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# STRONGER TOGETHER DIVERSITY IN DUVAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS

In search of true racial and economic integration

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## Executive Summary

There is considerable evidence that greater socioeconomic and racial diversity in schools results in better academic and social outcomes for students. But here in our own community, we often find ourselves geographically separated by race and income level. While exploring Duval County school enrollment patterns, we found that African-American students are much more likely than students of any other race to attend schools that are not racially diverse (in this paper, defined as having a student body that is 60 percent or more of any one racial or ethnic group). More than half (54 percent) of all African-American students are in non-diverse schools, while less than a third (30 percent) of students of any other race attend non-diverse schools. When looking at income data, we find that among Jacksonville's low-income schools, most (83 percent) are considered racially non-diverse and have African-Americans as the largest group.

Geographically, this data shows that many of Jacksonville's low-income and African-American students are isolated in schools on the north and west sides of town, while schools in other parts of town are more racially and socioeconomically diverse — largely reflecting residential segregation patterns in Jacksonville as a whole. For a variety of reasons, the bottom line is that Jacksonville's low-income African-American students are disproportionately more likely to receive their education in a school that is not racially or economically diverse. Because research tells us a lack of diversity comes with negative consequences for academic and social performance, this is a real equity issue. As policy changes are made at the national, state, and county level, our community must continue considering how to reduce economic and social segregation and promote diversity to produce a lasting, positive impact in our schools.



Duval County has a diverse public school population (44 percent African-American, 36 percent white, 10 percent Hispanic, 5 percent multiracial, 4 percent Asian, and 1 percent American Indian), yet a closer look shows that many schools do not reflect the makeup of the overall student population.

Demographic enrollment patterns of Duval County schools make it apparent that diversity issues in Jacksonville parallel racial and socioeconomic isolation issues faced by many large cities that encompass both urban core communities and suburban sprawl.

For this paper, we define “racially diverse” schools as schools in which no single race/ethnicity grouping comprises over 60 percent of the total student enrollment and a “low-income” school as having 75 percent or more economically disadvantaged students enrolled. More detailed descriptions and rationales for these metrics are discussed later in the paper.

## **Racial and economic diversity in public schools: Why it matters and what we have learned since Brown v. Board of Education**

Sixty-two years after the landmark Brown v. Board of Education, court cases in Florida and in states across the nation are still fighting for equity in education. Duval’s own history of desegregation has been long and difficult. Despite the fact that Brown v. Board of Education declared segregated education unconstitutional in 1954, the Duval County School System was not ruled to have fully implemented desegregation until 1999. Today, about half of Duval public schools have student bodies that are 60 percent or more of a single race or ethnic background. Considering the substantial evidence that children of all backgrounds benefit both socially and academically from being in racially and economically diverse environments<sup>2</sup>, now is the time to advocate for increased economic and racial diversity in our schools.

In one long-running court case, Citizens for Strong Schools v. Board of Education, plaintiffs alleged that Florida’s education system is fundamentally unfair to the poor<sup>3</sup>, and does not provide adequate financial resources to struggling schools, which have the poorest performing students and also tend to be low-income and high-minority<sup>4</sup>. Although the case was recently dismissed<sup>5</sup>, throughout the state of Florida, and in Duval County in particular<sup>6</sup>, schools with low academic performance often have higher levels of low-income and minority students with little socioeconomic or racial diversity<sup>7</sup>.

It’s just not just that schools with a high concentration of low-income students often lack the additional resources of schools with a more diverse student body. Studies from higher education to business settings<sup>8</sup> show that integration along

## **Studies show that racial and economic integration produces higher student achievement outcomes for all students — not just minority students.**

racial and economic lines can prompt increased motivation, increased innovation, broader thinking, increased empathy, and decreased stereotyping among all students involved.

There is a substantial body of empirical evidence to show that students are better together and worse when racially or economically isolated<sup>9</sup>. Although some research draws mixed conclusions about the effects of diversity, studies hold evidence that segregated minority populations have lower scholastic performance even after controlling for poverty, teaching quality, and family life<sup>10</sup>.

So what might happen if struggling schools had student bodies with greater diversity in income and race? A new proposal from the White House may help uncover the answer. In the 2017 federal budget proposal<sup>11</sup>, the President has recommended that the government invest \$120 million to better integrate students of all income levels in public schools<sup>12</sup>.

