so that more efficient services can be provided to Latinx students by these professionals as well. Furthermore, participants discussed the process of applying to higher education and how Latinx parents should receive more information and resources in their language and that are culturally sensitive to feel more comfortable with the various aspects of this process.

One example they provided was the FAFSA and how some parents may need to be made comfortable with sharing their financial information to complete this application. Participants also highlighted that Higher Education is not the only pathway students take and, thus, resources and information regarding different post-high school opportunities should also be made available, especially so students are aware of the different options that are available to them.

Funding

Participants also suggested that there should be increased funding for schools in districts where students of color are the majority. This is especially important considering the fact that low-funded schools are being evaluated using the same metrics as schools with greater amounts of funding. To ensure that students in low-funded schools can achieve these high standards, funding needs to be made equitable across school districts. This would begin with first ensuring that SFRA is fully-funded, and then discussing whether that is sufficient for the school, which, generally, it would not be⁹. This recommendation not only considers how to ensure that sufficient funds are made available to these schools but also ensures that funding is allocated efficiently. For example, this would mean ensuring that budgets are equitable, with sufficient funding going to special education resources, ESL resources, and various other areas that are vital to student learning and to meet the needs of Latinx and other students with specific needs. This portion of the recommendation requires internal infrastructure and supports for schools to understand how to efficiently and wisely utilize their funds.

Data

To address data needs, participants established that foundations can apply for grants or collaborate with organizations and educational institutions to gather data on the effectiveness of programs, understand how effective resources created for Latinx students are, and understand the needs of impacted populations, amongst various addressing various other data needs. Collecting such data is vital because advocacy can tend to be hampered by a lack of data; we need the numbers to support our claims. Additionally, they discussed an increased need for state data collection and data disaggregation across programs and school districts. Disaggregation of data can help us focus on the populations that we are really concerned about, so it is important to ensure that the state government is disaggregating data. However, this would require advocates to provide more specificity around what the data needs are. Finally, they stated that, once we do have more data tailored to Latinx students and their needs, it is important to bring it to the New Jersey State Legislature, especially the Latinx caucus, so that they can be informed on the issues facing Latinx students and what policies changes need to be subsequently be made.

Community-Based Solutions

Community-based solutions were also identified as potential solutions to the issues Latinx students face within New Jersey schools. As such, participants encourage schools to foster the integration of community members and community-based organizations in schools. An example of this would be when teachers invite professionals to speak in their classrooms, they can be encouraged to reach out to members of the community so that members are integrated into the school setting and students see their communities represented in the school environment. They also would encourage formal partnerships between schools and the community. For example, this includes enhancing the presence of Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) within the school environment through state funding and investment in community grants. Participants who have experience with or as a part of CBOs discussed how they often operate in fragmented ways; this effort can bring them together in collaboration with local schools which can in turn increase their collective reach and effectiveness.

This recommendation also requires outreach to enhance the awareness of CBOs and various other members of the community. Participants specifically discussed LANF searching for a grant that would allow us to utilize our statewide network of Latino CBOs for parent organizing. This would be a vehicle for delivering this information and school-community partnership directly into communities by providing community members with information and mentoring. The outreach would directly target parents who have children in public schools to engage in a parent-organizing model.

Resources and Information

Participants also discussed several potential solutions to address the lack of resources and information or the inaccessibility of resources and information. First, they discussed the importance of creating accountability for access to information for parents in their own language at every school district level. This includes having interpreters available in every meeting, such as school board meetings or IEP (Individualized Education Plan) meetings. The interpreters should not simply be Spanish speakers but professional interpreters hired by the schools. Simultaneous interpretation is a skill, just because someone speaks both the languages being interpreted does not mean they have the skills to successfully and seamlessly interpret. It is also important to make information from such meetings understandable to all, even those who may not be familiar with specific terms and concepts. So, schools must also provide context at meetings such as defining what an IEP is to parents. This also includes addressing literacy challenges. It is not just important to provide resources to all, but also to make sure that they are understandable to all, including their context, regardless of literacy level.

Furthermore, participants discussed creating and disseminating resource guides and directories for parents, in multiple languages. While there are currently resource guides that exist, it is important to enhance their reach through outreach, translating the directories, and making them easier to find. Additionally, these resource directories would need to incorporate resources that address the unique needs of the school community, including that of undocumented students and parents, independent students, English Language Learners, etc.

