

Magnet School Change in Demographics and Success

Date Request Received: 11/21/2008

Request From: Jeanne Collins, Superintendent of Burlington, Vermont School District

Research From: Empirical Education Inc.

Description of Request:

The Burlington School District is planning to open two magnet schools in the fall of 2009. The primary rationale for creating the magnet schools is to attract more middle class students to the two elementary schools that currently have very high enrollments of students in poverty. This plan has been discussed for many years but it appears that it will finally be implemented in fall of 2009.

Questions:

1. What research exists that shows whether or not magnet schools have an effect on school demographics, specifically socio-economic status?
2. What does existing research say about what makes a magnet school successful?

Report:

We conducted a search for rigorous research reports in this area. The sources included federally funded organizations, additional research centers and several educational research databases. Our results include literature reviews, journal articles, and lists of resources. We also searched for appropriate organizations that may act as a resource. We have not done an evaluation of these organizations ourselves, but offer this list to you for your information only.

Magnet, or controlled choice, schools are defined as “special focus schools...designed to attract students and integrate schools; some restrictions are made to balance enrollment. More than 1,350 magnet schools were reported in 1999-2000” (U.S. Office Department of Education, 2004). Research on demographics and magnet schools emphasizes school desegregation with regard to socio-economic status and race (see 1.2, 1.4, and 1.5 below). According to the researchers cited below, indicators of magnet school success include desegregation, academic achievement, and parental and community involvement (see 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, and 2.4 below).

We focused on identifying resources that specifically addressed magnet schools’ effect on demographics as well as indicators of success, such as student achievement, parental and community involvement, and student diversity. We included research articles that reach back more than 10 years because it appears magnet schools were a key political issue in the 1960’s – 1980’s. For example, Magnet Schools of America (<http://www.magnet.edu/modules/content/index.php?id=1>) notes “in the late 1960’s, school districts across America were being torn apart by resistance to forced desegregation of the schools...” and “in the early 1980’s Magnet schools eventually were helped by the federal Magnet Schools Assistance Program (MSAP)...” To supplement the research findings, we included a list of relevant organizations.

Question/s:

1. What research exists showing whether or not magnet schools have an effect on school demographics, specifically socio-economic status?

1.1. Comparison of the Enrollment Percentages of Magnet and Non-Magnet Schools in a Large Urban School District. *Arcia, Emily; December 2006; Education Policy Analysis Archives; Volume 14, Number 33; pp. 1-16.*

http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/3e/9b/4d.pdf

"In this study, the enrollment statistics for magnet and contiguous non-magnet public schools in Miami-Dade County Public Schools, a large, urban district that had been released from court ordered desegregation, were compared to each other and to district enrollment averages at two time points: the year the district was declared unitary and four years hence. Findings indicated that within four years of being declared unitary, the gains that the magnet schools had made with regards to Black/non-Black desegregation had eroded substantially. Also, in the four year span, magnet schools had not made significant strides in meeting the diversity ideals adopted by the district at being released from supervision by the court. These findings highlight the difficulty of attaining diversity in student enrollment characteristics when quotas are not used and suggest that recruitment and enrollment policies must be crafted with care if districts are to achieve diversity goals."

1.2. Social Class Isolation and Racial Diversity in Magnet Schools. *Smreker, Claire; Goldring, Ellen; May 2005; Paper presented at Meeting of National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education (New York, NY, 2000); 71 pages.*

http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/19/dc/90.pdf

"This paper explores issues related to magnet schools and racial diversity, reviewing research on magnet schools that underscores the importance of analyzing how effective magnets are in reducing racial isolation, how these data differ across districts, and what accounts for these differential effects. The paper also includes findings from a 3-year study of magnet schools in two major urban school districts (Saint Louis, Missouri, and Cincinnati, Ohio), examining the social context of school choice in order to highlight the interplay between choice policies and efforts aimed at school desegregation. It focuses specifically on issues of social class isolation in the context of magnet school systems that are designed to address racial diversity, arguing that these persistent patterns of socioeconomic segregation can be arrested under certain conditions. The paper concludes by discussing indications that the post-busing era of desegregation and litigation signals a heavy reliance upon magnet schools and parental choice without the commitment to diversity goals that marked earlier decades of social and educational reform." From page 20, "In summary, although the racial composition of many magnet and nonmagnet schools is similar, it is clear that magnet schools enroll students whose parents are of higher socio-economic status with regard to income, education, and employment. These differences are consistent for all racial groups."

