

Nos. 05-908 & 05-915

IN THE
Supreme Court of the United States

PARENTS INVOLVED IN COMMUNITY SCHOOLS,
Petitioner,

—v.—

SEATTLE SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 1, *et al.*,
Respondents.

CRYSTAL D. MEREDITH, Custodial Parent and
Next Friend of Joshua Ryan McDonald,
Petitioner,

—v.—

JEFFERSON COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION, *et al.*,
Respondents.

ON WRIT OF CERTIORARI TO THE UNITED STATES
COURTS OF APPEALS FOR THE NINTH AND SIXTH CIRCUITS

**BRIEF *AMICUS CURIAE* OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL
LIBERTIES UNION, THE ACLU OF KENTUCKY, AND
THE ACLU OF WASHINGTON IN SUPPORT OF RESPONDENTS**

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INTEREST OF *AMICI*¹

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) is a nationwide, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization with more than 550,000 members dedicated to the principles of liberty and equality embodied in the Constitution and this nation's civil rights laws. In support of those principles, the ACLU has appeared in numerous cases before this Court, both as direct counsel and as *amicus curiae*, including *Gratz v. Bollinger*, 539 U.S. 244 (2003), and *Grutter v. Bollinger*, 539 U.S. 306 (2003). The ACLU of Kentucky and the ACLU of Washington are state affiliates of the national ACLU.

SUMMARY OF ARGUMENT

This brief addresses the question of whether race-neutral alternatives to race-conscious school assignments sufficiently remedy racial segregation in public schools to qualify as less-restrictive alternatives under the Fourteenth Amendment. Several *amici* writing in support of Petitioners, including the United States, agree that school districts maintain an “important” interest in reducing racial segregation in elementary and secondary schools. Yet, they contend that the goal of racially integrated schools can be achieved without resort to race-conscious remedies by relying instead on such race-neutral alternatives as (1) the use of socioeconomic status (“SES”) to assign students to schools, and (2) the creation of magnet school programs. Neither Petitioners nor

¹ No counsel for a party authored this brief in whole or in part, and no person or entity other than *amici* and their counsel made any monetary contribution toward the preparation and submission of this brief. Pursuant to Rule 37.3, the parties have given general consent to the filing of *amicus* briefs.

their *amici*, however, cite any evidence in support of their claims.

In fact, the available empirical evidence suggests that while these race-neutral alternatives may sometimes have a marginal beneficial impact on integrating public schools, they present, at best, only a partial solution and, at worst, exacerbate existing segregation. In light of the evidence that race-neutral student assignment policies, by themselves, do not achieve sufficient integration, school districts should be permitted to use school assignment policies that flexibly consider race as one of several factors to achieve additional progress toward the reduction of minority isolation. Nothing in the Constitution requires school districts to accept partial solutions to the problem of racial segregation.

ARGUMENT

These cases do not seriously call into question the importance of reducing racial isolation in public elementary and secondary schools that are, distressingly, subject to increasing re-segregation across the country. Far from suggesting that diversity should play no role in the K-12 context, the Solicitor General, writing in support of both Petitioners, explicitly endorses a state interest in racially and ethnically desegregating elementary and secondary schools. The United States agrees that “even in the absence of” past *de jure* segregation, “school districts can pursue a legitimate and important purpose in seeking to reduce or eliminate minority group isolation in public schools,” Brief for the United States as Amicus Curiae Supporting Petitioner at 17, *Parents Involved in Community Schools (P.I.C.S.) v. Seattle School Dist. No. 1, et al.*, No. 05-908 (U.S. Aug. 21, 2006), and that the purpose of “avoiding racially concentrated schools” is “undoubtedly legitimate and important,” Brief for

the United States as Amicus Curiae Supporting Petitioner at 15, *Meredith v. Jefferson County Bd. of Educ.*, No. 05-915 (U.S. Aug. 21, 2006).²

Implicit in that acknowledgement is a recognition of the ongoing prevalence of segregation in elementary and secondary schools. Nationally, over one-third of African-American and Latino students attend “intensely segregated minority schools,” where 90% or more of the student body is minority. Gary Orfield & Chungmei Lee, *RACIAL TRANSFORMATION AND THE CHANGING NATURE OF SEGREGATION* 6, 9-11 (2006). Over one in six African-American students attends “apartheid” schools with 99% or more minority enrollment, as does more than one in ten Latino students. *Id.* at 10-11.