Representation

Another issue participants sought to address through their recommendations was representation throughout the New Jersey Department of Education, including teachers, administrative staff, and state-level officials. Specifically, participants identified a need for increased representation in leadership roles at the state level related to education policy. This includes the State Board of Education, which influences what schools allocate their money towards and the overall New Jersey education system. Thus, it is important to influence the School Board Election process to get more representation of the Latinx community. Part of this process includes public education and outreach to ensure that there is a greater public understanding of the board election process, how this process works and impacts school performance, and the importance of voting for your school board members, especially amongst the Latinx community. Additionally, the participants recommended that the legislature work on a set of bills to provide incentives with the purpose of diversifying the teaching profession. Such measures would include loan forgiveness and tuition reimbursement for those that pursue degrees in education. This also includes creating pathways for bilingual educators and service providers.

Immigrant Student Needs

Participants also discussed recommendations for programs that support the needs of newcomer students and their families. These programs would need to provide holistic social and educational support to newcomers. To implement these programs, participants suggested identifying school districts serving communities that are in immediate need of such a program. These would be communities with a high number of newcomers. Once these supports are in place, they suggested that school staff need to identify classes or subjects where newcomer students need more support. This would be done on a case-by-case basis, where each student would be identified to understand their individual needs. One specific resource that participants advocated for, however, was a universally available technology basics course for students and their families.

Additionally, they suggested that undocumented parents and guardians be educated and empowered to learn about and engage in the school-based decisions that impact their children's education. For example, part of this includes advocating so that the School Board election process allows non-citizen parents and students who are independent the right to vote.

Finally, participants advocated for implementing a safe zone policy for school districts and for schools to follow related protocols in case ICE or other law enforcement attempt to make unlawful arrests in schools. As part of the DHS-sensitive locations, schools are safe havens for immigrant students and families, these schools should be formally protected with such protocols, and accountability measures, in place.

Conclusion

The Latinx community is a non-homogenous group with varying needs and concerns. As such, it is imperative that these differing needs are addressed, especially in the school setting to ensure that all resources are conducive to student learning and success. Unfortunately, as it stands, the New Jersey school system does not have all the resources needed to enhance Latinx student well-being and performance in the school environment. However, with the implementation of the above recommendations, we are a small step closer to ensuring true equality for Latinx students in schools and that they are in an environment that truly caters to and considers their unique needs.

Thank you to all the participants who, with their unique expertise and lived experience, helped develop these recommendations.

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- 9 Weber, M. (2021, August 19). School funding in New Jersey: A fair future for all - new jersey policy perspective. New Jersey Policy Perspective -. <https://www.njpp.org/publications/report/school-funding-in-new-jersey-a-fair-future-for-a-ll/>

Appendix A - Preparatory Resources

Below are all of the resources that were shared with participants prior to the roundtable. Participants were asked to read these resources in advance.

NJPP reports:

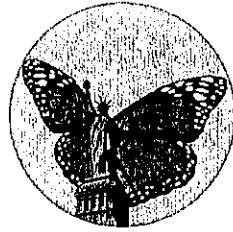
- <https://www.njpp.org/publications/report/separate-and-unequal-racial-and-ethnic-segregation-and-the-case-for-school-funding-reparations-in-new-jersey/>
- <https://www.njpp.org/publications/report/new-jersey-school-funding-the-higher-the-goals-the-higher-the-costs/>
- <https://www.njpp.org/publications/report/school-funding-in-new-jersey-a-fair-future-for-all/>
- <https://www.njpp.org/publications/report/new-jerseys-black-students-suffer-a-decline-in-access-to-school-mental-health-staff/>

NJCIC/ELC/NJTESOL Report:

- <https://www.njpp.org/publications/report/separate-and-unequal-racial-and-ethnic-segregation-and-the-case-for-school-funding-reparations-in-new-jersey/>

Appendix B- Participants

Beatriz Patino- Sherard (Lakewood)
Calandria Ortiz- Resende (NJ Coalition to End Domestic Violence)
David Matos (Latino Action Network)
Debbie Esposito (SPAN)
Francesca Baroni (Latino Action Network, LANFoundation)
Jesselly De La Cruz (LANFoundation)
Jose Laureano (Latino Action Network, Mercer County Community College)
Kimberly Valle (Imm Schools)
Lady Jimenez Torres (New Jersey Consortium for Immigrant Children)
Mark Webber (New Jersey Policy Perspective, RUGSE)
Nicole Rodriguez (New Jersey Policy Perspective)
Raven Diaz (Rutgers student)
Ronald Chaluisan (Newark Trust)



**New Jersey Consortium
for Immigrant Children**

This policy agenda was a collective effort between the Latino Action Network Foundation and the New Jersey Consortium for Immigrant Children.

