

The Civil Rights Project



Proyecto Derechos Civiles

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UCLA Survey Reveals Deep Commitment to Diversity in Schools

Jefferson County Parents Believe Integrated Schools Improve Greater Louisville Community

-- Today, the Civil Rights Project/*Proyecto Derechos Civiles* released the much-anticipated results of their survey of Jefferson County, KY parents and high school students regarding diverse education in the county's public schools. "*Experiencing Integration in Louisville: How Parents and Students See the Gains and Challenges,*" is an analysis of survey responses regarding the public's experiences with integration efforts after the implementation of the Jefferson County Public Schools' (JCPS) new student assignment plan, which began in 2009.

Two years after a 2007 Supreme Court decision ended its old desegregation plan, the JCPS implemented a new plan designed to preserve diversity without assigning students on the basis of their race. This year, the Jefferson County school board asked UCLA Professor Gary Orfield to direct a review of the new plan and make suggestions for possible needed improvements. Orfield is the co-director of the Civil Rights Project, long a leading nonpartisan research center on issues of racial equity. As a first step, parents and students in this large, highly integrated system were surveyed. This afternoon, Orfield and his collaborator, Professor Erica Frankenberg, of Penn State University, presented the report to the school board in Louisville.

When Orfield and Frankenberg accepted the invitation of the school board to do an independent assessment of the plan, it was clear that there was uncertainty about what families in the JCPS were experiencing and whether the long-term commitment of the community to integrated education was fading. The researchers now have much better understanding of those issues and believe that the citizens of the county will be very interested in what the parents and students have concluded.

Orfield and Frankenberg's analysis found that despite difficulties experienced by Jefferson County families related to problems with the major rearrangement of student transportation under the new plan, there is a deep and continuing commitment to the goals of diverse schools in Louisville among all groups of parents and students.

"The survey results show a strong and durable commitment by parents to desegregated schools," Orfield commented, "and students of all races reported receiving important benefits from attending integrated schools."

Frankenberg added, "There are always challenges sorting out the details of a major change in a big school system, but when more than 90% of parents believe that diverse schools benefit their children, then we are

confident that Jefferson County can solve the problems reported, and continue as an example to the nation."

The study analyzes two surveys, one of parents and the other of high school students. Each surveyed more than 1,000 individuals and tried to understand the community's experiences with and attitudes about integration and student assignment principles.

The study's key findings suggest that:

- More than 90% of parents believe that diverse schools have important educational benefits for their children.
- 89% of parents think that the school district's guidelines should "ensure that students learn with students from different races and economic backgrounds."
- 90% of parents support a student assignment policy that allows for family choice, but parents would also like to have diverse schooling options in their neighborhood, too, if possible.
- A majority of parents were satisfied with student assignment for their child (69%), and an even higher percentage were satisfied with the quality of their child's education (87%).
- Students reported strong support for college aspirations. In terms of encouragement for higher education, nine-tenths of students said they were encouraged by their teachers to go to college and 58% of black students and 63% of white students said they received strong encouragement.
- 64% of white students and 68% of black students said they were "very comfortable" "discussing controversial issues related to race and even higher proportions felt very comfortable "working with students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds on group projects."

"The survey portion of our work has concluded," Orfield said, "and the experiences and views of the district's parents and students will provide the central guideposts for the next stage of our assessment, which now begins in earnest."

To view a copy of "*Experiencing Integration in Louisville: How Parents and Students See the Gains and Challenges*," visit: www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu

More findings from the survey:

- A substantial proportion (43%) of parents believe that the decades of integrated schools have improved the greater Louisville community.
- There was less satisfaction (54%) about how well the plan had been implemented overall with particular concerns about the reliability of bus transportation.
- The survey revealed gaps in knowledge of the plan and of the choices available to parents. This indicates a major area for improvement as JCPS moves forward with implementing the new plan.
- 51% of black students and 27% of white students favored continuing the plan as is or strengthening it.

- In terms of their future, huge majorities of students felt very well prepared to work and live in diverse settings.
- More than a fourth of students believe that the district should do *more* to improve diversity and equity in the schools.”

About The Civil Rights Project at UCLA

Founded in 1996 by former Harvard professors Gary Orfield and Christopher Edley, Jr., the Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles is now co-directed by Orfield and Patricia Gándara, professors at UCLA. Its mission is to create a new generation of research in social science and law, on the critical issues of civil rights and equal opportunity for racial and ethnic groups in the United States. It has commissioned more than 400 studies, published 14 books and issued numerous reports from authors at universities and research centers across the country. The U.S. Supreme Court, in its 2003 *Grutter v. Bollinger* decision upholding affirmative action, and in Justice Breyer’s dissent (joined by three other Justices) to its 2007 *Parents Involved in Community Schools decision*, cited the Civil Rights Project’s research.

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