Notwithstanding significant differences between student assignments in elementary and secondary education and student admissions in higher education, racial integration in K-12 education fits comfortably within the framework announced in *Grutter v. Bollinger*, which held student body racial diversity to be a compelling interest in the context of higher education. 539 U.S. 306, 328-33 (2003). The rationales relied upon in *Grutter* to justify race-conscious school admissions policies --- including not only improvements in academic outcomes but also the promotion of sociological and democratic values --- are as applicable in the context of K-12 public schools, if not more so. By “promot[ing] cross-racial understanding,” race-conscious

² Nor could the United States reasonably adopt a contrary position. Congress has enacted educational programs which have operated for decades with explicitly race-conscious goals. An express purpose of the Magnet School Assistance Program (“MSAP”) is the “elimination, reduction, or prevention of minority group isolation in elementary schools and secondary schools with substantial proportions of minority students.” 20 U.S.C. § 7231(b)(1).

admissions and assignment policies in both the K-12 context and in higher education “help[] break down racial stereotypes, and enable[] [students] to better understand persons of different races.” *Id.* at 330. Similarly, racial integration in elementary and secondary schools, as in universities, “better prepares students for an increasingly diverse workforce and society, and better prepares them as professionals.” *Id.* In addition, it ensures that all students obtain the “exposure to widely diverse people, cultures, ideas, and viewpoints” that is critical to our nation’s global competitiveness, economically and militarily. *Id.* at 330-31.

Indeed, as articulated by other *amici* supporting the School Districts, racial integration in public schools is even more compelling in the K-12 context than it is in higher education, in large part because K-12 education, which must be provided for all students, reaches more students, and at an earlier stage of their development when they are more impressionable. Given the rates of racial re-segregation and racial isolation in those schools, and the impressionability of schoolchildren, the educational stakes are undeniably high. It is not surprising, therefore, that the central role of K-12 education informed this Court’s opinion in *Brown v. Bd. of Ed.*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954). The *Brown* Court recognized primary and secondary education as “a principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment.” *Id.* at 493. Consequently, the Court reasoned, the harms of racially separated public schools “apply with added force to children in grade and high schools.” *Id.* at 493-94.

Rather than challenging the importance of racially integrating the nation’s public elementary and secondary schools, Petitioners’ supporters principally challenge school assignment policies that include race consciousness on the

ground that they are not narrowly tailored. They posit that less restrictive alternatives --- specifically, student assignments based on socioeconomic status and magnet programs --- satisfy this well-established interest. *See, e.g.*, Brief of Petitioner at 18, 40, *P.I.C.S. v. Seattle School Dist. No. 1, et al.*, No. 05-908 (U.S. Aug. 21, 2006) (proposing, *inter alia*, magnet programs and the use of socioeconomic factors as race-neutral alternatives); Br. of the U.S. for Meredith at 16, 22 (proposing magnet schools as a race-neutral alternative); Br. of the U.S. for P.I.C.S. at 25-27 (offering SES-based assignments and magnet programs as race-neutral alternatives). Under this Court’s constitutional jurisprudence, however, these measures cannot be considered “alternatives” unless they are as effective as race-conscious remedies in achieving the stated government interest.

As the Court explained in *Grutter*, the central question is not whether the proffered race-neutral alternatives have any value but, rather, whether they serve the government’s interests “about as well” as the challenged policy. 539 U.S. at 339 (quoting *Wygant v. Jackson Bd. of Ed.*, 476 U.S. 267, 280 n.6 (1986)); *see also Richmond v. J.A. Croson Co.*, 488 U.S. 469 (1989) (noting that the appropriateness of race-neutral remedies must consider their efficacy).³ Here, the

³ The challenged policies in the two districts at issue here, Seattle and Louisville, both used race-conscious measures in conjunction with race-neutral measures, confirming that the appropriate inquiry is not to compare the efficacy of race-neutral alternatives against the efficacy of race-conscious measures, but rather to determine whether race-neutral alternatives alone are as effective as the challenged plans which utilized both race-conscious measures and race-neutral alternatives. *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle Sch. Dist. No. 1*, 426 F.3d 1162, 1167, 1169 (9th Cir. 2005) (describing district’s use of race-conscious measures in conjunction with race-neutral ones, including, *inter alia*, implementing magnet programs, adopting a weighted funding formula, improving facilities, and developing innovative academic programs);

government's interest is to achieve racially integrated public schools --- not only for the resulting improvements in academic outcomes, but also to promote sociological and democratic values similar to those described in *Grutter* and in *Brown*. Thus, it is not enough to say that student assignments based on socioeconomic status and magnet programs can produce many educational benefits --- for example, reduced poverty concentration, improved school quality, introduction of innovative educational instruction and increased choice for students and their parents. Even assuming that is true, which may be the case in some circumstances, the issue of whether these programs constitute viable "race neutral alternatives" that preclude any use of race-conscious assignment policies depends on their effectiveness in racially integrating K-12 schools. If these alternatives are sufficient by themselves to create integrated schools, then the use of race-conscious measures would be difficult if not impossible to justify. If, on the other hand, these alternatives, without more, have proven inadequate in most circumstances to achieve the compelling state interest in an integrated school system, then school districts should be granted the discretion to experiment with school assignment policies that use race "in a flexible nonmechanical way," *Grutter*, 539 U.S. at 334, in their effort to address the problem of racial segregation and isolation in America's public schools. Compare *id.* at 342 ("The States may perform their roles as laboratories for experimentation to devise various solutions where the best solution is far from clear," quoting *United States v. Lopez*, 514 U.S. 549, 581 (Kennedy, J. concurring)).

McFarland v. Jefferson Cty. Public Schools, 330 F. Supp.2d 834, 861 (W.D. Ky. 2004), *aff'd* 416 F.3d 513 (6th Cir. 2005) (noting that the Board utilized race-neutral alternatives in addition to race-conscious measures).

