

Interdistrict Desegregation Plans and the Struggle for Equal Educational Opportunity



PASSING THE TORCH

**The Past, Present, and Future of Interdistrict School
Desegregation**

January 2009

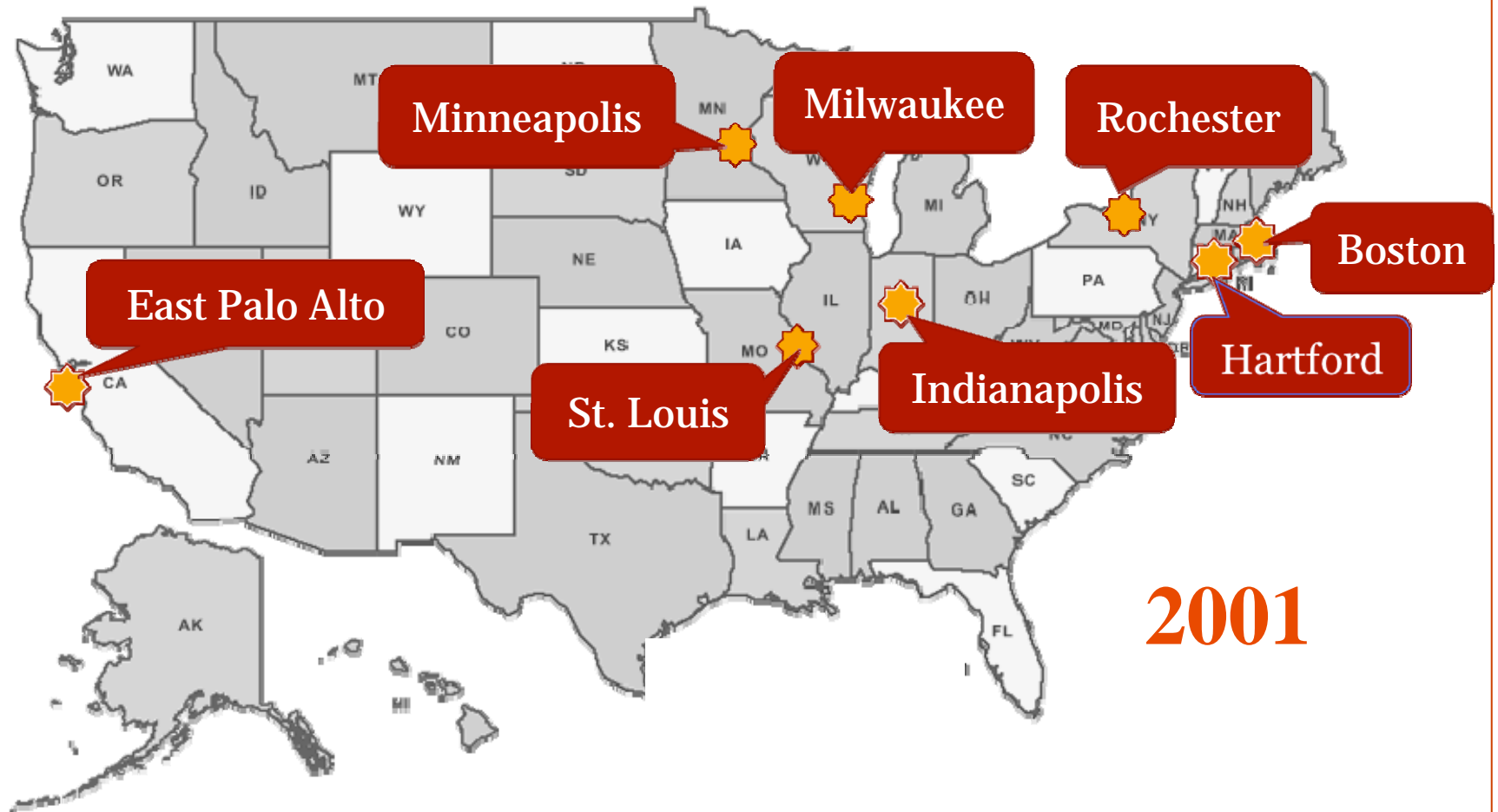
By: Amy Stuart Wells

**Bianca J. Baldridge, Jacquelyn Durán, Courtney Grzesikowski, Richard
Lofton, Allison Roda, Miya Warner & Terrenda White**

Center for Understanding Race and Education

Teachers College, Columbia U.