The program would provide increased funding to districts who commit to integrating high and low income students into the same schools, with each district having the option to participate or not. The idea, which is backed by the historic precedent of desegregation<sup>13</sup> as well as the aforementioned education research, is to reduce the economic, and often racial, isolation that students in poor performing schools experience.

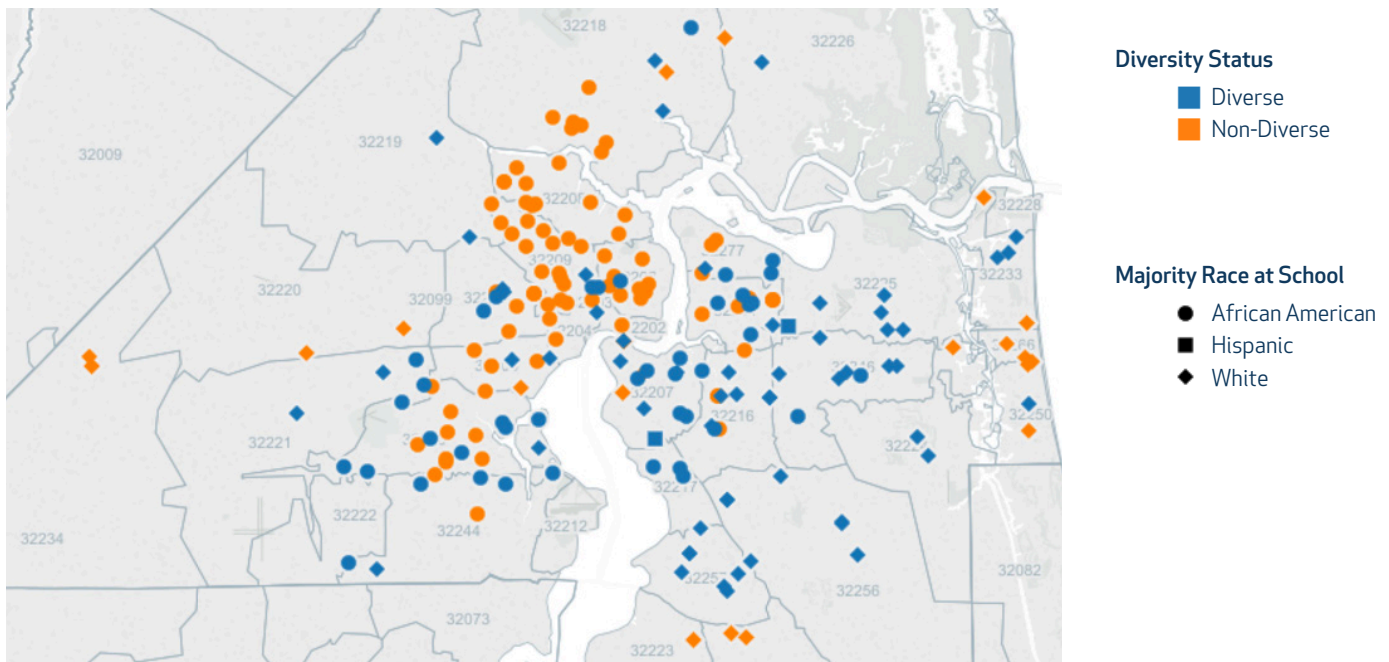
## **Racial diversity looks like in Duval County: A look at isolated schools**

To explore whether an initiative like this could benefit our schools locally, we looked at enrollment patterns in public schools (including charters) in Duval County in the 2015-16 school year. For the purposes of our analysis, a school was considered “racially diverse” if no single race/ethnicity made up more than 60 percent of student enrollment in a school.

While there is no official federal standard for what makes a school “racially diverse,” we have set this purely exploratory value in accordance with other analyses<sup>14</sup> of diversity that use percent of population of the largest racial group as the barometer of diversity.

For their own monitoring, Duval County Public Schools uses a standard that defines a school as diverse if it has between 20 percent and 55 percent African-American students<sup>15</sup>.

**Figure 1: Racially Diverse vs. Non-Diverse Public Schools in Duval County**



Source: Jacksonville Public Education Fund

This produces similar distributions to our criteria (86 percent overlap), but does not account holistically for racial demographics, particularly of non-African-American student populations.

Looking at enrollment patterns, we found that about half of Duval's schools would be considered "racially diverse" by our exploratory standard and the other half would be considered "non-diverse."