In short, facts matter, and “a page of history is worth a volume of logic,” *New York Trust Co. v. Eisner*, 256 U.S. 345, 349 (1921) (Holmes, J.). Yet, not a single brief in support of Petitioners cites any evidence supporting their argument that their proffered alternatives do “about as well” as race-conscious school assignment policies in promoting integrated schools. Instead, P.I.C.S. and *amici* supporting both Petitioners rely on bald assertions, such as “race neutral alternatives would likely increase diversity just as much as the race preference.” Br. of P.I.C.S. at 22. *See also* Br. of the U.S. for Meredith at 22 (asserting, without evidence, that the “goal of achieving racially integrated schools can be achieved effectively through race-neutral alternatives”); Br. of the U.S. for P.I.C.S. at 23 (same). Not only are claims that race-neutral measures work “about as well as” as race-conscious measures counterintuitive, *see, e.g., Brewer v. West Irondequoit Centr. Sch. Dist.*, 212 F.3d 738, 752 (2d Cir. 2000) (“[T]here is no more effective means of achieving th[e] goal of [reducing racial isolation] than to base decisions on race”), but they also are demonstrably inconsistent with the experience of actual districts employing these measures. The empirical evidence shows that, at best, SES-based assignment policies and magnet programs provide only a partial and insufficient integration solution and, at worst, exacerbate segregation and hyper-segregation. In the five school districts profiled by the United States Department of Education employing SES-based measures, none eliminated racial segregation. Even worse, the introduction of SES-based policies coincided with an exacerbation of racial isolation in those districts where it existed. Similarly, a review of districts receiving funds through the United States Department of Education’s Magnet Schools Assistance Program (“MSAP”) shows that, at best, the individual schools targeted for grant funds experienced mixed results in reducing racial segregation and isolation, and that the impact

of the grant across the entire district was even more limited. Because race-neutral alternatives alone cannot achieve the government's compelling interest, school districts should be entitled to utilize race-conscious measures that will further the government's goal of an integrated school system. The evidence demonstrates that there simply is no less restrictive alternative that is as effective as including race-conscious school assignment policies in efforts to achieve racial integration in our nation's public schools.

I. RELYING SOLELY ON SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS FOR SCHOOL ASSIGNMENTS HAS A LIMITED IMPACT ON RACIALLY INTEGRATING PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Petitioners' *amici* propose using socioeconomic status to assign students to schools as a race-neutral alternative for reducing racial segregation in public schools. *See, e.g.*, Brief of Drs. Murphy, Rossell & Walberg as Amici Curiae Supporting Petitioner at 24-25, *P.I.C.S. v. Seattle School Dist. No. 1, et al.*, No. 05-908 (U.S. Aug. 21, 2006) (proposing SES-based assignments as a race-neutral alternative); Brief of Pacific Legal Foundation as Amici Curiae Supporting Petitioner at 25, *Meredith v. Jefferson County Bd. of Educ.*, No. 05-915 (U.S. Aug. 21, 2006) (same). In support of that contention, the United States in particular relies on a report issued by the Office for Civil Rights of the United States Department of Education, *ACHIEVING DIVERSITY: RACE-NEUTRAL ALTERNATIVES IN AMERICAN EDUCATION* (2004) (hereinafter OCR, *ACHIEVING DIVERSITY*), touting the use of SES-based assignments to racially integrate public schools and describing five model school districts that have utilized this method. Br. of the U.S. for P.I.C.S. at 25; Br. of the U.S. for Meredith at 22. But neither *amici*'s briefs nor the OCR Report cite any evidence to demonstrate that SES-based measures actually succeed in achieving racial integration.

Proponents of SES-based school assignments argue that such programs advance important government interests independent of racial integration, such as the improvement of academic outcomes for low-income students. *See, e.g.*, OCR, *ACHIEVING DIVERSITY* 63-64; Richard D. Kahlenberg, *Socioeconomic School Integration*, *POVERTY & RACE* (Poverty & Race Research Action Council, Washington, D.C.), Sept./Oct. 2001. They also suggest that, to the extent that race and poverty are correlated, these measures may assist in reducing racial segregation in schools. *See, e.g., id.* What they do not claim is that SES-based assignments are a *substitute* for race-conscious assignments. Even Richard Kahlenberg, cited by the United States Department of Education as “one of the leading experts on the issue of socioeconomic diversity,” OCR, *ACHIEVING DIVERSITY* 63, states, “class should be a supplement to rather than a replacement for race” in school assignments, contrary to the position of Petitioners and their *amici*. Richard D. Kahlenberg, *Socioeconomic School Integration - A Reply to the Responses*, *POVERTY & RACE* (Poverty & Race Research Action Council, Washington, D.C.), Nov./Dec. 2001 (internal quotations omitted).