1.3. Evaluation of the Magnet Schools Assistance Program, 1998 Grantees. *Christenson, Bruce; Eaton, Marian; Garet, Michael; Miller, Luke; Hikawa, Hiroyuki; DuBoi, Phyllis; 2003. U.S. Department of Education - Office of the Under Secretary Doc #2003-15.*

http://www.air.org/news_events/documents/MagnetSummary.pdf

"Implications: Overall, our results indicate that MSAP [Magnet School Assistance Program] projects and schools achieved mixed results over the three years that are the focus of our evaluation. In particular, most MSAP schools appear to have adopted innovative themes, and there is some evidence, based on both survey and case study data, that MSAP schools on average were able to establish a somewhat more positive school climate and level of professional community than other schools serving similar students in the same districts. In addition, our survey and case study data indicate that MSAP schools made efforts to align their programs with state and district standards and assessments.

At the same time, MSAP schools made only modest progress in preventing, reducing, or eliminating minority student isolation and improving student achievement. There is some indication, however, that MSAP schools with more positive program features (e.g., school climate) outperformed comparison schools in student achievement.

These results suggest a number of approaches that might be taken to enhance the prospects that MSAP schools will produce positive desegregation and achievement outcomes..." page xiv.

1.4. The Social and Instructional Setting for Metropolitan Integration. *Levine, Daniel U.; Levine, Rayna F.; 1977; 25 pages.*

(http://eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/Home.portal?_nfpb=true&searchtype=ERIC_Search&NARROWpubDateRangeTo=2009&NARROWkeyword_search=poverty&ERICExtSearch_Descriptor=%22Magnet+Schools%22&pageSize=10&eric_displayNrtiever=true&eric_displayStartCount=11&NARROWpubDateRangeFrom=0&_pageLabel=RecordDetails&objectId=0900019b800345bc&accno=ED148937&_nfls=false)

"Before trying to identify Federal policies which might help bring about constructive school desegregation in metropolitan areas, it is useful to discuss some of the considerations which make a metropolitan or regional approach to this problem desirable. This paper reviews the socioeconomic factors and the geographic and administrative feasibility of desegregation. It also examines the phenomena of magnetization and urban development and suburban resegregation as they relate to school desegregation. The authors present evidence to support the position that the metropolitan approach, as opposed to a central city only focus, renders much more potential for successful integration on all these levels. They suggest possible actions for the Federal government to take in order to facilitate the desegregation process. One Federal level proposal which encourages comprehensive, long range planning in this regard is the National Educational Opportunities Act of 1977. This Act would do more than previous legislation to effect coordinated city and suburban school desegregation and also give special attention to central city schools with a particularly high concentration of poverty. Legislation of this sort combined with related efforts to tie school planning to urban planning in general might begin to overcome the social forces which have ravaged our cities and are now beginning to engulf other parts of the metropolitan area as well."

Note: Abstract only. Full-text can be purchased from:
<http://www.springerlink.com/content/f6817p0211781824/>

1.5. A Study of Selected Issues Involving Magnet Schools in Big City School Districts.

Eubanks, Eugene, E.; Levine, Daniel U.; April 1979; Paper presented at Annual Meeting of American Educational Research Association (San Francisco, CA, 1979); 16 pages.

(http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/35/d2/cc.pdf)

"Despite the rapid growth and popularity of the magnet school movement, little systematic research has been conducted on questions of vital importance in assessing the movement's impact on the quality of educational opportunities in big-city school districts. There are certain issues that are important and deserve immediate attention from educators concerned with the potential of magnet schools for improving and equalizing educational opportunity. For example, it is important to obtain information on the home environments of magnet school students as well as on their social class backgrounds. A determination on whether magnet schools are producing academic achievement gains, with emphasis on the achievement of students formerly attending predominantly poverty schools should also be made. Another important issue to be considered is whether full time enrollment should be required for purposes of desegregation in magnet schools. This issue is critical in considering the prospects for voluntary metropolitan desegregation. In addition, an inquiry should be made into the potential role magnet schools can play in the renewal of central city neighborhoods."

2. What does existing research say about what makes a magnet school successful?

2.1. Creating and Sustaining Successful K–8 Magnet. *U.S. Department of Education, Office of Innovation and Improvement, Creating and Sustaining Successful K-8 Magnet Schools, Washington, D.C., 2008.*

(<http://www.ed.gov/admins/comm/choice/magnet-k8/magnetk-8.pdf>)

"In choosing an attractive theme, research on model programs in other parts of the country may help to generate or narrow down options, but final decisions should be shaped by an assessment of the local context." "Successful magnets choose a theme based on existing resources, local, needs, and interest. The theme is linked to a clearly defined mission that attracts and energizes all stakeholders."