In this data, there are some clear patterns in enrollment demographics and geographic location between schools we would consider "racially diverse" in Duval County and those we would not.

**Of the 105 schools considered racially diverse (no single race/ethnic group makes up more than 60 percent of student population):**

- 58 percent had white students as the largest represented group.
- 40 percent had African-American students as the largest represented group.
- 2 percent had Hispanic/Latino students as the largest represented group.

**Of the 103 schools considered not racially diverse (a single race/ethnic group makes up more than 60 percent of student population):**

- 79 percent had African-Americans students as the largest represented group.
- 21 percent had white students as the largest represented group.

Looking at it this way, it is clear that African-American students are much more likely to make up the majority of enrolled students at schools considered to be not racially diverse.

In addition to being more culturally isolated from interacting with a diverse group of peers, Figure 1 shows that students in schools not considered to be "racially diverse" also tend to be located in certain areas of town.

On the map in Figure 1, schools considered racially diverse are represented in blue, and schools considered non-diverse are in orange.

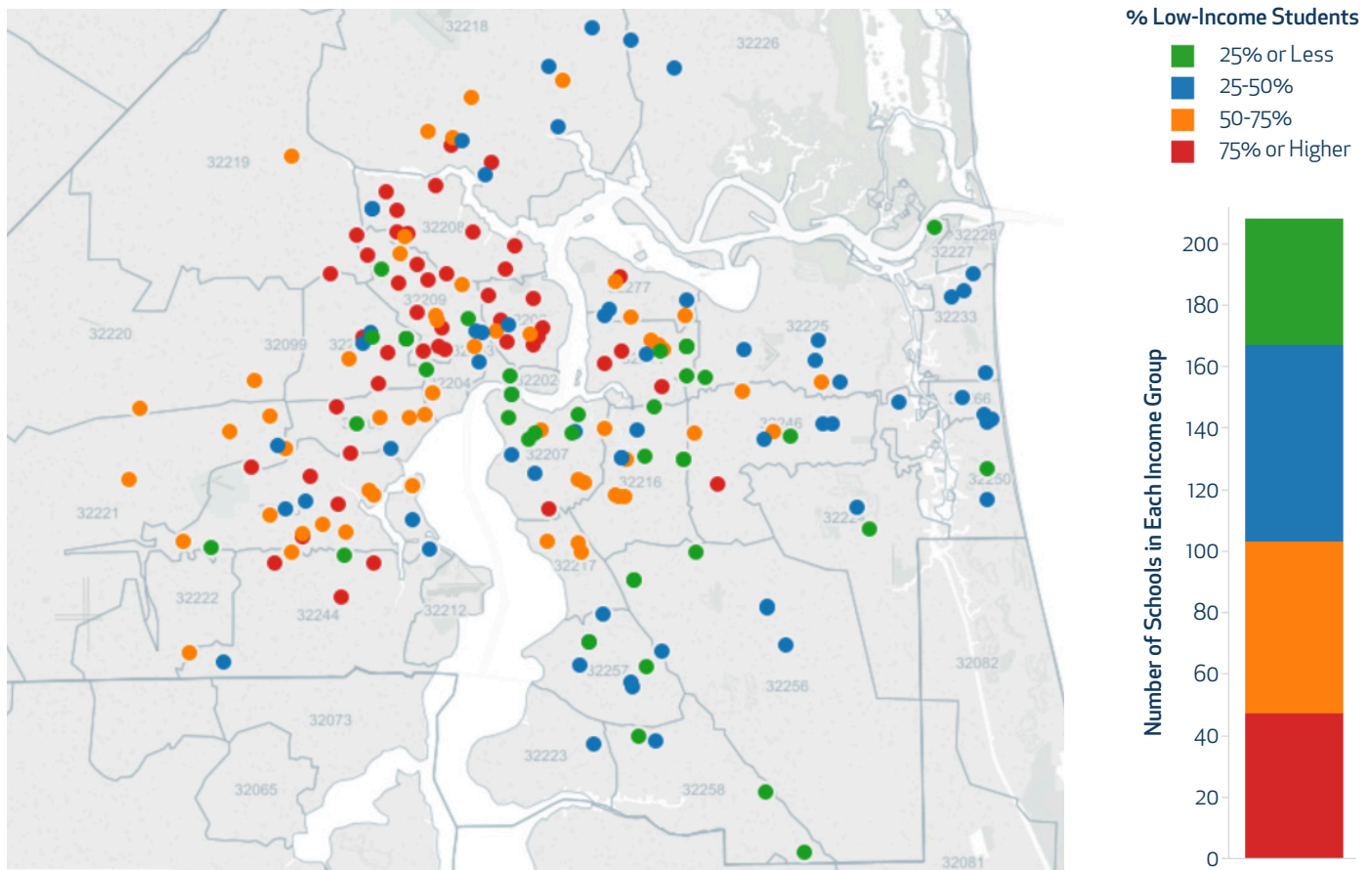
A majority of schools that would be considered non-diverse are located on the north and west sides of town, with a smaller number also clustered out by the beaches.