The Office for Civil Rights report relied upon by the Solicitor General profiles the following five school districts as models for using SES-based assignments as a race-neutral alternative to achieving student body diversity: Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina; Wake County, North Carolina; San Francisco, California; Brandywine, Delaware; and La Crosse, Wisconsin.⁴ OCR, *ACHIEVING DIVERSITY* 61-62, 66-

⁴ OCR, *ACHIEVING DIVERSITY* also mentions that Cambridge, Massachusetts employs a SES plan, but it does not describe this plan in detail. Cambridge’s plan, in fact, is not race-neutral as it continues to consider race as a factor in student assignments. *CAMBRIDGE PUBLIC SCHOOLS, CONTROLLED CHOICE PLAN 9* (Dec. 18, 2001), *available at*

71. An analysis of the racial composition of the schools in these districts before and after the adoption of the SES assignment plans, however, reveals that, at best, SES-based assignments provide only a partial solution to racially integrating schools.

To determine the impact of the SES assignment plan in each district profiled by the OCR report, *ACHIEVING DIVERSITY*, we used publicly available data from the United States Department of Education's Common Core of Data ("CCD")⁵ to identify changes in the degree of segregation and hyper-segregation that resulted after each district abandoned race-conscious school assignment policies and/or implemented a SES-based assignment policy. For analytical purposes, we define a segregated school as one in which the percentage of minority enrollment deviates by more than 15% from the district-wide proportion of minority students.⁶ By this measure, if a district's minority enrollment constitutes 30% of the student population, then a school with less than 15% or more than 45% minority populations is considered segregated. Following the Harvard Civil Rights

<http://www.cpsd.us/Web/PubInfo/ControlledChoice.pdf>; *see also*, Sara Rimer, *Schools Try Integration By Income, Not Race*, N.Y. TIMES, May 8, 2003, at A1 (noting that Cambridge, Massachusetts, continues to use race "as a last resort" in making school assignments).

⁵ The Common Core of Data, a database maintained by the United States Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics, provides statistics on public school enrollment disaggregated by race/ethnicity. It is accessible via the internet at <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/>.

⁶ Standards such as these have been frequently employed in school desegregation cases. Although courts have adopted a range of deviations, a 15% deviation has been commonly used. *See, e.g., Comfort v. Lynn Sch. Comm.*, 418 F.3d 1, 7 (1st Cir. 2005); *Davis v. East Baton Rouge Parish School Bd.*, 721 F.2d 1425, 1430-31 (5th Cir. 1983); *Brinkman v. Gilligan*, 583 F.2d 243 (7th Cir. 1978).

Project's definition of "intensely segregated minority schools," Orfield & Lee, RACIAL TRANSFORMATION 6, we define a hyper-segregated school --- a measure of racial isolation --- as one with more than 90% minority enrollment.⁷ In each instance, we compared the data from the year before the SES policy was adopted, to data from the 2004-2005 year, the most recent year for which CCD statistics are available.

Although touted as successes by the OCR, ACHIEVING DIVERSITY report, none of the five districts that adopted SES policies succeeded in eliminating segregation or hyper-segregation. In fact, the adoption of SES-based policies exacerbated segregation in two districts, and introduced or increased racial isolation in three districts. The following tables summarize the results:⁸

⁷ We use the Civil Rights Project's definition here, although we acknowledge that schools with more than 90% non-minority enrollment may be considered "hyper-segregated" and implicate some of the same types of harms as those with more than 90% minority enrollment.

⁸ We acknowledge that this analysis does not control for demographic changes in each district. The percentage change in racial composition is likely to be small over a span of only a few years, and such an analysis is beyond the scope of this brief.

Extent of Racial Segregation			
District (Year Before the Policy Change)	Percentage of Students in Racially Segregated Schools Prior to Policy Change	Percentage of Students in Racially Segregated Schools in 2004-2005	Difference in Percentage of Students in Racially Segregated Schools
Charlotte- Mecklenburg, NC (2000-2001)	48.35%	73.64%	+25.29%
Wake County, NC (1999-2000)	25.48%	32.40%	+6.92%
San Francisco, CA (2000-2001)	7.93%	6.18%	-1.75%
Brandywine, DE (2001-2002)	12.24%	10.77%	-1.47%
La Crosse, WI (1991-1992)	10.89%	7.64%	-3.25%

Extent of Racial Isolation			
District (Year Before Policy Change)	Percentage of Students in Racially Hyper- Segregated Schools Prior to Policy Change	Percentage of Students in Racially Hyper- Segregated Schools in 2004-2005	Difference in Percentage of Students in Racially Hyper- Segregated Schools
Charlotte- Mecklenburg, NC (2000-2001)	3.30%	19.03%	+15.73%
Wake County, NC (1999-2000)	0%	0.17%	+0.17%
San Francisco, CA (2000-2001)	55.93%	63.16%	+7.23%
Brandywine, DE (2001-2002)	0%	0%	0%
La Crosse, WI (1991-1992)	0%	0%	0%

Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina: In the Charlotte-Mecklenburg district, the adoption of the SES plan coincided with a dramatic re-segregation of students.

