

# Heading in the Wrong Direction: Growing School Segregation on Long Island

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**RACISM**

**January 2015**

## **Heading in the Wrong Direction: Growing School Segregation on Long Island**

### **MAIN FINDINGS**

- Based on 2000 and 2010 Census data, Long Island continues to be one of the most racially segregated regions in the country with segregation between blacks and whites remaining extremely high and segregation between Latinos, Asians and whites increasing. Since the Latino population is the fastest growing racial/ethnic group on Long Island, their increased isolation, along with the continuing very high black to white segregation levels, is cause for great concern.
- Long Island is more segregated by race than by income. Black and Latino families, regardless of their income, experience high levels of racial segregation. For example, on average a black household that earns more than \$75,000 resides in a neighborhood with a similar level of exposure to whites as a black household that earns less than \$40,000.
- Racial segregation, combined with concentrated poverty in majority black and Latino neighborhoods, upholds a public school system that is separate and unequal. For example, 91% of all students in high need districts are black or Latino.
- Few of Long Island's black and Latino students have access to the highest performing schools on Long Island. Based on graduation rates, 3% of black students, 5% of Latino students, 28% of white students and 30% of Asian students on Long Island have access to the highest performing school districts.
- Diversity is not a benefit to the region if residents continue to live in segregated neighborhoods and students continue to attend racially and economically segregated schools.
- Education equity can only be achieved through addressing housing discrimination and by creating education policies at the state and local level that promotes racially integrated schools and classrooms.

### **INTRODUCTION**

With the release of the 2010 Census data, ERASE Racism undertook an effort to compare the levels of segregation and the racial disparities between 2000 and 2010. The results are cause for great concern. Although Long Island has become more racially diverse <sup>1</sup> (Graph 1), it continues to be one of the most segregated regions in the country, ranking tenth in terms of the highest levels of segregation

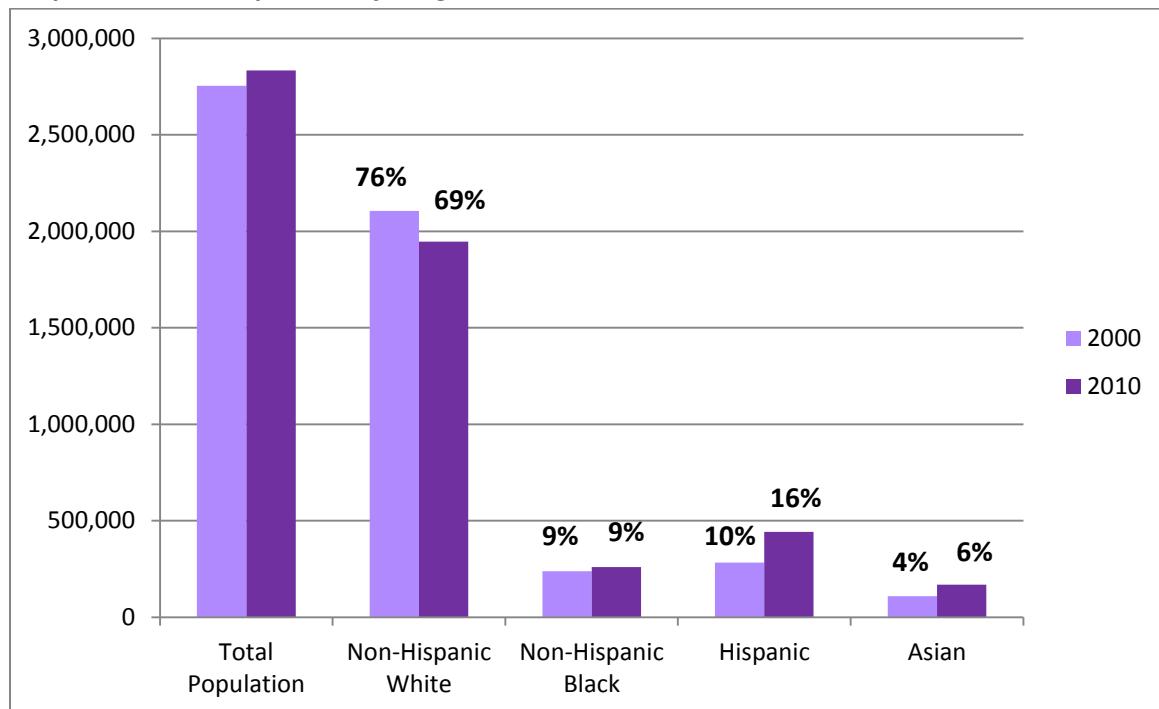
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<sup>1</sup> In 2000, Long Island had 2,753,913 residents. The racial demographic of the region was 2,105,352 non-Hispanic white, 238,293 non-Hispanic black, 282,693 Hispanic/Latino, 108,249 Asian, and 19,326 other races. In 2010, Long Island had 2,832,882 residents. The racial demographic of the region was 1,946,037 non-Hispanic white, 260,418 non-Hispanic black, 441,594 Hispanic/Latino, 168,228 Asian, and 16,605 other races.

