

# An Open Letter to the People of New Jersey

Our country may be deeply divided, but in New Jersey civic and community leaders, faith leaders, and civil rights and education advocates are working to create opportunities in the public schools for students of all different backgrounds to learn to live and work together in harmony.

The State of New Jersey is trying to stop them.

Over 370,000 Black and Latinx children in New Jersey (63% of the state total) attend public schools that are segregated by race and by poverty. New Jersey's public schools are among the most racially segregated in the entire country, more so than many public schools in states of the former Confederacy that were integrated following the U.S. Supreme Court's groundbreaking 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Unfortunately, the promise of *Brown* has never been fully realized in New Jersey.

On May 17, 2018—*Brown*'s 64th anniversary—a coalition of organizations and individuals filed a landmark case, *Latino Action Network et al. v. State of New Jersey et al.*

Segregation in New Jersey is not by choice. Much of it can be traced to government-sponsored policies that decades ago subsidized suburban housing for White people while at the same time refusing to insure mortgages in racially mixed neighborhoods. These practices spread throughout the real estate industry and were reinforced by exclusionary zoning policies that limited housing opportunities for Black people. This history helps to explain the severe residential segregation that exists in New Jersey today. State law that requires students to attend school based on where they live perpetuates this segregation in the state's public schools.

This segregation denies students from diverse racial and class backgrounds the chance to learn from each other and to find common ground across their differences. As the New Jersey Supreme Court has repeatedly held, school segregation also violates the state's constitution. Indeed, it is the only state constitution in the country that explicitly bans segregation in public schools.

The State is asking a court to dismiss the case—or to add 585 public school districts as parties, which would grind the case to a halt. The State is also demanding that plaintiffs show how school segregation would be fixed before the court rules that the State is required to fix it. This is like making a pedestrian who has been hit by a car show that his injuries can be healed before holding the driver responsible for hitting him.

A decision in favor of the State would be disastrous.

Extensive social science evidence over many decades documents the numerous educational benefits for children educated in integrated public schools. Research shows that becoming educated in diverse settings encourages children to think more critically; and it instills social and emotional skills by teaching children to be more empathetic toward people who are different. All children—Black, Latinx, Asian, Native, and White children alike—benefit from integration.

Recent research focusing specifically on Black children's educational outcomes at the height of southern school desegregation during the 1970s and 1980s shows significantly higher college attendance and completion rates, an average 30 percent increase in annual income, and better health outcomes. Indeed, the educational effects of prolonged exposure to school desegregation during this period were large enough to eliminate the Black-White achievement gap, with no adverse effects on the performance of any racial group. When coupled with equitable school funding and high-quality preschool, integration can dramatically improve educational outcomes that promote lifelong opportunity.

We, the undersigned, are educators, civic leaders, faith leaders, social justice advocates, researchers, and policy experts who are committed to educational equity and fairness. We urge you to lift up your voices and call Governor Murphy at (609) 292-6000. Tell him that his Administration should work to ensure that the promise of *Brown* is finally realized in the Garden State.

Action Together NJ

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NJ-o8 For Progress

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