According to OCR, *Achieving Diversity*, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg district adopted a SES assignment plan to replace race-conscious measures in August of 2001. OCR, *ACHIEVING DIVERSITY* 70. During the 2000-2001 school year, the year prior to the policy change, 48% of students in the district attended racially segregated schools; that number rose to an alarming 74% of students in 2004-2005. The data are similarly disturbing with respect to racial hyper-segregation. During the 2000-2001 school year, only 3% of Charlotte-Mecklenburg students attended hyper-segregated schools. That figure rose to 19% in 2004-2005, an increase of sixteen percentage points.

Wake County, North Carolina: Like the district in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Wake County school district experienced re-segregation upon abandoning a race-conscious plan in favor of a SES-based plan. OCR, *Achieving Diversity* reports that Wake County operated under a court-ordered desegregation plan using race-conscious assignments from its formation in 1976 until it achieved unitary status in 1982. *Id.* at 66. It continued to use race-conscious measures on a voluntary basis, and in 1998 added socioeconomic status as an additional factor in school assignments. *Id.* at 66-67. Then, beginning with the 2000-2001 school year, the district abandoned the use of race-conscious policies but retained consideration of socioeconomic status. *Id.* at 67. CCD enrollment data revealed that before the policy change in 2000-2001, 25% of the Wake County student body was enrolled in racially segregated schools. After the abandonment of the race-conscious plan, the use of SES in student assignments resulted in 32% of the student body attending racially segregated schools, an increase of seven percentage points. In addition, abandoning race and relying on SES in school

assignments resulted in racial hyper-segregation in Wake County schools for the first time.

San Francisco, California: San Francisco's abandonment of race-conscious school assignments in favor of SES-based school assignments yielded mixed results: the adoption of the plan coincided with a marginal decrease in racial segregation, but a marked increase in racial isolation. Beginning with the 2001-2002 school year, San Francisco abandoned race-conscious policies and began relying in part on socioeconomic status for student assignments. *Id.* at 70. During the 2000-2001 school year, 8% of students were enrolled in racially segregated schools, and that percentage dropped to 6% for the 2004-2005 school year, suggesting a modest improvement in the percentage of students in segregated schools. The change in the degree of racial isolation, however, presents a very different picture. During the 2000-2001 school year, 56% of San Francisco's students attended hyper-segregated schools, and that figure rose to 63% for the 2004-2005 school year. Thus, abandonment of race in favor of a SES plan coincided with an increase of seven percentage points in the percentage of students attending racially hyper-segregated schools. This finding is consistent with the conclusions of the monitor of San Francisco's racial desegregation consent decree in *San Francisco NAACP v. San Francisco Unified Sch. Dist.*, 284 F.3d 1163 (9th Cir. 2002), who found an increase in the number of severely re-segregated schools in each year after the SES-based program was implemented. Stuart Biegel, FINAL SUPPLEMENTAL REPORT OF THE CONSENT DECREE MONITOR REGARDING DESEGREGATION AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT 3-4 (Dec. 28, 2005). For a comprehensive discussion of re-segregation in San Francisco, *see* Brief of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights of the San Francisco Bay Area as Amicus Curiae Supporting Respondents at 12-

14, P.I.C.S. v. Seattle School Dist. No. 1, et al., No. 05-908, and Meredith v. Jefferson County Bd. of Educ., et al., No. 05-915 (U.S. Oct. 10, 2006).

Brandywine, Delaware: Brandywine has enjoyed marginal success in racially integrating schools through a SES-based plan. Brandywine is a small school district enrolling approximately 10,500 students, about 45% of whom are minority. In March 2002, the Delaware State Board of Education approved a school assignment plan using SES. OCR, *ACHIEVING DIVERSITY*, at 71. Adoption of this plan coincided with a modest decrease in racial segregation: in 2001-2002, 12% of Brandywine's students attended racially segregated schools, and that percentage dropped to 11% in 2004-2005. Brandywine had no racially isolated schools either before or after adoption of the SES plan.

La Crosse, Wisconsin: Like Brandywine, La Crosse enjoyed modest success in improving racial integration with a SES plan. Also like Brandywine, La Crosse is a relatively small school district, enrolling approximately 7,500 students, less than one-fifth of whom are minority. In 1992, La Crosse became one of the first school districts in the United States to use SES as a factor in school assignments. William Celis, *Income-Based School Busing Stirs Anger in Wisconsin*, N.Y. TIMES, July 16, 1992, at B12. During the 1991-1992 school year, the last year before the plan was adopted, 11% of La Crosse students attended racially segregated schools. In 2004, after twelve years of implementation, the SES-based plan reduced the percentage of students in segregated schools to 8%. Like Brandywine, La Crosse did not have any hyper-segregated schools either before or after the SES plan was adopted.