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between blacks and whites.<sup>2</sup> Between 2000 and 2010 the level of segregation between blacks and whites has barely decreased, remaining extremely high, while the levels of segregation between whites and Latinos and whites and Asians has actually increased. Racial segregation on Long Island creates disparities in access to resources and opportunities, with black and Latino communities consistently getting the short end of the stick. Through an analysis of 2009-2010 New York State Department of Education Report Cards, it is clear that Long Island's racially and economically segregated schools reflect the neighborhood segregation. The region's long history of housing discrimination and deficient fair housing enforcement practices have produced not only severe residential segregation but also racially segregated schools and disparities in the quality of education between low, average, and high need school districts.

**Graph 1: Racial Composition of Long Island 2000-2010**



(Source: 2000 and 2010 Census data)

## RESIDENTIAL SEGREGATION

One frequently used measure of segregation is the Index of Dissimilarity (D). It measures the proportion of one group that would need to move to another census tract in order to achieve an equal distribution in relation to another group.<sup>3</sup> In general, values of D above 60 indicate a very high level of

<sup>2</sup>Of the 20 metropolitan regions in the country with the largest black populations in 2010, Long Island ranked among the top 10 in terms of the highest levels of segregation: (1) Detroit, MI; (2) Milwaukee, WI; (3) New York, NY; (4) Newark, NJ; (5) Chicago, IL; (6) Philadelphia, PA; (7) Miami, FL; (8) Cleveland, OH; (9) St. Louis, MO; and (10) Nassau-Suffolk, NY.

<sup>3</sup> From the US2010 Project: The Index of Dissimilarity (D) measures whether one particular group is distributed across census tracts in the metropolitan area in the same way as another group. A high value indicates that the

