

Strength in Diversity Act of 2021 (H.R. 729)

A historic proposal to support local communities in their efforts to desegregate public schools

Background

In the Supreme Court's landmark 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote: *In the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.*

More than 66 years later, America's public schools are [more segregated today](#) than at any time since the 1960s. The segregation of students by race and income has dramatically *increased* over the past two decades. The share of K-12 public schools that were high-poverty and comprised of mostly Black or Latino students nearly doubled from 9 percent in 2000 to 16 percent in 2013.

Segregated schools promote inequity in education. In 2016, schools with predominantly children of color [received \\$23 billion less](#) than schools with predominantly white students, despite serving the same number of children. Students of color not only attend schools that are under-resourced, they also attend schools that are over-disciplined. In the 2015-16 school year, Black students accounted for 15 percent of all students, but 31 percent of referrals to law enforcement and school-based arrests.

Students attending diverse schools do better academically, because they gain access to the same resources as white students. The benefits from attending diverse schools continue into adulthood, including more integrated communities, higher levels of social cohesion, and reduced racial prejudice.

Districts across the country have implemented innovative strategies to address these issues, including developing state-of-the-art magnet schools, establishing open enrollment policies, or changing feeder patterns to promote diversity. However, many school districts lack the resources necessary to meaningfully address school segregation in their communities, including nearly 30 districts who applied for the Obama-era integration grant that Secretary DeVos [eliminated](#).

About the *Strength in Diversity Act*

The *Strength in Diversity Act* helps fulfill the promise of equity in education by offering support to districts that are developing, implementing, or expanding school diversity initiatives. The bill:

- Establishes a grant program that provides federal funding to support voluntary local efforts to increase diversity in schools. Grants could fund a range of proposals, including (but not limited to):
 - Studying segregation, evaluating current policies, and developing evidence-based plans to address socioeconomic and racial isolation.
 - Establishing public school choice zones, revising school boundaries, expanding equitable access to transportation for students, or improving open enrollment processes.

- Creating or expanding innovative school programs that can attract students from outside the local area.
 - Recruiting, hiring, and training new teachers and improving teacher diversity.
- Supports the development and maintenance of best practices for grantees and experts in the field of school diversity.
- Grant funding would be available to school districts, independently or in collaboration with neighboring districts, as well as regional educational authorities and educational service agencies.