The Office for Civil Rights of the Department of Education presented these five districts as having

successfully used SES-based school assignment policies to achieve diversity in public schools. The federal government's own statistical evidence, however, does not support that claim. Two of the five districts --- Charlotte-Mecklenburg and Wake County --- experienced *increases* in the percentage of students in segregated schools. The three remaining districts --- San Francisco, Brandywine, and La Crosse --- only modestly reduced the percentage of students attending segregated schools, and none actually succeeded in eliminating segregation. And, where hyper-segregation existed --- in San Francisco, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, and Wake County --- relying on SES exacerbated rather than remedied the problem. Although it is difficult to draw broad conclusions based on a sample of five districts, these data suggest that the use of socioeconomic status for school assignments, standing alone, has not succeeded in desegregating public schools, particularly in larger districts. Based on that evidence, there is certainly no basis for suggesting --- as Petitioners and their *amici* argue --- that the use of socioeconomic status for school assignments is an adequate alternative for school districts seeking to further their compelling interest in racial integration.

II. RELYING SOLELY ON MAGNET SCHOOL PROGRAMS HAS A LIMITED IMPACT ON RACIALLY INTEGRATING PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Petitioners' supporters also repeatedly cite magnet schools as a race-neutral alternative that will racially integrate public schools. *See, e.g.*, Br. of Pacific Legal Foundation for P.I.C.S. at 24 (proposing magnet programs as a race-neutral alternative). The Solicitor General specifically highlights the United States Department of Education's Magnet Schools Assistance Program ("MSAP") to this end. Br. of the U.S. for Meredith at 22 n.8; Br. of the U.S. for P.I.C.S. at 25-27. Yet, the proponents of reliance on race-

neutral magnet programs again neglect to provide any empirical evidence that supports the effectiveness of this alternative. And, once again, there is little evidence that race-neutral magnet school programs alone, whatever their other merits, can achieve the level of racial integration that school districts plainly are entitled to seek. Even magnet programs receiving generous federal funding through the MSAP have had only modest success in achieving racial integration.⁹ The empirical evidence demonstrates that, like SES-based assignments, magnet programs provide, at best, only a partial and insufficient approach to achieving integration. Accordingly, even one of the leading advocates for magnet programs, the Magnet Schools of America, has signed an *amicus* brief in support of the School Districts in these cases.

Under the MSAP, the Department of Education provides discretionary grants to local school districts to develop magnet schools for the purpose of, *inter alia*, eliminating, reducing, or preventing minority group isolation in public schools. 20 U.S.C. § 7231(b)(1) (2002). Grants are awarded on a competitive basis and provide significant federal funds, up to \$3,000,000 per year for three years. *See* Magnet School Assistance Program, Notice Inviting Applications for New

⁹ This brief does not contest that magnet schools may present valuable benefits independent of racial integration, *see, e.g.*, 20 U.S.C. § 7231 (identifying goals of Magnet School Assistance Program to include, *inter alia*, developing innovative educational methods), and, even, that magnet schools may help achieve a measure of racial integration in some circumstances, *see, id.* (finding that magnet schools constitute a “significant part” of efforts to racially desegregate schools). As detailed *infra*, however, they cannot and should not be viewed as a complete solution to the problem of racial segregation that continues to plague so many school districts. And, magnet programs would play a more vital role in racial desegregation efforts were race-conscious student assignment policies permitted.

Awards for Fiscal Year (FY) 2001, 65 Fed. Reg. 46698-01 (July 31, 2000). In addition, grantees benefit from oversight, guidance, and technical assistance from the Department of Education throughout the term of the grant. See U.S. Dept. of Educ., Office of the Undersecretary, EVALUATION OF THE MAGNET SCHOOLS ASSISTANCE PROGRAM, 1998 GRANTEES (2003) at IV-4 n.5 (hereinafter, U.S. Dep't of Educ., *1998 Evaluation of MSAP*) (noting that the Department provides technical assistance to grantees experiencing difficulties in obtaining desegregation goals).

Despite these advantages, MSAP recipients have enjoyed only limited success in desegregating schools. Indeed, the Department of Education's most recent evaluation of the MSAP, released in 2003 and reviewing the 1998-2001 grant cycle, conceded that MSAP recipients "overall made only modest progress in reducing minority group isolation" in the individual magnet schools targeted by the MSAP grant, U.S. Dep't of Educ., *1998 Evaluation of MSAP*, at x, defining "minority group isolation" as the degree to which a school enrolled more than 50% minority students, *id.* at IV-1 (citing 34 C.F.R. § 280.4).¹⁰ In 43% of the 294 schools targeted for desegregation during the grant cycle, the degree of minority group isolation (MGI) actually *increased* or remained the same. *Id.* at xiii. The remaining 57% of schools succeeded in reducing minority group isolation, but 35% of the targeted schools did so by less than five percentage points.¹¹ *Id.* at xii-xiii.

¹⁰ The limitations of this definition of "minority group isolation" are discussed *infra*.

¹¹ Only 17% of the targeted schools reduced MGI by five percentage points or more. 28% reduced MGI by between one and five percentage points. 7% of the targeted schools reduced MGI by less than one percentage point. *Id.* at xiii.