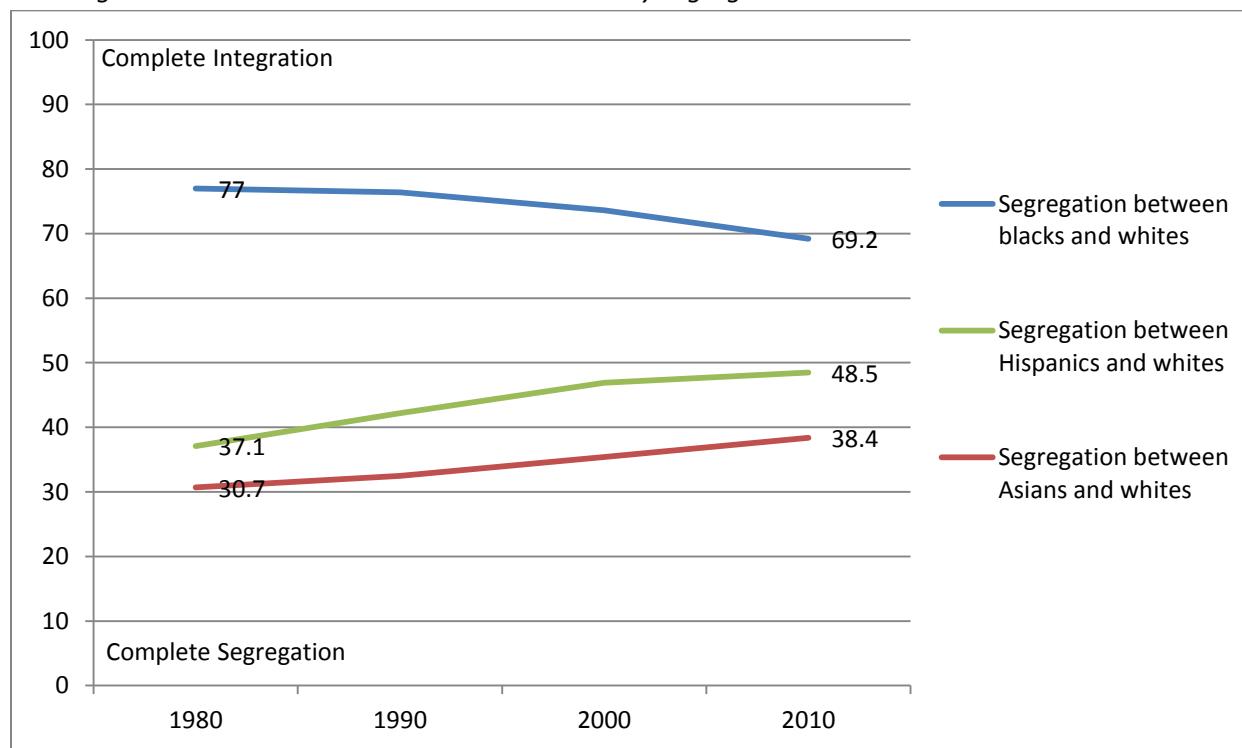
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segregation between the two groups. The Index of Dissimilarity between white and black Long Islanders based on the 2010 Census data is 69.2. (Graph 2) While that value does indicate a reduction in segregation in comparison to the 1980 census ( $D = 77$ ), it is evident that segregation is still at an extreme level. For example, in 2010 the average black Long Islander lived in a neighborhood that was three and a half times as black as the region.

Although segregation between Latinos and whites is less severe on Long Island compared to black-white segregation, the growing Latino population has become increasingly more isolated. According to the Index of Dissimilarity, segregation between Latinos and whites increased between 1980 and 2010 (from 37.1 to 48.5). The Isolation Index is the percentage of same-group population in the census tract where the average member of a racial/ethnic group lives. It has a lower bound of zero, indicating a very small group that is quite dispersed, to 100, indicating that group members are entirely isolated from other groups. The Isolation Index for Latinos shows that in 1980 the average Latino lived in a neighborhood that was 10% Latino; in 1990, the average neighborhood population grew to 20% Latino and in 2010, it was up to 30% Latino. In other words, in 2010, the average Latino lived in a neighborhood that had twice the proportion of Latinos as the region.

### ***Graph 2: Levels of Segregation from 1980-2010, Measured by the Index of Dissimilarity***

*Values greater than 60 are considered to be extremely segregated*



(Source: 1980, 1990, 2000, and 2010 Census data)

two groups tend to live in different tracts. D ranges from 0 to 100. A value of 60 (or above) is considered very high. It means that 60% (or more) of the members of one group would need to move to a different tract in order for the two groups to be equally distributed. Values of 40 or 50 are usually considered a moderate level of segregation, and values of 30 or below are considered to be fairly low.

On Long Island, and throughout most of the nation, there are large income differences between racial groups; however, the high levels of racial segregation cannot be explained by income disparities alone. If it is true that the segregation of blacks on Long Island is attributable in part to the fact that blacks have lower incomes on average than whites and thus cannot afford to live in majority white neighborhoods, we would expect affluent blacks to reside in communities with less poverty and more exposure to whites than poor blacks. The data show that this is not the case.