## Economic diversity: A growing concern, and how Duval schools vary by income levels

Of course, diversity by student race/ethnicity representation is just one type of diversity. To better understand the current state of diversity in Duval County schools, we also looked at enrollment patterns by indicators of economic diversity.

As with race/ethnicity indicators there is no formal standard or universally accepted benchmark about what makes a school "economically diverse" so we must define our criteria.

**Figure 2: Income Diversity Among Public Schools in Duval County**



Source: Jacksonville Public Education Fund

The Florida Department of Education (FLDOE) collects data<sup>16</sup> on how many students at a school qualify for free and reduced price lunches, also referred to in FLDOE data as percentage of “economically disadvantaged” students. Qualifying as “economically disadvantaged” by this measure will serve as a proxy for a student’s family income status in our analysis.

Using this indicator, we organized schools into four groups of approximately similar average income levels:

- Schools where less than 25 percent of students are considered economically disadvantaged
- Schools where 25-50 percent of students are considered economically disadvantaged
- Schools where 50-75 percent of students are considered economically disadvantaged
- Schools where 75 percent or more of students are considered economically disadvantaged

When we observe income diversity (Figure 2), we see that the schools with the most low-income students are also clustered in the north and west sides of the city. Of the 47 schools with 75 percent or more low-income students, 83 percent (39 schools) are not racially diverse with African-Americans as the largest group.

## Toward a new approach

Our exploratory investigation of enrollment patterns in Jacksonville schools suggests that African-American students tend to be more geographically and economically isolated than their white counterparts and other racial groups. Because research tells us that diversity is linked to increased educational and social outcomes<sup>17</sup>, including academic performance<sup>18</sup>, adaptability, and employability, it is an issue of equity that so many of Jacksonville’s African-American students are not receiving the benefits of racial and economic diversity.

This doesn’t mean that schools with low diversity cannot be successful — indeed, here in Duval County and across the country there are examples of high-performing schools with low diversity in terms of race and socioeconomic status. However, on the whole, research shows that a lack of opportunity to interact with classmates from a variety of backgrounds puts some students at an unfair, and real, disadvantage.

While diversity is clearly not the only factor that influences the success of education, increasing diversity in schools is likely to be an effective approach to decreasing the academic performance “achievement gap” between African-American students and white students.

## Desegregation in Duval County Public Schools: A Brief Timeline

**1954**

In *Brown v. Board of Education*, the U.S. Supreme Court declares school segregation unconstitutional.

**1962**

Duval County Public Schools begins to implement the “Single System Geographic Plan to End Segregation,” a plan to desegregate at one grade per year, over 12 years.

**1967**

The Single System plan is deemed failure by the courts.

**1971**

A U.S. court order to implement full desegregation begins forced cross-town busing.

**1985**

The court no longer monitors desegregation efforts despite NAACP protest.

**1987**

The same judge rules there is no longer segregation in Duval schools.

**1989**

An appeals court calls previous ruling erroneous, reverses ruling and restores court supervision of desegregation.

**1990**

The NAACP and Duval County School Board agree to stop busing, use magnet enrollment to encourage diversity.

**1999**

A judge rules Duval schools are fully desegregated and without racial discrimination.

**2016**

Duval continues to use magnet enrollment to increase diversity, but nearly half of public schools have student bodies of 60 percent or more of one race; 83 percent of low-income schools have student bodies that are 60 percent or more African American.

It is worth noting here that residential segregation, which is the primary contributor to low diversity in many Duval schools, is fairly pronounced in Jacksonville, according to national study of 2010 Census data by the University of Virginia<sup>19</sup>. This issue is well beyond the scope of this paper. At the same time, school districts can have a positive impact on levels of diversity in schools through program and policy changes.

