



# Learning Together: Discussing the Supreme Court's School Diversity Cases

The Supreme Court's recent school integration decisions endorsed the importance of promoting racial integration and equal opportunity in our nation's schools. Yet, because the Court issued several opinions and struck down certain approaches while upholding others, the decisions are not well understood by the public or policymakers. We recommend using the following messages to communicate the importance of pursuing inclusion in our schools, and to outline the valid options for doing so.

## The Values: Community and Opportunity.

**One of the most important things we can do as a community is to teach our kids to live together, learn together and play together in our increasingly diverse world.**

- We're all connected in our community. Our future and well-being are linked to each other. The better we know and understand each other, the more easily we'll live together, the more productively we'll work together, and the stronger our community will become.
- Our society and world are increasingly more diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, and language. Our future workers, entrepreneurs, and leaders must be prepared to function easily in diverse environments. Integrated schools provide children with that preparation. That's good for our kids and it's good for our community.
- Research shows that integrated schools benefit *all* of our kids—
  - Students' critical thinking skills deepen and improve in racially diverse classrooms—and that's true for kids of *all* racial and ethnic groups.
  - Racially diverse learning opportunities strengthen the problem-solving skills of students of all races, and improve their skills at communicating complex ideas.
  - Kids in diverse schools are less likely than students in racially homogeneous schools to develop racial prejudice; they're more likely to have friendships with kids from other races, and they're more likely to be comfortable and effective in different job situations.

## The Problem: A Legacy of Separation.

**If we don't plan for inclusion and opportunity, it won't happen on it's own.** That's because our individual neighborhoods don't always reflect the rich diversity of our community as a whole.

- Discriminatory decisions such as exclusionary zoning and housing discrimination will continue to isolate our kids today, unless we act now to bring them together.

[www.opportunityagenda.org](http://www.opportunityagenda.org)

*Building the National Will  
to Expand Opportunity in America.*

New York  
568 Broadway  
Suite 302  
New York, NY 10012  
Tel: 212.334.4202  
Fax: 212.334.2656

Washington, DC  
2000 Florida Avenue NW  
Suite 210  
Washington, DC 20009  
Tel: 202.387.2829 ext. 101  
Fax: 301.576.5780



- Focusing on economic class or poverty alone won't solve the problem. Research shows that racial segregation and isolation cannot be overcome without making racial integration and inclusion explicit goals in our educational policymaking. Smart integration policies consider race only when *not* doing so would result in harmful segregation in a particular school.

## **The Court's Decisions: Endorsing Inclusion, Identifying Options.**

**The Supreme Court said promoting integration is legal, important, and the right thing to do.**

- The Supreme Court's decisions in the Seattle and Louisville school cases affirmed integration as an extremely important goal for our communities and our nation. The Court identified several methods for lawfully achieving that aspiration.
- The Court said school districts may promote integration by considering the racial make-up of neighborhoods and then creating attendance zones to promote diversity, in siting new schools, by using magnet schools to attract a diverse student body, and by recruiting students and faculty members to promote diversity.
- The Supreme Court said school officials *cannot* determine school assignments based solely on an individual student's race—unless they are ordered to do so by a court.
- As a majority of the Court recognized, race still matters in American society. We sometimes need to take race into account to address persistent racial gaps in educational opportunity and achievement, to overcome our racial separation and to strengthen our multi-racial democracy.

## **The Solution: Coming Together for Our Kids.**

**Now is the time to adopt the best of the many legal and successful policies that create high quality, integrated schools in our community.**

- The Court's decision and decades of scholarly research give us a number of effective ways to produce an inclusive, high quality education for every child in our community. Now, it's our job to pick the best policies and practices for our schools and to provide a high quality, inclusive education for our kids no matter where they attend school.
- We owe our kids the best possible education, and that means quality instruction, good facilities *and* a diverse and dynamic learning environment.

*The Opportunity Agenda is a communications, research, and advocacy organization dedicated to building the national will to expand opportunity in America. The Opportunity Agenda is a project of the Tides Center. Visit us at [www.opportunityagenda.org](http://www.opportunityagenda.org). For more information or to comment on these talking points, e-mail us at [comment@opportunityagenda.org](mailto:comment@opportunityagenda.org).*