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## Policies Needed to Build Inclusive Cities and Schools

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**Abstract:** Race and class segregation have long governed patterns of residential sorting in the American metropolis. However, as urban neighborhoods across the country experience an influx of white and middle-class residents, they could alleviate the stark economic and racial segregation that is ubiquitous to urban neighborhoods and school systems. This paper argues that gentrification is a growing phenomenon with great potential to influence neighborhoods as well as cities and the schools within them. Key steps are discussed that policymakers can take to foster neighborhood and school change that is both inclusive and equitable.

**Keywords:** Segregation; gentrification; integration; school choice

### **Políticas necesarias para construir incluso las ciudades y las escuelas**

**Resumen:** La carrera y la clasificación de la segregación han estado gobernando patrones de viviendas residiendo en las metrópolis americanas. Sin embargo, las urbanizaciones adyacentes a través de la experiencia de los habitantes de una población de la clase media y media, podrían aludir a la situación económica y racial segregación que es ubicua para los alrededores de los alrededores y los sistemas. Este documento argues que gentrification es

un fenómeno de crecimiento con un gran potencial para influir en los países así como las ciudades y las escuelas dentro de ellos. Los pasos clave se explican que los directivos de políticas pueden llevar a unirse y cambiar de contexto que son ambos incluso y equitativos.

**Palabras clave:** Segregation; gentrificación; la integración; escuelas

### **Políticas necessárias para construir cidades e escolas**

**Resumo:** A raça e a classificação da segregação têm governado os padrões de habitação que residem na metrópole americana. No entanto, as urbanizações adjacentes, através da experiência dos habitantes de uma população de classe média e média, poderiam aludir à segregação econômica e racial que é onipresente para os arredores e sistemas circundantes. Este documento argumenta que a gentrificação é um fenômeno de crescimento com grande potencial para influenciar países, bem como cidades e escolas dentro deles. Os principais passos são explicados que os gerentes de políticas podem liderar a junção e mudança de contexto, que são ao mesmo tempo justos.

**Palavras-chave:** Segregação; gentrificação; a integração; escolha da escola

## **Introduction**

The gentrification of neighborhoods across American central cities has attracted notice since at least the 1970s. In the most recent decade's "return to the cities," with redevelopment and investment of many downtown areas (Freeman & Cai, 2015; Owens, 2012), gentrification has become much more pervasive. This demographic transformation is likely being fueled by greater demand among the young, college-educated demographic (20- to 30-somethings) for centrally located housing in higher-density cities and neighborhoods (Hyra, 2016). Many of the nation's largest cities, including Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Chicago, Washington, DC, Los Angeles, and Portland, are experiencing an influx of upper-middle-class families. This pattern had long been unthinkable since the flight of white, middle-class families from urban centers had become a ubiquitous part of suburbanization during the second half of the twentieth century. In fact, between 2010 and 2015, city populations grew more rapidly than their surrounding suburbs (Frey, 2017). Regardless of whether this trend signals a long-term resurgence of cities or a short-term upsurge attributable to the Great Recession and its aftermath in combination with the suburban housing market slump (Frey, 2015), it carries potentially significant implications for urban school districts.

If the millennials and young professionals who make up a primary element of this urban renewal trend (Hwang & Lin, 2016) choose to reinvest in city schools, they could alleviate the stark economic and racial segregation that is pervasive in urban school systems (Mordechay & Orfield, 2017; Noguera, 2003). School desegregation levels peaked in the 1980s, and since that time, schools have become increasingly segregated (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014). Residentially, segregation by income has increased over the last three decades in the nation's largest metropolitan areas (Fry & Taylor, 2012), while racial residential segregation has persisted (Logan & Parman, 2015). Racial and economic segregation is linked to a variety of negative outcomes (Orfield & Lee, 2005), such as lower levels of academic achievement, lower graduation rates (Swanson, 2004), and higher dropout rates (Balfanz & Legters, 2004). On the other hand, racial and socioeconomic desegregation is associated with numerous academic and social benefits for all students (Ayscue, Frankenberg, & Siegel-Hawley, 2017). Therefore, the desegregation of communities and schools should be a desirable policy goal.

