

Concerns about the St. Paul School District Plan, “Strong Schools, Strong Communities”

1. The current situation for students of color in St. Paul schools is unacceptable according to any reasonable measure. The district’s use of the term “achievement gap” insufficiently describes the situation for students of color in St. Paul. For example, in 2010 only 32% of African American students in St. Paul schools met or exceeded the standard on the Math tests; only 41% of African American students in St. Paul schools met or exceeded the standard on the Reading tests; and only 14% of African American students in St. Paul schools met or exceeded the standard on the Science tests. All of these results, in addition to being clearly inadequate, were less than the state-wide average for African American students.

Question: How does the St. Paul School District Plan, “Strong Schools, Strong Communities” address the inadequate achievement of African American Students, specifically?

2. From our preliminary analysis, students of color in St. Paul who attend desegregated¹ schools perform better academically than students of color in St. Paul who attend segregated schools. On the attached spreadsheet, we looked at the performance of all racial groups on the three MCA tests for 2010 in St. Paul at the five most desegregated schools compared to the five most segregated schools. On every test, African American students in the five most desegregated schools performed significantly better than African American students in the five most segregated schools. Latino and Asian American students in the five most desegregated schools performed significantly better in Reading and Math than their counterparts at the five most segregated schools, and performed equally inadequate in Science at both sets of schools.

Question: How does the St. Paul School District Plan promote integration, specifically?

¹ The use of the terms “desegregated” and “segregated” refers to the level of concentration of students of color in the schools. These descriptors are oversimplified for purposes of this memo. The most segregated schools, as detailed on the attached spreadsheet, refer to the schools with the highest concentration of students of color and very nearly correlate to the schools with the highest poverty level. The most desegregated schools, again defined on the attached spreadsheet, refer to the schools with the lowest concentration of students of color (between 20+% – 40% students of color). This is not to suggest that schools with high concentrations of white students are not “segregated”—this is merely shorthand for demonstrative purposes to describe in efficient terms the racialized attendance patterns in St. Paul schools.

3. The St. Paul School District's assertion that students of color are performing slightly better in community schools is likely accurate, but it misstates the issue. Many of the designated "magnet" schools are not operating as true magnets. In fact, three of the five most segregated schools are magnet schools. Also, many of the most desegregated schools are "community" schools, where the smaller populations of students of color are performing better on all three tests than the district average. The real issue is not magnet versus community schools, but segregation and concentrated poverty.

Question: How will the St. Paul School District Plan address this?

4. Other districts that have returned to community schools² and dismantled desegregation plans have had the achievement of their students of color decline significantly. Community schools plans across the country (and across the river in Minneapolis) have predictably created more high poverty schools and more racially segregated schools. Students of color in these schools across the country have had lower achievement than their counterparts in low poverty and less segregated schools.

Question: How does the St. Paul School District Plan specifically address this? What evidence do you have that the achievement of students of color will not significantly decline as result of the return to community schools?

5. This plan would further segregate the schools by race and income. The schools in St. Paul are already significantly segregated by both race and income. In the recent NAACP meeting with the district, district officials acknowledged that this plan will further segregate the schools ("but not more than 5-10%"). They stated that the district projected how the plan would impact the demographics of each individual school, and committed to providing the NAACP with that data (they have not received it yet). Anecdotally, they informed the NAACP that Horace Mann, for example, would become 86% white students (from 78%).

This is unacceptable. We would like to see the data showing the impact of the plan on the demographics of each individual school.

6. The district's plan may raise legal issues. Without all of the data and all of the details of the plan it is difficult to make any specific recommendations or analysis, but it is possible that the district's actions could be seen as intentional

² The terms "community schools" and "neighborhood schools" are often used by districts to communicate the dismantling of desegregation plans. The district's materials about the plan repeatedly use "community schools" and "neighborhood schools" (and other similar language, like in the title itself).

re-segregation of the schools in violation of federal constitutional law and more likely may be in violation of state constitutional law that requires the state to provide an adequate education—as a fundamental right—to every student. Inadequacy under the state constitution could also include segregated education, regardless of academic results.

Question: How does the St. Paul School District Plan address this?

7. For many years, the school district has blamed the housing market for school segregation and said that the district has no control over housing segregation. . . yet the proposed plan may in fact worsen housing segregation if it limits educational options to within six "yet to be determined" attendance areas.

Question: How does the School District's proposed plan avoid worsening housing segregation (if it limits school choice) and lowering the value of housing in Black and low-income communities (with underperforming schools) in Saint Paul?

8. 85 percent of St. Paul School staff is Caucasian--yet the district proudly states that about 75 percent of the students are students of color.

Question: How does the School District's plan result in a more representative workforce both in and outside the classrooms in Saint Paul Schools? It is our understanding that there are only a handful of Black school principals, and very few Black teachers. Most of the Black staff are Education Assistant's (EA's) and Teacher Assistant's (TA's).

9. Saint Paul Public Schools is a \$600 + million dollar operation, yet the only evidence we see of contracts going to African American businesses are a few small purchases from Faye's Catering and Carolyn Smaller's Flower Shop.

Question: How does the School District intend to address this embarrassing situation? It is our understanding that the St. Paul School District does not have an Affirmative Action Plan.

10. The State of MN requires school districts to have a multicultural curriculum plan, yet there is no evidence that Saint Paul Public Schools has one. While we are pleased that the district has a Latino Consent Decree and that there are many schools solely focused on American Indian, French, Spanish, Hmong and Chinese language, history and culture--there is little or no evidence that the contributions of African Americans in business, literature, the arts, culture or history are present, taught and valued across the school district--at any grade level.

Please respond. We had a report from a parent that a literacy teacher specifically stated that Black books about urban youth could not be added to the curriculum.

11. One of the strategic plan items the district has touted over the past 5 yrs. is creating a welcoming and respectful environment. Because we continue to hear complaints from African American parents, students and staff about their experience in Saint Paul Public Schools, it appears this priority exists only on paper.

Question: Please explain how the School District's proposed plan promotes a district-wide, inclusive learning environment and a district-wide environment where African American students and families will feel valued, respected and welcomed in Saint Paul Public Schools?

12. Given the above, the district's plan should be rejected because it will predictably increase segregation in the schools by race and income, and maintain, if not exacerbate, the unacceptable educational results for students of color. Importantly, while other groups have raised the issue of segregation and the impact on students of color, no other group has made this issue a priority. It is left to us, to bring this issue to the forefront of the debate.

Please Respond!