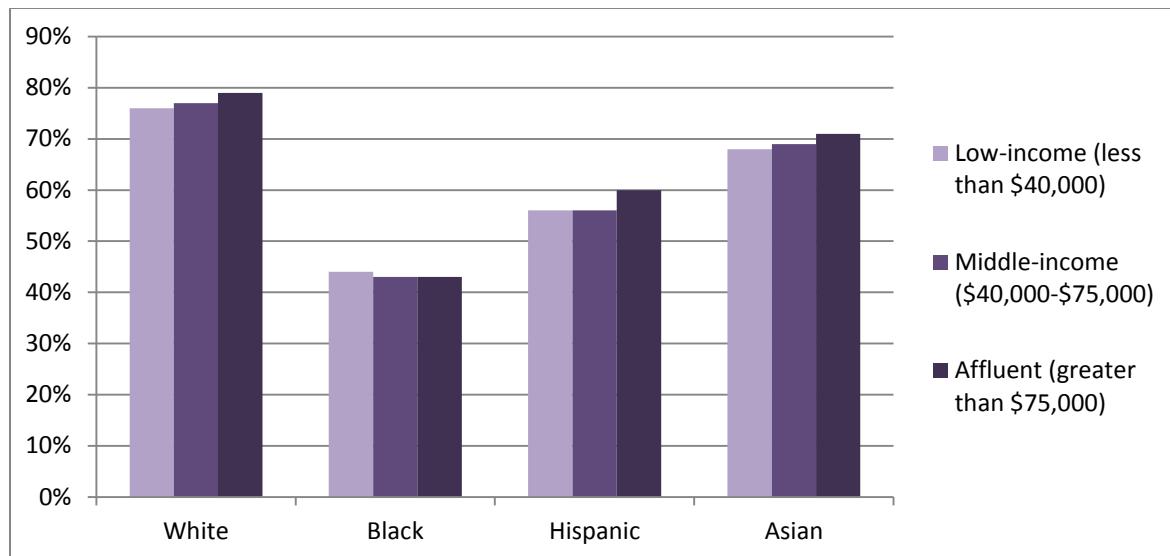
According to “Separate and Unequal: The Neighborhood Gap for Blacks, Hispanics and Asians in Metropolitan America,” a national analysis of metropolitan regions by sociologist John Logan, race is a much more important factor in segregation than income. Based on 2005-2009 American Community Survey data, Logan uses exposure indices to show that at the national level, affluent blacks are less isolated than poor blacks (36.3 vs. 42.9) and also somewhat more exposed to whites (42.9 vs. 39.8), but these differences of three to six points are small in relation to their large income differential. Logan defines low-income as under \$40,000, middle-income as between \$40,000 and \$75,000, and wealthy as earning above \$75,000 for a four person family household. He concludes that in the case of residential segregation and neighborhood quality, “race trumps income for blacks” in metropolitan regions across the nation.<sup>4</sup>

A similar conclusion can be drawn regarding segregation on Long Island, where the situation is even more severe when compared to national data. According to John Logan’s US2010 Project, which calculated 2005-2009 ACS data at the neighborhood level (by Census tracts) for every metropolitan region, black households at *all* income levels on Long Island live in areas with few whites, while whites of *all* income levels live in very white neighborhoods. In contradiction to the belief that blacks are segregated because of their lower average income level, the data show that blacks at all income levels live in communities that are on average only 43-44% white. (Graph 3) While not to the same degree as blacks, Latinos also live in communities that are less white than the region, regardless of their income. Affluent Latinos live in communities that are on average 60% white compared to poor Latinos who live in communities that are 56% white; still lower than the 69% of white residents regionally, yet significantly higher than the exposure of blacks to whites. Asians at every income level are the only minority racial group on Long Island who, on average, live in communities with percentages of white residents that are commensurate with the region as a whole.