Much of the research on gentrification and schools suggests that traditionally, families who moved into neighborhoods that were gentrifying often opted out of the neighborhood schools, relocating to suburban communities when they had children (Hankins, 2007; Keels, Burdick-Will, & Keene 2013; Kennedy & Leonard, 2001) and effectively ensuring that the local public schools remained segregated. However, there is evidence that more recent waves of gentrifiers—that is, young, largely white, millennial, middle- to upper-class families—are beginning to engage with urban school districts (Mordechay & Ayscue, 2017; Siegel-Hawley, Thachik, & Bridges, 2017; Stillman, 2012). Although many hurdles remain that prevent integration from being a widespread reality, these trends signal the possibility of future neighborhood and school desegregation. One concern is that without crafting policy solutions that support integrated schools and diverse neighborhoods, these newly diverse neighborhoods and schools will re-segregate.

## **Opportunities for Integration, Inclusion, and Equity**

Although much remains to be learned about the process of urban gentrification, policies at the federal, state, and city levels could increase the likelihood of equitable development as community demographic changes continue to sweep across much of America’s urban landscape. Managing this process so that it supports integration will require coordinated and targeted policies that underscore the deep and fundamental relationships among housing, communities, and schools. In the context of gentrification, policy responses should be constructed with the goal of racial and economic integration. The first step is to ensure that affordable housing opportunities are available in neighborhoods as they gentrify so that low-income families previously residing in the neighborhood are not forced out. Second, policies that facilitate greater racial and economic diversity in school environments are essential. In the following section, we outline housing policies that preserve affordable properties in high-opportunity neighborhoods and school policies that actively promote racial and economic diversity. We provide examples of cities, including New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Pasadena, and Denver, that are implementing the types of housing or school policies described below.

## **Housing and Education Policy Responses to Gentrification**

### **Affordable Housing**

Issues of housing affordability are widespread and reach beyond the “hottest” coastal markets and gentrifying neighborhoods, putting enormous pressure on highly desirable housing markets and contributing to the persistence of racial and ethnic exclusion in many urban neighborhoods. Therefore, strategies that could alleviate pressures on housing affordability should be at the core of managing gentrification. This goal requires prioritizing the preservation and production of affordable properties in high-opportunity neighborhoods. Affordable housing units in gentrifying neighborhoods offer the possibility of better access to job opportunities, social networks, and schools. One recent study of housing provided by the New York Housing Authority compared developments located in gentrified or rapidly changing neighborhoods with those in low-income and racially segregated neighborhoods. The study found that residents in gentrifying neighborhoods on average enjoyed higher incomes, lower crime rates, and higher test scores in local schools (Dastrup et al., 2015). While the extent of “social mixing” among different racial and social class groups has been hotly debated (Davidson, 2010; Lee, 2008), one possibility is to replace existing high-density housing “projects” with new lower-density mixed-income communities. Several studies have illustrated resident satisfaction with housing and neighborhood across the income and race spectrum

in well-designed mixed-income developments (Chaskin & Joseph, 2010; Levy, McDade, & Dumlao, 2010). In fact, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere (HOPE VI) Program, which began in 1992, has been used to foster social mixing across race and income lines, even though the evidence of interaction across income or racial groups in those developments has been inconsistent (Silver, 2013). Some studies have suggested that HOPE VI is not an effective program for increasing resident self-sufficiency. For example, several scholars found that residents who were moved out of their old public housing projects due to HOPE VI redevelopment found no employment increases (Curley, 2010; Goetz, 2010). Nonetheless, in several sites, HOPE VI has sponsored innovative efforts to link public housing redevelopment with substantial investments in neighborhood schools (Popkin et al., 2004).

More recently, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (2016) released a report laying out a broad-based approach to housing affordability in gentrifying areas. These recommendations include preserving existing affordable housing through rental assistance demonstrations, providing housing choice vouchers, offering preservation-friendly incentives, and encouraging further development. Programs that preserve existing affordable housing and encourage greater development of rental units at all levels can reduce pressure on the rental market, thus lowering housing costs and expanding housing choice for residents, particularly in gentrifying areas with significant rent growth and tight supply.

### **Possible Strategies: Three Current Examples**

Some local governments and organizations are already looking at innovative ways to ensure equity in neighborhood development in rapidly gentrifying communities. This section highlights the work of several local agencies that are focusing on development requirements to preserve low- and middle-income housing, developing job centers, and strategically locating affordable housing near accessible transportation networks. In the three examples described below, local governments and organizations are working toward innovative and comprehensive ways to ensure equity in neighborhood development and change. These examples can serve as models for how to counteract destructive redevelopment practices and the negative effects of gentrification, namely the displacement of entire communities of color.