Perhaps most damaging to the Solicitor General's claims, the Department of Education's own report states that one probable explanation for these disappointing results was that many grantees were prohibited from using race-conscious assignment policies. Specifically, it cites "limitations placed on the use of race as a factor in selection of students" as a "potentially important factor[]" that may "help explain why more than 40 percent of desegregation-targeted schools were not successful in making progress on their desegregation objective." *Id.* at IV-11. The report further explains, "[I]n District C, for example, the project director contended that it is difficult to meet the desegregation objective when school officials are prohibited from taking race into account in making school assignments, even though administrators did consider eligibility for reduced-price lunches and reading scores instead." *Id.* at VI-13.¹²

¹² A comparison of the efficacy of race-neutral MSAP programs to race-conscious MSAP programs is beyond the scope of this brief, largely because of the failure of the federal government to maintain and make available the data that would make such a study possible. First, there is no reliable indicator as to which MSAP recipients relied exclusively on race-neutral means. Although the Solicitor General states that since 1999, "the Department has not approved any use of race in assigning students to magnet schools in voluntary plans," Br. of the U.S. for P.I.C.S. at 26-27 n.8, there is no publicly available source to determine which recipients under mandatory court orders utilized race-conscious plans. Additionally, the Solicitor General's statement is inconsistent with press accounts reporting that even after 1999, MSAP recipients continued to use race-conscious measures. For example, the Los Angeles Unified School District and the Berkeley Unified School District --- neither of which was under a mandatory plan --- received MSAP grants for the 1998 and 2001 grant cycles yet continued to use race-conscious assignment policies. See Mitchell Landsberg, *L.A. Unified Sued Over Race Issues*, L.A. TIMES, Oct. 13, 2005, at 8 (reporting that the Pacific Legal Foundation filed suit against the district for using race-conscious admissions policies in their magnet schools); *Desegregation in Four Cities*, ALAMEDA TIMES-STAR (California), May 10, 2004, WL 20564473 (describing Berkeley's use of

Moreover, this evaluation, while telling, does not identify the extent to which MSAP recipients remedied actual segregation because its measure of “minority group isolation” does not measure the extent to which a targeted magnet school’s minority distribution deviates from the district’s minority distribution.¹³ Additionally, the 1998 Evaluation does not provide any measure of racial isolation, *i.e.*, hyper-segregation, among targeted magnet schools. Nor does it say anything about the extent to which MSAP grantees addressed segregation or hyper-segregation throughout the district beyond the individual targeted schools. Given that most of the recipient-districts targeted only a handful of magnet schools, one would expect that even if an individual magnet school succeeded in becoming more diverse, it would have little impact on the majority of other schools across the district.

In light of the limited utility of the 1998 Evaluation, we conducted an independent evaluation for the most recent grant cycle for which Common Core of Data information is available, the 2001 grant cycle, which lasted from 2001 to 2004. This analysis confirms that even the most advantaged programs, those funded under the MSAP, enjoy only limited

race as a factor in the assignment of students to public schools in a zoning program in effect from 1995 through 2004).

Second, a comparison of race-neutral MSAP programs to race-conscious MSAP programs is not the appropriate inquiry for this brief. Rather, this brief argues that magnet programs, standing alone, do not achieve racial integration. For this reason, districts should be entitled to resort to race-conscious measures, including district-wide programs that apply more broadly than magnet schools, to further progress in achieving its compelling state interest.

¹³ As mentioned above, the Department of Education’s evaluation limited its measure of “preventing, reducing, or eliminating minority group isolation” to determining the extent to which a school had more than 50% minority enrollment through the term of the grant.

success in reducing segregation and hyper-segregation among the magnet schools targeted by the grants. Additionally, the data suggest that the success of MSAP grants in achieving integration across the entire recipient-district, rather than on the individual magnet schools, was even more limited.

A. Impact of MSAP Grants on Reducing Segregation and Hyper-Segregation Within Individual Targeted Magnet Schools

During the 2001 grant cycle, the Department of Education awarded grants to 66 school districts nationwide, targeting a total of 333 magnet schools within those districts collectively.¹⁴ To determine the impact of MSAP grants on the magnet schools targeted by the program, we first determined the extent to which these targeted schools reduced segregation during the course of the grant cycle, defining a “segregated” school as one that deviates by more than 15 percent from the district-wide proportion of minority students. Second, we determined the extent to which racial isolation decreased among the targeted magnet schools, defining a “hyper-segregated” school as one where minority enrollment exceeds 90%.¹⁵ In our review of MSAP recipients, we did not control for district-wide demographic changes during the course of the grant because few districts are likely to experience significant demographic shifts during the three-year period.

¹⁴ A list of abstracts identifying each recipient district and each magnet school targeted within the district for the 2001 grant cycle was obtained from the United States Department of Education, Magnet Schools Assistance Program.

¹⁵ Again, we acknowledge that schools with over 90% non-minority enrollment likewise may be considered “hyper-segregated” but do not include such schools in our definition here. *See supra* n.7.

In the first step of the analysis, evaluating the success of MSAP in reducing racial segregation within the targeted magnet schools, we used information from the Common Core of Data to compare the racial composition of each of the targeted magnet schools from 2000-2001, the year before the grants were awarded, to that of 2003-2004, the last year of the grant cycle. Due to data constraints, our analysis is limited to 313 of the total 333 targeted magnet schools.¹⁶ We found that 124 of the targeted schools were racially segregated before the grant was awarded. Although 22 of these individual schools no longer were considered segregated at the end of the cycle, 40 of them experienced an exacerbation of the degree of segregation. Moreover, 18 schools that were not racially segregated prior to the grant became segregated by the third year of the grant. These data suggest that during the 2001 cycle, as during the 1998 cycle, only some of the targeted schools experienced gains in racial integration, while others became more segregated. The results of these findings appear in Appendix 1a.