Some school districts in recent years have begun attempting to address this issue more proactively. Charlotte, NC<sup>20</sup>, for example, recently instituted a requirement for their school board to review zoning patterns every six years based on a variety of criteria including reducing “high concentrations of poor and high needs children.” At the national level, U.S. Secretary of Education John King is increasingly calling for historically conscious action around this issue<sup>21</sup>. Duval County was recently cited as one of 91 school districts and charter networks across the country that have made race and socioeconomic status key factors in student assignment<sup>22</sup> practices in an effort to encourage diversity and its benefits — in Duval’s case, considering socioeconomic factors in magnet school admissions.

*Although the impact of neighborhood segregation remains strong, school district policies can be a force for inclusivity and integration. But it will require deliberate efforts as a community to promote diversity in our schools. The shift toward giving parents more public school choices could either increase or decrease school segregation.*

This is one practical way to promote diversity in Duval schools, but other ideas are worth pursuing as well.

American demographics are rapidly approaching a new status quo, where the collective population of racial minority groups is predicted to comprise more than half of the U.S. total population by 2044<sup>23</sup>. Already, in Duval County Public Schools, 64 percent of students are non-white, and the city itself is quickly growing more diverse as well. Yet that change in the reality of our nation will not necessarily be reflected within our schools unless our major cities, Jacksonville included, take steps

to ensure that artificial patterns of racial and economic isolation do not become structurally entrenched in how we educate our children.

Since desegregation, diversity in schools nationwide has grown on the whole, but patterns of racial segregation continue to occur<sup>24</sup>, especially in cities with large urban core areas and sprawling suburban communities such as Jacksonville. These communities tend to be divided along racial and socioeconomic lines.

Although the impact of neighborhood segregation remains strong, school district policies can be a force for inclusivity and integration. But it will require deliberate efforts as a community to promote diversity in our schools. The climate in Florida is shifting dramatically in favor of giving parents more school choices within public education<sup>25</sup>, and this shift could either increase or decrease school segregation.

One immediate opportunity to help is to consider how recently proposed student assignment related bills, such as local program and boundary changes<sup>26</sup> and the state's upcoming open enrollment bill<sup>27</sup>, HB 7029<sup>28</sup>, will impact diversity in Duval's schools.

Here are some steps community members can take in

considering these and other policy opportunities to improve and maintain diversity across race and socioeconomic lines in our schools:

- Monitor recently changed school programs and boundaries<sup>29</sup> for signs of increasing or decreasing segregation.
- For any future proposed boundary changes, look for opportunities to increase income and racial diversity.
- Advocate to local leaders for Duval to participate in federal Stronger Together programs to foster increased economic diversity in schools.
- Be thoughtful and purposeful in your own school choice decisions about the benefits of true economic and racial diversity in schools, and be clear to district and school leaders that this is information that is important to you in your decisions.

## ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report is part of an occasional series of topical white papers issued by the Jacksonville Public Education Fund. All data is current as of April 27, 2016. For more information, including interactive visualizations and additional research reports and publications, visit [www.jaxpef.org](http://www.jaxpef.org).

## ENDNOTES

- 1 - <http://www.duvalschools.org/domain/5268>
- 2 - <https://tcf.org/content/report/how-racially-diverse-schools-and-classrooms-can-benefit-all-students/>
- 3 - <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/education/article65739822.html>
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- 11 - <https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/budget/fy2017/assets/opportunity.pdf>
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- 15 - <http://m.jacksonville.com/news/metro/2016-05-09/story/not-all-magnet-schools-have-lived-their-role-engines-integration#article=6796E4B51761B0A9A1669162E6AA516D7DC1>
- 16 - Note: This research includes public charter schools and public alternative education programs. It is important to note that the state-reported data on percentages of economically disadvantaged students for some public charter schools and alternative education programs that serve low-income students are significantly lower than would be expected.
- 17 - <https://tcf.org/content/report/how-racially-diverse-schools-and-classrooms-can-benefit-all-students/>
- 18 - [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Eric\\_Hanushek/publication/5189220\\_Harming\\_the\\_Best\\_How\\_Schools\\_Affect\\_the\\_Black-White\\_Achievement\\_Gap/links/5514278f0cf283ee0834ac3b.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Eric_Hanushek/publication/5189220_Harming_the_Best_How_Schools_Affect_the_Black-White_Achievement_Gap/links/5514278f0cf283ee0834ac3b.pdf)
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