

Chapter 6

From Desegregation to Resegregation: The Impact on Schooling in the African–American Community

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ABSTRACT

Exploring the history of systemic racism rooted in longstanding policies, practices, and unfair treatment of African Americans can explain present-day disproportionality. Desegregating schools following the 1954 Brown v. Board decision was long, arduous, and contentious. Despite desegregation efforts, the return to neighborhood schools, residential segregation, court rulings, and district student assignment and choice plans, school segregation has increased. Rumberger and Palardy argue that students in segregated schools are primarily poor, and that socioeconomic status significantly affects student achievement. Furthermore, children who are experiencing poverty are at greater risk of encountering trauma and barriers to maximizing educational opportunities for success. In this chapter, the authors explore these traumatic experiences, which are prevalent in segregated areas of concentrated poverty. The authors highlight the need for authentic integration for access and trauma-informed practices to mitigate the effects of acute and chronic stress and foster resilience.

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INTRODUCTION

The conditions for Black people in America date back to 1619 when the first Africans were brought to the shores of the United States and were enslaved. In 1896, *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruled that separate but equal was constitutional, legalizing the separation of African Americans, but was overturned in 1954 when the Supreme ruled in *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* that separate but equal was, in fact, unconstitutional. It has been nearly 70 years since the landmark decision of Brown versus Topeka Board of Education promised equal educational opportunity, particularly for African American students. Despite the promise of *Brown* to equalize educational opportunities for African American students, studies and various datasets show disproportionate outcomes for both Hispanic and African American students, which suggests that the promise of *Brown v. Board* has not been fully realized. The disparate outcomes for African Americans iterate the idea of Du Bois and Myrdal in the early 1900s, and more recently, scholars such as Ta-nehisi Coates and Kimberly Alexander, to name a few, argue that “race continues to be a source of controversy and conflict for American society and the condition of racial minorities” (Noguera et al., 2014, p. 1).

W. E. B. Du Bois (1935) argued the need for separate schools only if these institutions “provided a proper education for the Negro race” and mixed or integrated schools did not (p. 328). According to Du Bois (1935), some characteristics of a “proper education” relies on teachers having historical knowledge of the group of students being taught, “sympathetic touch between teacher and student,” relationships between students and adults to students based on “perfect social equality,” and educational facilities (p. 328). Although Du Bois’s ideology stemmed from the continued racial divide in America, he proposed that separate schools may one day be obsolete even if the education of African American students received was deplorable. In fact, Du Bois (1935) stated, “The plain fact faces us, that either he will have separate schools, or he will not be educated” (p. 329).

Despite Du Bois’s preference for separate schools unless African Americans were going to receive a superior education in a mixed or integrated school, within 20 years, the move towards integration of schools began with the passing of key legislation. The decision of the courts for all school districts to desegregate with “all deliberate speed” had great implications for American schools; however, the path to achieving equality and equity was just the beginning of a long and arduous process nationally. Thus, the objectives of this chapter are to establish school integration as a social justice issue by:

1. Exploring the impact of segregated schools on African American children.
2. Highlighting the need for trauma-informed practices for African American children who live in and attend schools in impoverished communities.
3. Presenting efforts to promote more racially and socioeconomically integrated schools.

BACKGROUND

Unkept Promises: *Brown v. Board*

At the onset of the *Brown v. Board* decision, the promise of improved outcomes was met with great enthusiasm among the Black community that through school integration, Black students would benefit. The very group of Black students that should have benefited from Brown are among the most

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