**New York City.** One of the nation's most expensive cities with widespread gentrification, New York City is using a combination of zoning changes and public works projects to incentivize developers to come to East Harlem. By opening up new areas to residential construction and easing zoning regulations, the city hopes to expedite the development of affordable and mixed-income housing. Many of the projects will be required to set aside between 20% and 30% of their units for low- or moderate-income households. In addition to promoting the development of and increasing access to affordable housing, "The East Harlem Plan" (New York City, 2018) also seeks to promote economic opportunity by leveraging its investments in affordable housing to create local jobs and strengthen small businesses. With such strategies in place, gentrification can provide a path to economic opportunity for more minority and low-income residents. But absent policy intervention, the displacement of existing residents is likely to occur.

**Philadelphia.** Similarly, Philadelphia's housing boom has resulted in rapid price appreciation for housing and gentrification of neighborhoods in the downtown core. The Philadelphia Association of Community Development Corporations (PACDC) has been attempting to address these issues with its equitable development policy platform. PACDC published a report titled "Beyond Gentrification, Toward Equitable Neighborhoods" (Philadelphia, 2018) which outlines five strategic recommendations: strengthen community organizations, build and preserve affordable housing, develop neighborhood commercial corridors as job centers for local residents, collect and

analyze data to achieve a better understanding of the issues related to displacement, and improve assistance programs. Such policy recommendations can ensure that those who are most disadvantaged in today's social and economic systems are given opportunities to benefit from improving neighborhoods in cities.

**San Francisco.** In the San Francisco Bay Area, the heart of the technology boom and one of the nation's least affordable housing markets, the Transit-Oriented Affordable Housing (TOAH) Fund, launched in 2011, and financed by public and private resources, was created to provide financing for the development of affordable housing and other vital community services near transit lines throughout the nine-county Bay Area (San Francisco, 2018). Through the fund, developers can access flexible, affordable capital to purchase or improve available property near transit lines for the development of affordable housing, retail space, and other critical services such as child care centers, healthy food amenities, and healthcare clinics.

### **Racial and Economic Diversity in Schools**

Neighborhoods matter to the well-being of children and families (Chetty, Hendren, & Katz, 2015; Ellen & Turner, 1997). They are the baseline for essential public and private services, with schools being one of the most significant. Neighborhood revitalization efforts that achieve mixed-income communities alone often do not result in desegregated schools since, as was noted above, higher-income families who move into gentrifying neighborhoods have traditionally often opted out of the neighborhood schools (Keels, Burdick-Will, & Keene 2013). Therefore, policy efforts that actively promote race and class diversity on the school level should be encouraged.

One possibility is to create more urban magnet programs with strategies and guidelines for racial and income diversity. Studies have suggested that magnet programs with unique educational offerings can provide multiple benefits to students. Such programs not only provide improved academic outcomes for students but also, with appropriate civil rights protections, they can play a role in fostering integration (Siegel-Hawley & Frankenberg, 2012). Magnet schools have greater flexibility than traditional public schools in their curricula, admissions standards, and the freedom to draw students from different geographical areas. Gentrifying areas with high numbers of English language learners might consider establishing regional dual language magnet programs that recruit half Spanish speakers and half native English speakers with a goal of producing bilingual students; such schools have been shown to produce exceptional academic outcomes for all students (Gándara & Mordechay, 2017; Umansky & Reardon, 2014). Models for these kinds of magnet programs can be found in metropolitan areas across the country, many of which are popular among students and families (Gándara & Hopkins, 2010). Other magnets could offer innovative programs that focus on a particular theme, such as experiential learning, computer science, or fine arts, that might appeal to both gentrifying parents and other parents who were already living in the community.

The federal Magnet Schools Assistance Program (MSAP) offers grants to school districts seeking to create magnet schools that strive to achieve racial desegregation in previously segregated schools. A recent study of 24 school districts receiving such grants across the nation identified numerous strategies that are important for enrolling a racially diverse student body (Ayscue, Levy, Siegel-Hawley, & Woodward, 2017). These mechanisms include selecting an attractive and relevant theme such as those suggested above, conducting outreach, providing free and accessible transportation, intentionally selecting a diverse site such as a gentrifying neighborhood, and employing lottery-based admissions. Although there is some concern that creating diverse magnet schools triggers greater segregation in other schools, we are not aware of research that supports this concern. Further, magnets receiving MSAP funding are required to identify the schools and the

racial demographics of the schools from which they would draw students in order to address this type of concern.