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<sup>4</sup> Logan, John. “Separate and Unequal: The Neighborhood Gap for Blacks, Hispanics and Asians in Metropolitan America” July 2011. Pg.3

**Graph 3: The average white, black, Hispanic and Asian Long Islander with a given household income lived in a neighborhood with the following percent of white residents.**



(Source: US2010 Project; Data: 2005-2009 American Community Survey)

## SCHOOL SEGREGATION

The persistence of racial and economic segregation on Long Island is reflected in the persistence of school segregation, which has actually intensified throughout the past two decades. According to a 2014 report from the Civil Rights Project that tracked student demographic change throughout New York, the share of white students enrolled in public schools on Long Island declined by almost 18% points, from 81% in 1989-1990 to 63% in 2010-2011; the overall share of black student enrollment remained stable over the last 20 years; the Asian share of enrollment increased by 140%; and Latino share of enrollment increased by 300% since 1989.<sup>5</sup> The report showed that growing student diversity did not result in greater school integration. According to the report, the percentage of intensely segregated schools—less than 10% white—on Long Island has increased from 4% in the 1989-1990 school year to 11% in the 2010-2011 school year, and the percent of majority minority schools—those that are 50-100% minority students—has doubled over the same period of time.<sup>6</sup> Mirroring the neighborhood trends outlined above, the report also shows that school segregation for black students on Long Island has remained extremely high from 1989 to 2011, and segregation for Latino and Asian students has increased.

With 125 school districts on Long Island (56 in Nassau and 69 in Suffolk), the intense fragmentation helps to perpetuate racial segregation, as well as disparities in resources. New York State

<sup>5</sup> In the school year 1989-1990, the student demographic on Long Island was 80.6% non-Hispanic white, 10.1% non-Hispanic black, 6.2% Hispanic/Latino, and 2.9% Asian. In the school year 2010-2011, the student demographic on Long Island was 63.4% non-Hispanic white, 11.2% non-Hispanic black, 18.3% Hispanic/Latino, and 6.9% Asian.

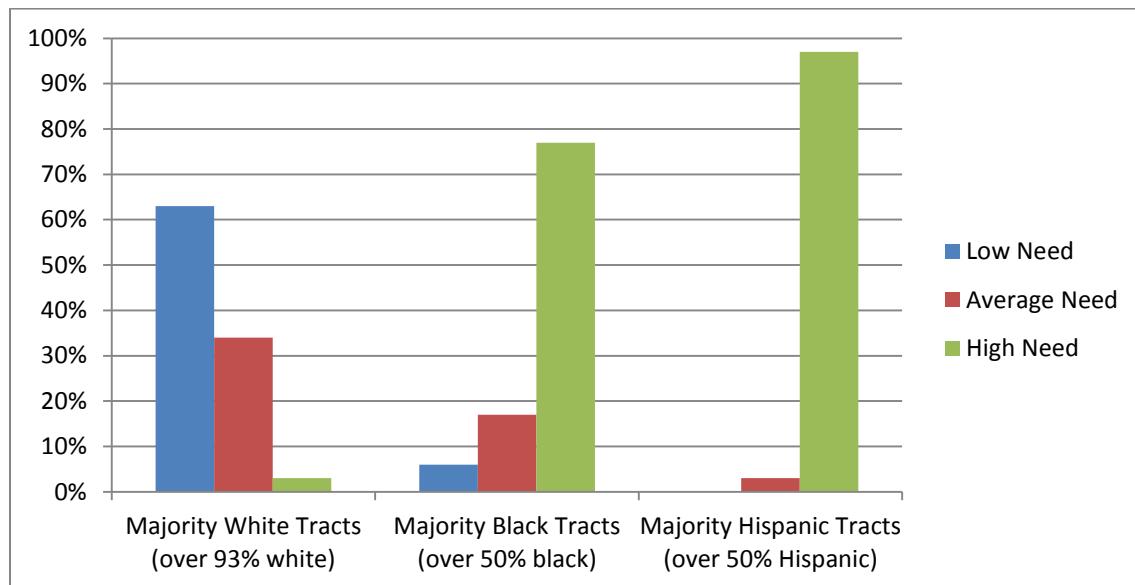
<sup>6</sup> Kucsera, John and Gary Orfield. "New York State's Extreme School Segregation: Inequality, Inaction and a Damaged Future" The Civil Rights Project, 2014

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assesses the economic situation at the district level in terms of the discrepancy between “need” and “resource capacity.” School districts are classified as “low need,” “average need,” and “high need.” Low need districts are rich in resources and can provide their students with state-of-the-art learning facilities, technology, and faculty. High need districts are resource-starved and students do not have the same opportunities available to them. According to 2009-2010 NY State School Report Cards, the vast majority of Long Island students attend low and average need districts.<sup>7</sup> Only 8% of all Long Island students attend high need districts. There are, however, extremely large racial and ethnic differences: 91% of all students in high need districts are black or Latino.