Interdistrict Desegregation Plans



Presentation Overview

- Introduction of the eight interdistrict desegregation plans
- Historical roots: Community/grassroots efforts
- Parameters and specifics of the plans
- Research findings
- Recommendations and looking to the future

Past: The initial struggles to create these interdistrict desegregation plans began in the 1960s or early-70s, at a time in our nation's history when solving racial inequality was more of a priority than it is today -- a time when change seemed possible...



Future: These eight interdistrict school desegregation programs are our bridges; they will not let us forget our past... We can build on the foundation they have provided to move onward with a struggle for racial justice that transcends man-made school district boundaries that remain barriers to integration.



A History of Struggle for Interdistrict Desegregation: From Fed Up Mothers, to Grassroots Organizing, to New Policies



Grassroots Organizing and Cross-Racial Coalitions



On the north side of St. Louis, in 1971, frustrated mothers whose children were assigned to old and decrepit schools due to overcrowding and on-going segregation found themselves meeting in churches, across kitchen tables, and in living rooms. This led to protests for better quality education, not only for their children, but for all African American children.



Minnie Liddell, Beatrice Yarber, and the Concerned Parents of North St. Louis



- Parents collected data and became aware of :
 - Unfair student assignment patterns, disparate physical conditions of schools, unequal distribution of resources, and a racialized achievement gap.
 - Racial isolation within the City schools and an understanding of its impact on black students' access to quality educational programs
- *Liddell v. Board of Education of the City of St. Louis, Missouri*

Push for Desegregated Schools



Liddell, Yarber and the Concerned Parents pushed for better schools and desegregation:

“People are more apt to take care of your children if you have some of their children to take care of”

– Beatrice Yarber

Milwaukee's Grassroots Protest against "Intact Busing"




- In 1964, a grassroots coalition called Milwaukee United School Integration Committee (MUSIC) organized a one-day boycott of the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) in response to the notorious policy known as "intact busing," by which black students were transported to white schools and kept separate throughout the day.
- Over 300 protesters picketed the MPS central office demanding desegregation.



In May 1964, 11,000 black and white children boycotted the public schools and enrolled in freedom schools in several black churches. Most of these students remained in the freedom schools for more than a year.



Freedom Schools in Milwaukee



“No amount of compensatory education will repair the damage done to students and teachers by segregation...equal educational opportunity is impossible without racial integration.”

Lloyd Barbee, 1963, Milwaukee NAACP Leader



Milwaukee Public School

Amos v. Board of Ed. & Chapter 220



- In 1976, U.S. district Judge John Reynolds ruled the Milwaukee Public Schools were segregated unlawfully and must develop a desegregation plan.
- Shortly thereafter the Wisconsin Legislature enacted Chapter 220 to aid in integrating MPS and promote interdistrict desegregation.
- In 1979 Judge Reynolds approves desegregation plan for MPS and urban-suburban transfers under Chapter 220.

“Operation Exodus”

Boston, MA



- In 1963 and '64, black parents boycotted Boston Public Schools for their failure to desegregate. This grassroots organizing led to growing awareness of the limited school options for Black children and innovative approaches to addressing the inequality.
- In 1965, *Operation Exodus* began under the leadership of Black parents, **Ellen Jackson and Elizabeth Johnson**, to get students bused from segregated, deficient schools to better schools in the city. Exodus later formed into **METCO Inc.** (Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity).
- The Massachusetts Racial Imbalance Act was signed in 1966 after a year of lobbying by parents and activist allowing children to attend schools outside of their school districts of residence.



