

## **Apartheid-like Separation Found in City's Schools**

“Redlining” is the practice of banks designating whole communities – mostly low-income neighborhoods of color - where loans, usually housing loans, are restricted. Many black New Yorkers of a certain age recognize this stratagem. It was always unethical and now it’s illegal – although there are still sub-rosa instances of it occurring.

The Schott Foundation for Public Education has just released a report entitled, “A Rotting Apple: Education Redlining in New York City.” It reveals that the city’s school system’s funds, experienced teachers, and quality programs are unequally distributed according to race and neighborhood. It shows how the New York City school system practices education redlining.

Mayor Bloomberg and several public figures running to succeed him have lately been arguing about the closing of schools that do not meet certain levels of testing. The Schott report exposes the fact that all the handwringing about school closings is just nibbling around the margins of the problem; the opportunity to be taught properly and learn adequately is systematically distributed by race, ethnicity, and neighborhood.

### **Systematic Inequality**

As the report states: “This unequal distribution of opportunity by race and neighborhood occurs with such regularity that reasonable people can no longer ignore the role that policies and practices play in institutionalizing the resulting disparate outcomes.”

The opportunity of students to learn is determined by the quality of the schools they attend. And the access to good public schools – well funded, with experienced and highly educated teachers, and programs for gifted students – depends on the neighborhood of the student. Using data from nearly 500 middle schools, the report concludes that the city’s policies “systematically lock out most of its student population from an opportunity to learn.”

New York City’s 32 Community School Districts (CSD) vary from prosperous, predominantly white and Asian neighborhoods in Manhattan (CSD 2 – Battery Park City to Upper East Side) and Queens (CSD 26 – Hillcrest-Flushing Heights-Fresh Meadows) with excellent schools to low-performing districts serving highly segregated, impoverished black and Latino neighborhoods primarily in the Bronx (CSD 7 – Mott Haven-Port Morris) and Brooklyn (CSD 16 – Bedford-Stuyvesant). The report determines that inequalities between districts largely correlate to poverty and race.

Among the report’s findings: Black students are nearly four times more likely to be enrolled in the city’s lowest-performing schools than white and Asian students. It is five times more likely that a white student will have a top score on the state’s English Language Arts assessment than a black student. On the other hand, it is three times more likely that a black student will be in the lowest scoring group than a white student.

And students of color have far less likelihood of graduating high school with a Regents diploma, the baseline qualification for college or a good job. Fifty-five percent of white students received Regents diplomas in 2009 compared to 28 percent of black students.

The report also finds a direct association between teacher quality and teacher turnover rate. Districts with few experienced teachers have high turnover rates for inexperienced teachers, leading to an unstable teaching environment. CSD 16 (Bedford-Stuyvesant) has more than twice the percent of teachers with less

than three years experience and 50 percent greater turnover rate for teachers with fewer than five years experience than CSD 26 (Hillcrest-Flushing Heights-Fresh Meadows). When the report looked at students eligible for free lunch, an index of poverty, it finds that the districts with higher poverty rates have fewer experienced teachers and less stable teaching staffs, while districts with lower poverty rates have more highly experienced teachers and more stable teaching staffs.

Besides the inequitable distribution of experienced teachers, funding inequities are apparent. The city's Department of Education spends 19 percent more on schools in the most prosperous neighborhoods than it does in the most impoverished neighborhoods. According to U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, there is a difference of \$8,222 in high school teacher salaries between schools with the highest and lowest black and Latino student enrollment in New York City.

### **Need for Leadership**

Confronting this problem will take leadership. New York State, which has been cutting school aid, should increase funding, and that funding should be targeted to the lowest performing districts. If funding is not increased to sufficient levels, then the state should be sued for its dereliction of constitutional duty to provide for adequate public education.

School funding should be on a non-competitive basis and should be meted out in accordance with the needs of the students. Although this policy may seem self-evidently logical, political considerations in the Legislature war against it happening without strong leadership by Governor Cuomo.

There also should be a maximum set percentage of inexperienced teachers in low-performing districts, and the salary gap between teachers in high and low poverty schools should be narrowed. Also, a test for the Gifted and Talented Program should be administered to all kindergarten students.

These are just several of the report's recommendations. The way the system is now operated, the success of students is being determined primarily by where they live, their color, and their parents' economics rather than by their abilities. Mayor Bloomberg and Schools Chancellor Walcott should be working to change this situation and give each student an equal opportunity to learn and acquire a decent education.

The Schott Foundation report is available online at <http://schottfoundation.org/drupal/docs/redlining-full-report.pdf>

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**David R. Jones is president and CEO of the Community Service Society (CSS), the leading voice on behalf of low-income New Yorkers for over 165 years. The views expressed in this column are solely those of the writer. The Urban Agenda is available on CSS's website: [www.cssny.org](http://www.cssny.org).**

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