This report was authored by Francesca Baroni, MSW, LSW, with contributions from Lady Jimenez Torres, MPA.

Sofia Rosa, Digital Strategist for LANF, provided translation and graphic design.

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Good morning members of the Joint Committee on Public Schools. My name is Saray Ramos from the Latino Action Network Foundation. As you are aware, in May of 2018, our sister organization, the Latino Action Network, alongside a coalition of civil rights, faith, and social justice groups, along with individual students and their parents/guardians, filed a lawsuit against the State of New Jersey to end its long history of segregated public schools.

Earlier this year, LANF, in collaboration with the New Jersey Consortium for Immigrant Children (NJCIC), hosted an education roundtable that focused on the Latino/x experience within New Jersey schools. Direct feedback from the roundtable, as well as on the ground community work for the past 5 years with students and young people around educational equity, highlighted several barriers to education equity including; residential segregation, language access, early childhood education, mental health and special needs, school discipline, school environment and curriculum, and pathways to higher education. This collective knowledge and direct community input resulted in a series of recommendations aimed at advancing the integration of our schools and fostering educational equity across the state. You can find the full report on our website at lanfoundation.org

I would like to emphasize that while the court mentions predominantly Latino/e and Black districts, any proposed solutions or recommendations should not be limited to specific areas. What is needed are structural and long-term changes statewide. Schools, regardless of location, must provide supportive and equitable environments to ensure student's needs are met. The legislature holds the power to implement solutions addressing various educational equity issues, spanning both inter- district and intra district remedies.

I would like to make the following recommendations for consideration in the effort to desegregate New Jersey's public schools:

1. **Eliminating Zipcode Barriers:** Removing the reliance on zip codes for school enrollment ensures that students aren't limited to schools based on their geographic location. This shift can provide more opportunities for students to attend schools that suit their educational needs and interests, thus promoting a more diverse and inclusive

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learning environment. And, this would require legislation to amend the current language in statutes.

2. **Eliminate Zero Tolerance Policies:** Zero Tolerance Policies in schools have exacerbated racial disparities in student discipline. As per the Attorney General's August 2023 guidance, Black students in NJ are suspended at a rate 3.3x higher than white students, while Latino/e and Multiracial students face suspensions at 1.5x their white counterparts. These rigid policies do not contribute to enhancing school safety or improved student behavior but instead lead to negative consequences, especially for students of color. The solution lies in eliminating Zero Tolerance Policies from school disciplinary frameworks and instead adopting alternative restorative justice practices and culturally responsive approaches. By replacing punitive measures, schools can create more equitable disciplinary systems that support the well-being and successes of all students. This is also something that can only happen with the support of the NJ Legislature.
3. Other recommended solutions that are highlighted in the lawsuit include:
 - a. **Implementation of Magnet Schools:** Magnet schools with various themes such as music, art, aerospace, engineering, and healthcare, etc., have succeeded in attracting students from urban and suburban areas in other states. Ensuring equitable locations and inclusive enrollment practices can promote integration by bringing together students from different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. By strategically placing these schools in areas that encourage diverse enrollment, it can help break down segregation patterns.
 - b. **Inter-District Choice Programs:** Allowing students from urban districts the opportunity to attend schools outside their residential areas, allows students from various backgrounds and neighborhoods to connect, promoting diversity, and breaking down racial barriers. New Jersey's current inter-district choice program is limited and has not been widely used since the state started it as a pilot program and severely restricted it from the beginning. Expanding this program through mandatory participation for schools rather than voluntary would be beneficial as another remedy to desegregate our schools.

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- c. **Community schools:** Introducing comprehensive support services within schools can address various socio-economic challenges faced by students, especially in urban areas. By providing counseling, language assistance, healthcare, and additional resources, community schools can create a more supportive and inclusive environment. This can help strengthen urban schools by addressing the diverse needs of students and families beyond academic education, thus potentially attracting a more diverse student population.

The fundamental goal of these remedies is to significantly enhance educational opportunities for Black, Latino and White Children, providing them with the chance to receive education in an integrated environment.

In closing, I urge the Committee to consider these recommendations seriously. Our state has a long-standing obligation to rectify the systemic inequalities prevalent in our educational system. These initiatives proposed today are not merely suggestions; they represent a pathway toward fostering an education environment that is inclusive, equitable, and conducive to the success of all students, regardless of their racial and socioeconomic background. Thank you for your time and consideration.