Ellen Jackson

Founder and Director of Boston's
Operation Exodus in 1965



Ruth Baston

Chairperson of the Education
Committee of Boston's NAACP

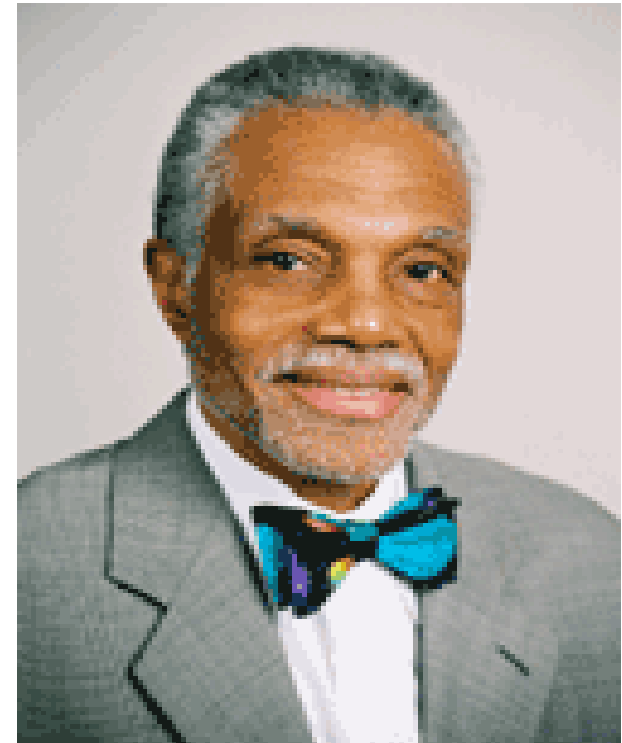
Project Concern

1966 – Hartford, CT



John Brittain

Lawyer for the plaintiffs in Connecticut
desegregation lawsuit



Elizabeth Horton Sheff

Plaintiff in Sheff v. O'Neill

Cross Racial Coalitions

Mid-Peninsula, Bay Area, CA



The “Sneak Out” Plan
Clarene Watts and Ken Freiberg



In 1966, African American students from East Palo Alto (Ravenswood City School District) were secretly placed in homes of white families in nearby school districts to protest unequal educational opportunities available in their poor, racially isolated schools.



Margaret Tinsley

1966 Sneak Out participant &
plaintiff in 1976 interdistrict
desegregation case



Gertrude Wilks

Founder of “Mothers for Equal Education”
East Palo Alto - 1969

White School Board Members, Educators and Parents Acknowledge Inequality



In Mid-peninsula, CA and suburban Rochester, white school board members, educators and parents at the grassroots level played a critical role in launching the interdistrict school desegregation plans.

Mid-Peninsula, Bay Area, CA



East Palo Alto mothers hosted cross-racial conference, which included 28 White women who were later inspired to develop their own conference entitled, “How Can We Act as Responsible White Women.”

From Grassroots to Court Case



- In 1971, a multi-racial group of parents, teachers and community leaders formed the Mid Peninsula Task Force for Integrated Education to advocate for integrating elementary schools across separate and unequal school districts.
- This activism led to the *Tinsley v. State of California* case.

Rochester, NY



- The suburban and predominantly White, West Irondequoit School Board and superintendent initiated the oldest and now longest-running interdistrict school desegregation plan.
- The West Irondequoit School District's efforts began shortly after a series of racial protests in the early 1960s which inspired the NY State Commissioner of Education to ask districts to address racial imbalance.

West Irondequoit officials admitted to the Commissioner of Education that their suburban district was segregated and mostly White and thus their students were “*being deprived of meaningful opportunities to interact with children from other cultures.*”

Formal Policy in Rochester



Collaboration among West
Irondequoit, the State Commissioner,
and Rochester Public Schools
launched the Rochester Urban-
Suburban Interdistrict Transfer
Program

From Grassroots to Formal Policies:



- Rochester - Urban-Suburban Interdistrict Transfer Program 1965
- Boston - Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity - 1966
- Hartford CT - Project Concern 1966
- Milwaukee, WI - Chapter 220 - 1976
- Indianapolis, IN - Interdistrict Suburban Township Desegregation program - 1981
- St. Louis, MO - The Interdistrict Transfer Plan - 1983
- Mid-Peninsula, CA - Tinsley Interdistrict Transfer Plan 1986
- Minneapolis, MN - The Choice is Yours Program - 2001



The Policies behind the Plans:

Some of the differences among these eight plans are reflective of their different origins—three involved federal court orders, three state court orders, and four state law.