In the second step of the analysis, evaluating the success of MSAP in reducing racial isolation within targeted magnet schools, the results likewise were mixed. Of the 92 schools that had more than 90% minority enrollment prior to the grant award, 81 continued to be hyper-segregated at the end of the cycle. In fact, 55 of those schools became even more racially isolated. Eighteen (18) additional schools were not hyper-segregated before the grant but became hyper-segregated at the end of the grant. Thus, the total number of

¹⁶ Fifteen schools were omitted because CCD data was absent for them. Two additional schools were omitted because conversations with the recipient districts indicated that the MSAP funds were not used for those schools. Three additional schools were omitted because during the course of the grant, they were subdivided into multiple schools, precluding a “before and after” comparison of enrollment.

targeted schools that were hyper-segregated increased during the grant term. These results appear in Appendix 1b.

In sum, the available evidence indicates that the ability of MSAP grants to eliminate segregation and hyper-segregation within targeted magnet schools is, at best, mixed.

B. Impact of MSAP Grants on Reducing Segregation and Hyper-Segregation Across the Recipient-District

To evaluate the efficacy of magnet schools as a race-neutral alternative to plans seeking broad integration of schools, examining the effect of a magnet plan on an individual school is insufficient. Rather, the success of a magnet plan in a district for these purposes must be measured by its impact on schools in the district as a whole to determine if the program has achieved the district's goal of integrating schools. To this end, we analyzed whether MSAP recipient-districts experienced reductions in segregation and racial isolation district-wide, using the same definitions for segregated and hyper-segregated schools as employed in the earlier analyses.¹⁷

To measure the degree of success in reducing segregation across the MSAP recipient-district, we calculated the percentage of students attending segregated schools across the entire district at the beginning of the grant cycle and compared it to the percentage of students attending segregated schools across the district at the end of the grant

¹⁷ Although the Department of Education awarded MSAP grants to 66 districts, comparable CCD data was available for only 57 districts. The eight New York City Community School Districts that received grants are subdivisions of the New York City Public Schools, and CCD tracks data only for the New York City Public Schools as a whole. Hamilton County, like all districts in Tennessee, does not provide CCD data broken down by race.

cycle. This analysis revealed that 27 of the 57 recipient districts experienced an *increase* in the percentage of students attending racially segregated schools, notwithstanding the adoption of the MSAP. Among those districts that succeeded in decreasing racial segregation, only 9 districts did so by more than five percentage points, *i.e.*, came more than five percentage points closer to the district-wide racial distribution. None of the districts managed to eliminate segregation through the MSAP.¹⁸ These results appear in Appendix 2a.

Similarly, we measured the degree of success in reducing racial isolation across all of the schools within a MSAP-recipient district. We found that more than half of the MSAP recipient districts experienced an exacerbation of racial isolation during the course of the grant. Among the 57 district recipients for which CCD data are available, 35 had more students enrolled in hyper-segregated schools in 2004 than before they received the grant. In many of these districts, the increase was substantial: 10 districts experienced an increase of ten percentage points or more in the percentage of students attending hyper-segregated schools. As for the districts that experienced a reduction in the degree of racial isolation, the success was marginal: more than half improved by less than one percentage point.¹⁹ These results appear in Appendix 2b.

The experience of the Magnet Schools Assistance Program, touted forcefully by the United States, casts serious doubt on the likelihood that magnet plans, much less ones that are not the beneficiaries of significant federal

¹⁸ Two school districts had no students enrolled in segregated schools either before or at the end of the grant cycle.

¹⁹ Eight school districts had no hyper-segregated schools either before or after the grant cycle.

investment, could by themselves provide a sufficient remedy for segregation and hyper-segregation in K-12 public schools.

CONCLUSION

This Court has long recognized that “[t]here is no universal answer to the complex problems of desegregation; there is obviously no one plan that will do the job in every case.” *United States v. Paradise*, 480 U.S. 149, 184 (1987) (quoting *Green v. County Sch. Bd. of New Kent County*, 391 U.S. 430, 439 (1968)). Although these complexities originally arose in the context of efforts to desegregate schools in cases seeking to remedy *de jure* segregation, the lack of a single approach to integrate schools applies whenever there is a governmental interest in providing integrated schools. SES-based assignments and magnet programs may present their own benefits, but they simply are not sufficient proxies to race-conscious assignments in achieving the goal of racially integrating schools. There is no less restrictive race-neutral alternative that is as effective as race-conscious measures for this goal. If eliminating racially and ethnically segregated classrooms is a compelling governmental interest, states and school districts should be permitted to carefully craft measures that flexibly use race as one of several factors to achieve that goal. For these reasons, we urge this Court to affirm the lower court decisions in both cases.

Respectfully submitted,

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