In addition to magnet programs, local traditional public schools could be attractive options for both gentrifying parents and previous residents. For example, schools in gentrifying neighborhoods might consider hosting forums and focus groups to ask gentrifier families exactly what they are looking for in a school so that the school could potentially be modeled according to their tastes as part of a community-driven redesign process. Such incentives could include full-day care that involves high-end extracurricular programs. This process should be planned with activities that intentionally and actively build bridges across race, language, and socioeconomic differences.

Also, school and district leaders should market these schools to the neighborhoods through print, radio, and social media platforms, as well as by having open houses and conducting school tours. Integrating realtors into this process should also be considered. School leaders could communicate with realtors about the attractive features of their schools so that local real estate professionals can speak positively about the schools when advising prospective residents. Since realtors are often the first people that families encounter when moving to a new location, their opinions about community characteristics, such as safety, culture, and the local schools, can hold considerable weight. Pasadena Unified School district in Southern California can serve as a model. Its school leaders are inviting realtors into the district's schools with the hopes of changing some of the long-held negative opinions about the local schools (Pasadena, 2018).

Placing similar requirements for racial and economic diversity on charter schools in gentrifying areas also presents an opportunity for desegregation and educational equity. For example, charter schools in New York are allowed to choose to give preference in their lottery to at-risk students, including those who are low income, English language learners, or students with disabilities (Kahlenberg & Potter, 2014). Through a weighted lottery, such admission preferences can be tools for creating a diverse student body, drawing applications from a diverse population of families. There is evidence that this approach is already happening, albeit on a small scale, in pockets of Brooklyn in New York City (Russo, 2013).

At present, charters tend to be more segregated than traditional public schools, often because charters are incentivized through education policy or philanthropic investments to locate in highly segregated, low-income communities (Scott, 2009). If philanthropic organizations and other funders promoted funding for charters in integrated areas rather than encouraging them to target homogenous communities (Kahlenberg & Potter, 2014), charters could potentially be supportive of facilitating desegregation. With appropriate civil rights protections, such as outreach to diverse families, accessible information, and free transportation (Frankenberg & Siegel-Hawley, 2009), charter schools could also play a role in fostering integration.

Denver Public Schools in Colorado can serve as a potential model for cities whose leaders are thinking about equity and long-term sustainability within the context of major shifts in demographics and resulting changes in housing patterns. In 2017, the Denver Board of Education passed a resolution to establish a citywide "Strengthening Neighborhoods Initiative" (Denver, 2018) with the task of developing recommendations to increase integration across the schools and to address the demographic pressures that accompany gentrification. Some of their recommendations include: establish quantitative targets for increasing integration within schools, establish a set of resources and supports for schools to use in creating a more integrated and inclusive environment, and develop citywide coordination and partnerships with other organizations such as the local housing authority, regional transportation agencies, and local public libraries. In addition, the initiative recommended that the school district and community partners launch a meaningful public

engagement and communications effort to increase awareness and understanding of the benefits of integration.

## Conclusion

Gentrification is a growing phenomenon that has considerable potential to influence neighborhoods as well as cities and the schools within them. By introducing affluent households into previously predominantly low-income and racially segregated neighborhoods, gentrification may be a part of the solution to concentrated poverty, which is borne overwhelmingly by people of color. Indeed, some have identified concentrated poverty and its relationship to race and ethnicity as the biggest urban challenge in America today (Cortright & Mahmoudi, 2014). Communities undergoing massive urban-core revitalization and metropolitan growth have a particularly ripe opportunity to harness the upsides of neighborhood change and alleviate the stark racial and economic isolation that is so pervasive in urban America. However, market pressures associated with gentrification also have the potential to force longtime, low-income residents and residents of color to move out, thus leading to resegregation of communities and schools.

In order to create stable and diverse neighborhoods and communities, policy responses that link housing and schools are needed. Although greater housing production and preservation is necessary in communities struggling to offset market pressures, in order for the outcome of gentrification to be a shared opportunity, efforts at meaningful integration across the lines of class and race are just as important. An essential part of this effort is that schools must be viewed as neighborhood anchors that can serve as vehicles for ultimately integrating the community.

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