State Law	Federal Court Order	State Court Order
Rochester (1965)	Milwaukee (1979)	East Palo Alto (1986)
Boston (1966)	Indianapolis (1981)	Hartford (1998)
Hartford (1966)	St. Louis (1983)	Minneapolis (2001)
Milwaukee (1976)		

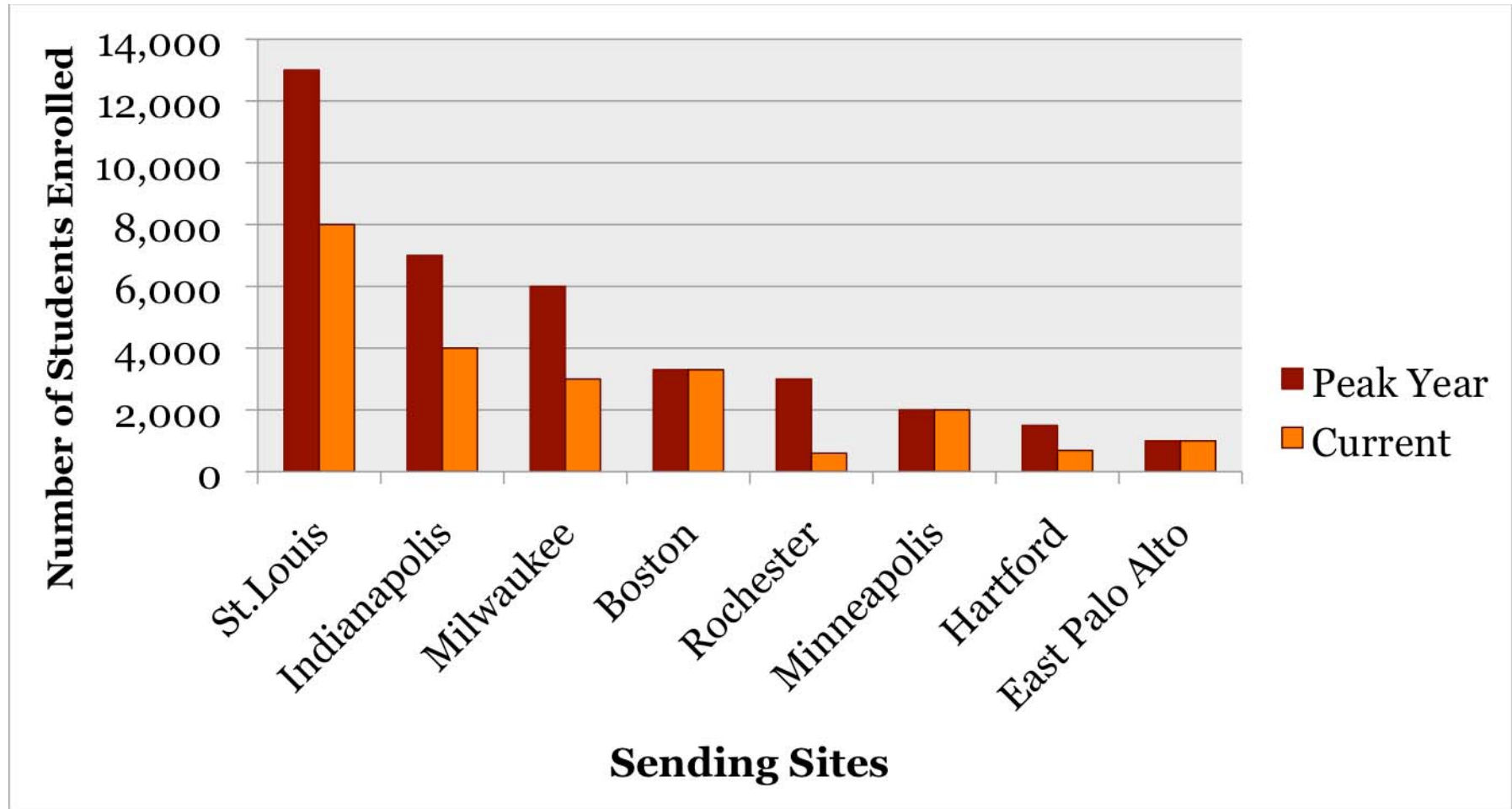


Not all plans are created equal:

These four elements of interdistrict desegregation plans critically impact their ability to address racial inequalities

- Recruitment, admissions, and enrollment
- Funding formula
- Transportation
- Support for transfer students

Peak and Current Enrollment



Demand Remains High



Urban Sites	Year	Acceptances	Waitlist/Rejection
Boston	07-08	460	~13,000*
St. Louis	07-08	1,163	2,499
Milwaukee	06-07	370	1,630
Rochester	07-08	80	370
Hartford	06-07	170	206
East Palo Alto	06-07	~166	~40

*Boston's METCO program rolls over its waitlist from year to year

Funding Models for Receiving School Districts



Equal to Suburban District's Per-Pupil Cost	Equal to Urban District's Per-Pupil Cost	Equal to State Average Per-Pupil Cost	Less than State Average Per-Pupil Cost
St. Louis*	Rochester	St. Louis*	Hartford
Milwaukee	East Palo Alto	Minneapolis	Boston
Indianapolis			

*St. Louis began with funding equal to the suburban district's per-pupil cost and then changed to an amount equal to the state average.

