



*** NEWS RELEASE ***

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 9, 2015

CONTACT: Civil Rights Project; 310/267-5562

UCLA Report Finds Connecticut's Schools Growing More Integrated *Programs are a "Lighthouse for the Region"*

LOS ANGELES—For the first time in its ten recent studies of public school segregation in East Coast states, the Civil Rights Project today releases a new report documenting significant progress toward integrated education. In the state of Connecticut there has been clear progress, according to the new study's findings.

Since its creation 18 years ago, the Civil Rights Project has provided basic information on the status of school segregation across the nation, and taken the pulse of the country's commitment to end the segregation that the Supreme Court found to be "inherently unequal" in its 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Following the Civil Rights revolution of the 50s and 60s, there was major, lasting progress in reducing the segregation of black students, which reached its low point in the late 1980s. For more than three decades since, the country has moved toward deeper segregation in all regions, for both African American and Latino students.

Although a rich and well-educated state, Connecticut was by no means immune to this trend, particularly in its urban centers. These areas became school districts with very few white or middle class students, separating a large share of the state's students of color in impoverished low-achieving schools. ***Connecticut School Integration: Moving Forward as the Northeast Retreats***, authored by Gary Orfield with Jongyeon Ee, shows, however, that Connecticut has turned the corner and is presently becoming more integrated.

Author Gary Orfield commented, "Thanks to creative educators, a path-making State Supreme Court, and determined civil rights advocacy, Connecticut is building a new model of educational opportunity through the creation of highly desirable and integrated schools of choice."

In New England, the story of school desegregation tends to focus on the violent resistance in South Boston four decades ago, which came to characterize racial tension in the entire region in spite of many positive experiences in other Massachusetts communities. This report shows a fundamentally different, voluntary and educationally creative approach that could become a template for the increasingly diverse multiracial Northeast of the 21st century.

The report does not, however, conclude that Connecticut has solved its racial problems, as there are very dramatic educational gaps still to be addressed. But the state is making significant progress, even as

the rest of the Northeast, and the country as a whole, are turning backward, toward deepening racial separation and inequality.

“The Civil Rights Project, “ said its Co-director Gary Orfield, “is very well known for hard-hitting analyses of the resegregation of America’s schools. We are very happy today to point to Connecticut’s success and to bring it to the attention of states that are betting their future on doubly segregated schools, where educators struggling against such odds are often blamed for the failings of a separate and unequal society.”

According to the new report, Connecticut had more than three-fourths white students back in 1987. Twenty years later, in 2012, this figure is slightly below 60%. Reflecting national birth rates and immigration patterns, the state’s Latino enrollment soared from 9% to 20%, becoming by far the state’s largest minority population, a trend throughout New England. The share of the state’s children living in families whose income is too low to pay for school lunches has increased to 36% from less than a fifth. The segregated African American and Latino schools were doubly segregated by poverty in 1987. On average in 2012 white students attended schools with slightly more than a fifth low-income students while African Americans were in schools with nearly two-thirds students living in poverty.

The new study shows that intense segregation of African American and Latino students is declining significantly in Connecticut in public schools, unlike those in Massachusetts, New York and New Jersey. Unfortunately, the report shows the same cannot be said for the charter schools which lack diversity policies and are now expanding in the state.

The state of Connecticut, due to a critical decision by its Supreme Court, is unique in the Northeast in terms of the growing integration in its schools, the goal of the State Supreme Court in its *Sheff* decisions. This is not the mandatory desegregation implemented in Boston and elsewhere forty years ago. It is, rather, the creative use of educational choice, which has dominated desegregation plans across the U.S. for a third of a century. Tangible progress is being achieved in an educationally positive way for Connecticut children of all races.

Connecticut is a leader today because of its Supreme Court. In the *Sheff v. O’Neill* decision, the court recognized that racial segregation in its schools violated the state constitution. It saw that this segregation was caused primarily by official school district boundaries, separating children by race and poverty in ways that could not be cured within the boundaries of individual municipalities (in its metropolitan areas), and that resulted in fragmented and separated school districts.

Creative educators in Connecticut, under the prodding of civil rights lawyers and a series of court decisions, have created excellent schools that not only permit students to voluntarily cross those racial lines but also are highly popular with students and families of all races.

The report shows that the creation of regional magnets and voluntary transfer programs from the three major central cities—Hartford, Bridgeport and New Haven—have created possibilities for the students in what had been intensely segregated and deeply impoverished central city school systems. These schools now draw so much demand from suburbanites wanting to participate in excellent and integrated schools of choice that the legislature imposed a funding moratorium on the creation of additional regional magnets in most of the state. The legislature meanwhile continues to fund more charter schools, which have no diversity goals and remain highly segregated, which impedes further success in expanding integration.

A half-century of research shows that schools segregated by race and class are often characterized by factors that produce inferior educational opportunities and outcomes, as summarized in the report.

They tend to have less experienced teachers, often educating outside their subject expertise, less prepared students, more students with chronic health problems, families with few educational resources, neighborhoods that are more risky, greater school and family instability, more limited pre-collegiate curriculum taught at an appropriate level, fewer models of good academic English, fewer parent resources available to the school, and much weaker links between schools and colleges. Research also shows that the children who lack resources at home and in their neighborhoods, and thus need resources the most, often attend the weakest schools.

In schools that are genuinely diverse by race and class, studies show that privileged students do not lose in academic achievement, but gain in understanding and preparation for success in diverse environments that will characterize their adult life. Nonwhite students gain a better set of academic opportunities and a stronger connection with and preparation for mainstream middle class institutions, like college and major employers. The size of the gains depend, of course, on the way the diverse schools are run, and much is known about the condition for achieving maximum benefits.

Connecticut is a very rich state with very poor central cities and tremendous educational inequalities. Compared to all of its neighbors, Connecticut has created a positive dynamic, reducing segregated and unequal education and supporting preparation of students of all races for the diverse society that will be the state's future. The limited voluntary desegregation plans have made a real difference and the resulting schools report solid educational successes. Persistent and remaining segregation and inequality still need to be addressed through additional educational and housing efforts.

The report recommends that the state board and commissioner apply the positive diversity policies of the regional magnets to the charters. It also advises that the cap on the development of new regional magnets be lifted to avoid rationing educational and community success. Another suggestion is to expand the goals and apply them more fully to racially changing suburbs and housing policies in those areas, since housing policy can help rather than hinder the promotion of integrated schooling. The report concludes with a range of positive next step recommendations.

The report's author, Professor Gary Orfield, noted "Connecticut has not solved all the problems of racial inequality in education or other aspects of opportunity but it is unique in the Northeast of working creatively on the challenge and making some real, measurable progress. The Nutmeg state is a lighthouse for the region."

The report and is located at <http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/integration-and-diversity/connecticut-school-integration-moving-forward-as-the-northeast-retreats>.

Researchers at the Civil Rights Project have been systematically analyzing the racial transformation and the school segregation of the states on the Eastern seaboard from Maine through North Carolina. This report on Connecticut is the tenth in that series, located at <https://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/integration-and-diversity/special-series-on-school-segregation>.

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 more than 15 [books](#) and issued numerous reports from authors at universities and research centers across the country.