

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

May 16, 2014

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Dorado:

This week marks the 60th anniversary of the landmark ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* in which the United States Supreme Court concluded that “segregation is inherently unequal” and that the prevailing doctrine of separate but equal in the field of education violated the dictates of our Constitution. Although our nation has made progress toward realizing the promise of *Brown*; we write out of concern that inequality persists in public education and more must be done to fully realize the promise of *Brown*.

The population of our nation’s public schools is dramatically different than it was in 1954. While there has been a steady decrease in the percentage of white students, the presence of Latino students has increased nearly five-fold. National statistics show that segregation in public schools typically occurs by both race and poverty, with African American and Latino students more likely to be educated in schools with a substantial majority of low-income students.¹

Nearly a half-century of research shows that segregation negatively impacts student outcomes and exacerbates unequal opportunity later in life. Schools that are racially and socioeconomically isolated are related to factors including quality of instruction, teacher turnover, lower-achieving peer groups, facilities disrepair, and outdated learning materials. High school dropout rates are significantly higher in poor, segregated schools, with most of the roughly 2,000 “dropout factories” doubly segregated by both race and income.² A 2010 research

¹ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey Data. Data prior to the 1991 obtained from the analysis of the Office of Civil Rights data in Orfield, G. (1983). *Public School Desegregation in the United States, 1968-1980*. Washington, D.C.: Joint Center for Political Studies.

² Balfanz, R. & Legters, N.E. (2004). Locating the dropout crisis: Which high schools produce the nation’s dropouts? In G. Orfield (Ed.), *Dropouts in America: Confronting the graduation rate crisis* (pp. 57-84.). Cambridge: Harvard Education Press, 2004.

study concluded that a school's concentration of poverty more strongly influences student academic achievement than the poverty status of the individual student.³

Despite 60 years having passed since *Brown*, African American and Latino students are more likely to be poor, far less likely than their white and Asian peers to perform on grade level, and more than twice as likely to drop out of high school before earning a diploma. As dramatic achievement gaps persist and demographics within communities are changing, there is growing concern that much of the initial progress made toward school integration in the decades immediately following *Brown* is dissipating and that policy changes are being made within public education without deliberate consideration for the impact on and effects of racial and socioeconomic isolation.

Specifically, we respectfully request that the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) carefully examine:

- (1) changes in student racial isolation or integration over time, as measured by concentration (the proportion of students of different races who attend schools that are majority white) and exposure to overall racial composition, experienced by major metropolitan areas due to variables including regional structure (county-wide versus municipal and multi-municipal school districts) and shifts in boundary lines from year to year, including shifts caused by school closures or consolidations, with particular attention to changes over time experienced in suburban school districts;
- (2) implementation of state and local educational agency (LEA) policies that affect attendance areas or admissions, including open enrollment in public charter schools, non-charter schools and magnet schools, within and inter-district enrollment policies, and any impact on socioeconomic and racial concentration (the proportion of students of different races who attend schools that are majority white) and exposure to overall racial composition and income level over time;
- (3) voluntary actions designed to further integration, such as student assignment policies and transfer priorities and policies within or across districts, undertaken by school districts and states, including those in post-unitary status, and any resulting failures or successes that may have policy implications for achieving integration in public schools more broadly;

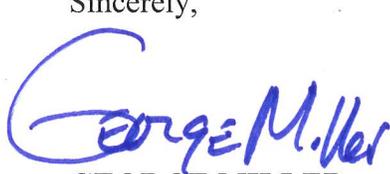
³ Broman, G., & Dowling, M. (2010). Schools and inequality: A multilevel analysis of Coleman's equality of educational opportunity data. *Teachers College Record*, 112(5), 1201-1246.

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- (4) impact of racial and socioeconomic isolation in public education, including GAO findings in responses to this inquiry, on student academic achievement, including reading and math proficiency rates, high school graduation rates, high school dropout rates, rates of college enrollment and completion, and postsecondary or postgraduate earnings.

We appreciate your assistance on this issue. If you have any questions concerning this request, please contact Jacque Chevalier with Committee on Education and the Workforce Democratic staff at (202)225-3725. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



GEORGE MILLER
Ranking Member
Committee on Education
and the Workforce



JOHN CONYERS
Ranking Member
Committee
on the Judiciary



ROBERT C. "BOBBY" SCOTT
Member
Committee on Education
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