

Ensuring Educational Equity for All Students

Despite efforts and policies by school districts across the country to foster school integration, U.S. public schools are more segregated today than they were 30 years ago. It remains imperative to address the causes of systemic inequities and work toward equal education for every student. Moreover, substantial evidence shows diverse schools benefit the academic achievement of students from all backgrounds and close opportunity gaps. **How do we ensure educational equity for all students, and what are innovative approaches to foster school integration?**

Funded by the American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) Opportunity Fund, the **Bridges Collaborative Continuous Improvement Study** is examining desegregation and integration efforts nationwide and addressing existing gaps in research. The Bridges Collaborative, an initiative of The Century Foundation, is a first-of-its-kind school integration initiative that serves as a national hub and works with school districts, charter schools, and housing organizations to provide opportunities to learn from each other and to develop successful integration strategies. Bridges Collaborative members represent 3.5 million U.S. school children and span across 20 states. AIR's study included 24 public school districts, 15 charter organizations, and 11 fair-housing organizations. AIR experts sought to understand how practitioners define and measure integration and the factors associated with school desegregation and integration, and to identify lessons learned and best practices.

Study Findings

- There are valid and reliable indicators of how integrated schools are, including attendance and chronic absenteeism, school leadership and staffing, course-taking patterns, Advanced Placement enrollment, referrals to gifted programs, and discipline practices.
- The most widely used desegregation interventions incorporate elements of family or student choice.
- Many education organizations sought to promote equitable experiences, provide training on culturally relevant practices, conduct equity audits, and hire diverse staff. Additional strategies included fostering parity in student experiences such as increasing access to advanced coursework and implementing culturally relevant curriculum and initiatives to improve school climate and student belonging.

Recommendations to Promote Integration and Equity

- Researchers identified numerous common established and emerging strategies shared by multiple member organizations, including:
 - Identify staff and dedicate resources (e.g., funding, training) to drive desegregation, integration, and equity work.
 - Create authentic two-way engagement opportunities with the community.
 - Develop collaborative relationships with partners like housing organizations and other community organizations by identifying common goals and developing structures to share leadership and resources to meet those goals.
 - Document progress and inform continuous improvement efforts by collecting implementation data as well as data on short- and long-term outcomes.

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Since its founding in 1946, the American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) has conducted rigorous research and used evidence to address complex social issues and improve the lives of people, both in the U.S. and across the globe. The AIR Opportunity Fund is predicated on these same principles and strengthens AIR's commitment by investing in the generation and use of high-quality evidence to address the harmful effects of inequality.