When looking at the disparities between predominately white Census tracts (over 93% white)<sup>8</sup> versus majority black tracts (over 50% black)<sup>9</sup>, and majority Latino tracts (over 50% Latino)<sup>10</sup> on Long Island, there are undeniable educational inequities. According to 2010 Census data and 2009-2010 NY State School Report Cards, 63% of the population in intensely white neighborhoods has access to low need, resource wealthy school districts, and only 3% go to high need, low-resource school districts. In contrast, the vast majority of the residents in majority black and majority Latino tracts only have access to high need school districts; 6% of students in majority black tracts have access to a low need school district, compared to 77% that have access to high need school districts. No student who lives in a majority Latino tract has access to a low need school district and 97% attend high need school districts. (Graph 4)

**Graph 4: Racially segregated neighborhoods and disparities in access to high-need and low-need schools**



*(Sources: 2010 Census data and 2009-2010 NY State School Report Cards)*

<sup>7</sup> 10 school districts are high need (5 in Nassau, 5 in Suffolk), 41 are average need (14 in Nassau, 27 in Suffolk), 74 are low need (37 in Nassau, 37 in Suffolk)

<sup>8</sup> 13 predominately white Census tracts are in Nassau County and 15 are in Suffolk

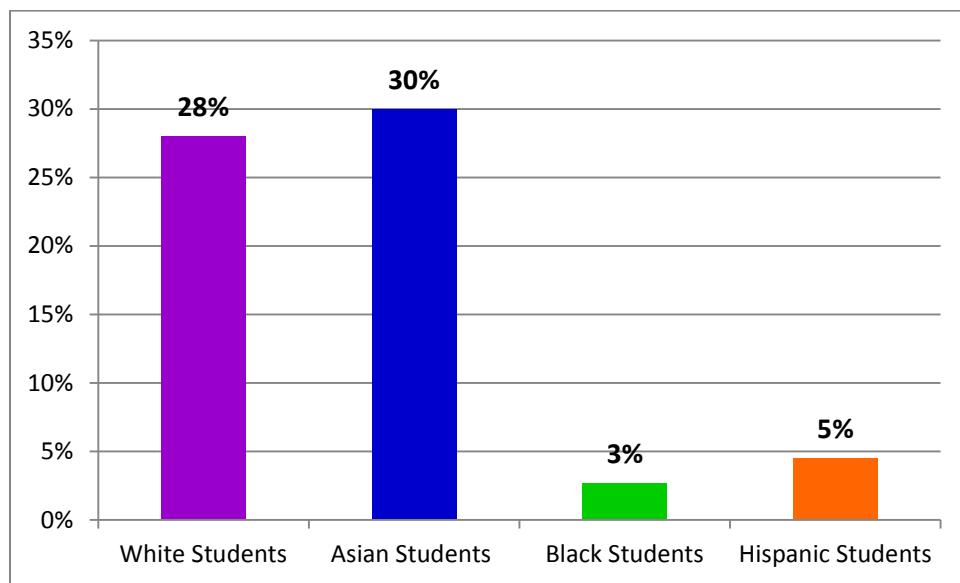
<sup>9</sup> 17 majority black tracts are in Nassau County and 9 are in Suffolk

<sup>10</sup> 12 majority Latino tracts are in Nassau County and 11 are in Suffolk