Funding Sources : Shifting the Burden



- Originally, the federal government partially funded the Rochester, Boston, and St. Louis plans.
- Currently, 100% of funding is covered by the states and local districts

Transportation



- All eight interdistrict desegregation plans offer state-supported free transportation
- In Milwaukee, students reported that “the bus is very valuable to them” and helps them participate in extra-curricular activities.
- In Minneapolis, only one-third of parents would chose the same school if transportation was not provided.

Support for Transfer Students



Key features of programs that offer some support:

- St. Louis- a coordinating body that helps recruit, place and counsel
- Milwaukee- program administrators and human relations coordinators, multicultural curriculum, school-community liaison or a Host Family Program
- Minneapolis- outreach through Parent Information Centers, media campaigns, radio and television advertisements, partnership programs with Head Start centers, school choice videos in multiple languages, direct mailings and parent information fairs

Research Findings

Academic Achievement



- Few solid studies—but evidence suggests that overall, the long bus rides are worth it...
 - Significantly higher reading scores
 - The longer students remained in the programs, the better they did
 - Graduation rates far exceeded those of black students who remained in city schools

Long Term and Intangible Outcomes for Mobility and Opportunity



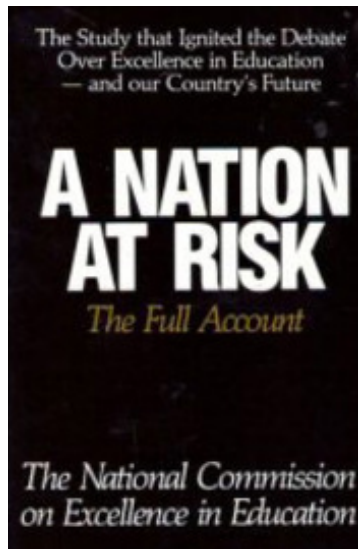
- Positively affected aspirations and expectations
- Greater access to jobs with traditionally fewer blacks
- More likely to be hired by white employers
- Greater sense of interracial comfort in predominantly white settings
- Greater access to more prestigious educational institutions

Racial Attitudes Change in the Suburbs



- Suburban appreciation and acceptance increases the longer the plans continue
 - ✦ Suburban residents
 - ✦ educators
 - ✦ school officials
 - ✦ Students
- For example, some suburban districts voluntarily continue to participate in or expand their programs

Nearly Three Decades of Policies That Have Left Desegregation Behind





Louisville/Seattle Supreme Court Decision Presents Challenges To Race Conscious School Plans



Persistent Racial Segregation & Significance of Interdistrict Partnerships



The need for cross-district solutions to educational inequalities are more critical than in the past, as now a full 84 percent of racial segregation occurs *across* and not *within* school districts (Clotfelter, 2004).

Policy Recommendations to Develop and Sustain More Equitable Interdistrict School Choice Plans



1. Create more interdistrict choice plans that target and support those students who live in the most disadvantaged, segregated communities and currently have the fewest school choices.
2. Foster and support significant participation of suburban districts
3. Further the goals of diversity and equity in urban *and* suburban education

The Importance of a New Wave of Grassroots Organizing





In September, 2008, State Senator Rev. James Meeks organized 1,000 Chicago Public School students and attempted to enroll them in affluent, suburban North Shore schools.

More Grassroots Efforts



- In 2004, Clayton High School students from suburban St. Louis walked out of class to show support for the Interdistrict Transfer Plan.
- In 2007, five days before the Louisville/Seattle decision, thirteen St. Louis suburban districts vote to keep interdistrict desegregation alive.
- Over 200 Detroit students walked out to protest closing of schools May 2007.

Obama: A realist about the legacy of racial inequality



A New Era of Hope, Inspiration and Possibility