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Another way to measure educational inequities is by analyzing performance measures, such as graduation rates and averages on test scores. Based on graduation rates, 65% of all black students, 61% of Latino students, 13% of white students and 10% of Asian students on Long Island are districted to the lowest performing school districts in the region. In other words, out of all of the black students on Long Island, 65% of them only have access to the region's lowest performing schools—school districts that are in the bottom 25% compared to the graduation rates of all districts on Long Island. Out of all of the Latino students on Long Island, 61% of them attend the lowest performing schools. Conversely, based on graduation rates, 3% of black students, 5% of Latino students, 28% of white students and 30% of Asian students on Long Island have access to the highest performing school districts. (Graph 5) The same analysis was also completed using average scores on the 8<sup>th</sup> Grade English Examination and yielded similar results as the analysis by graduate rate.<sup>11</sup>

**Graph 5: Percentage of each racial group that attend the highest performing schools district based on Graduation Rates**



(Source: New York State 2009-2010 School Report Card Database)

## CONCLUSION

All Long Island students should be able to live in neighborhoods that offer them opportunities to realize their full potential. Our analysis shows that black Long Islanders at all income levels are highly segregated in areas with relatively high levels of poverty when compared to white residents at the same income levels. While less segregated than blacks, Latinos are increasingly experiencing greater levels of

<sup>11</sup> Based on the 8th grade English exam, of all of the students on Long Island, 7% of black students, 8% of Latino students, 25% of white students and 44% of Asian students have access to the best performing school districts. Based on the 8th grade English exam, of all of the students on Long Island, 65% of black students, 60% of Latino students, 15% of white students and 16.5% of Asian students have access to the lowest performing school districts.

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segregation, which is particularly troublesome given that Long Island is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse. Asian students are also experiencing greater levels of segregation as their population increases. While the average Asian student has access to high performing school districts, their growing isolation further indicates that Long Island is going in the wrong direction when it comes to reaping the benefits of racially integrated schools. Diversity is not a benefit to the region if people continue to live in segregated neighborhoods. As a highly fragmented landscape with 125 school districts that mirror the residential segregation of the neighborhoods, students can spend their days in racially isolated areas without being able to form meaningful relationships with students that are from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. These trends do not point to a hopeful future for Long Island students or for the region. Now more than ever, steps need to be taken to ensure that our schools provide the highest quality education to all of its students regardless of their race, ethnicity or socio-economic status.

Education equity can be achieved by (1) decreasing housing discrimination and increasing fair housing enforcement, and (2) creating education policies at the state and local level that promote racially integrated schools and classrooms. We need to do both.

While a comprehensive outline of strategies to create education equity is outside the scope of this report, education equity strategies aimed at providing all students with a quality education include: reorganizing school districts; altering school district funding formulas; creating inter-district education programs; and aligning expectations for student learning, teacher training and teacher performance criteria to ensure that all students have access to a rigorous course of study in racially integrated schools and classrooms.

Aggressive enforcement of fair housing laws at the local, state and federal level is essential to any effort to increase neighborhood and school integration. This would include both prosecuting violators and taking affirmative steps to integrate housing. As an example, HUD (The Department of Housing and Urban Development) must ensure that municipalities receiving federal funding abide by their obligations to affirmatively further fair housing. HUD must also monitor fair housing enforcement agencies to ensure that they appropriately handle cases of housing discrimination. Countering segregation would also include placing affordable housing in high opportunity/low poverty areas and providing access to that housing for people from all racial and ethnic backgrounds by avoiding segregation-producing strategies, such as residency preferences that block blacks and others who do not already live in the community. Both new and existing housing units should be affirmatively marketed broadly and also targeted to under-represented populations to ensure that blacks and Latinos gain more housing choice. Last but of critical importance, zoning laws should not routinely block the creation of multi-family housing.

For more information on ERASE Racism's fair housing and education equity work, visit our website at [www.eraseracismny.org](http://www.eraseracismny.org).

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**About ERASE Racism:** ERASE Racism is a regional organization that leads public policy advocacy campaigns and related programmatic initiatives, community organizing, and legal action to promote racial equity in areas such as housing, public school education and public health. It engages in a variety of research, education and consulting activities to identify and address institutional and structural racism, especially on Long Island.

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