2.2. Examining Indicators To Assess the Overall Effectiveness of Magnet Schools: A Study of Magnet Schools in Jacksonville, Florida. Poppell, Judith B.; Hague, Sally A.; April 2001; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Seattle, WA, April 10-14, 2001, 17 pages.

http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/16/f9/d1.pdf

"The effectiveness of the magnet school program of the Duval County Public Schools, Florida, was studied. The magnet schools were established at approximately half of the district's 150 schools as part of a desegregation plan. The schools offered a variety of theme programs. In spring 1998, the program was evaluated by four subcommittees of a steering committee, focusing on: (1) the unique and innovative nature of the program; (2) the achievement of desegregation; (3) academic achievement; and (4) parent and community involvement. The committee found that the number of schools with the "magnet" designation should be reduced, and the focus of the remaining magnets be better defined. Academic achievement for magnet school students was found to exceed that of nonmagnet school students at all levels. Thirty-seven of the district's 78 schools with magnet programs met the minimum desegregation requirements of the court's mandate. Forty-two percent of the elementary magnet schools and 39% of the secondary magnet schools had above-average volunteer participation, and similar percentages had an above-average number of business partners. The obvious success of these programs in the areas of academic achievement and community and parent involvement indicate the benefits to students resulting from parent choice in school selection and assignment."

2.3. Ten Steps to a Successful Magnet Program. Research in Brief. Office of Educational Research and Improvement, September 1988; 4 pages.

http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/1c/f7/b6.pdf

"Magnet school programs require careful planning. Originally designed to achieve voluntary desegregation, magnet programs attract students of all races and backgrounds by offering special curricular themes and instructional approaches not offered in neighborhood schools. Outcomes of a successful program include the following: (1) desegregation; (2) decreased enrollment declines; (3) higher achievement levels; and (4) decrease in community concern over the general quality of education. The ten steps to developing a successful magnet program are the following: (1) decide what the program is supposed to do; (2) find out what the community wants; (3) decide on themes; (4) choose strong leaders; (5) let teachers volunteer; (6) provide staff development; (7) market the program to parents; (8) decide on selection criteria; (9) develop a practical transportation plan; and (10) identify and tap funding sources."

2.4. Community Participation in Urban Public Schools: Analyzing Effects of Magnet School Programs. Blank, Rolf, K.; April 1984; 40 pages.

http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/Home.portal?_nfpb=true&ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=magnet+schools&searchtype=ERIC_Search&NARROWpubDateRangeTo=2009&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=kw&NARROWkeyword_search=community+involvement&pageSize=10&eric_displayNtriever=true&eric_displayStartCount=31&NARROWpubDateRangeFrom=0&_pageLabel=RecordDetails&objectId=0900019b8004c6ee&accno=ED247358&_nfls=false

"Forty-five magnet schools in fifteen urban school districts were studied to find if magnet schools increase community participation in public education, what factors lead to increased community participation, and if there is a relationship between community participation and magnet school effectiveness. Major findings were the following: (1) Almost half the magnets had higher parent participation than other schools in their districts and, in general, the magnets had considerable success in stimulating participation by the private sector and nonprofit organizations. Sixty percent of the magnet schools had high or above average participation from two of the three sectors. (2) Three factors were strongly related to higher community participation (district policy consensus, community role in planning, and school implementation leadership), one factor was moderately related (magnet theme), and two factors were not related (type of magnet and neighborhood composition). (3) Districts with a high degree of overall community participation (parents, private sector, and nonprofit sector) had higher ratings on educational quality. The most basic finding was that a high level of parent and community participation is not an automatic

byproduct of a magnet school program but is the result of a planned and sustained outreach effort for community involvement.”

Note: Abstract only.

2.5. A Model for a Magnet Program Which Promotes Both High Achievement and Voluntary Integration. *Abadzi, Helen; Dunkins, Dennis; April 1984; Paper presented at the annual meeting of American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, 1984); 32 pages.*
(http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/34/7d/4d.pdf)

“In order to provide high quality specialized instruction and to achieve voluntary integration, a magnet program was developed in the Fort Worth (Texas) Independent School District. The program is in its third year of implementation and currently is underway in two high schools, two middle schools, and an elementary school. Program features included use of uniform entry criteria for all races, preparation of students prior to entering a minority neighborhood school, business community involvement through adoption, utilization of results from other districts' definition of performance standards, and consistency in abiding by them. Both number and quality of magnet program students have increased each year. In the 1982-83 school year, students scored 2-3.9 years above district norms, and showed 1.5-2.5 months gain per month of instruction. Black students, whose numbers rise each year, scored lower and showed slightly smaller gains than White students, but scored 3-4.6 years above district Black norms. Overall, ethnic enrollments in the magnet program include 6 percent Asian, 50 percent Black, 9 percent Hispanic, and 35 percent White. Program evaluation findings point toward the effectiveness of the magnet program, both as an environment of enhanced academic achievement and as a means of ethnic integration for the schools involved.”

Additional Organizations to Consult

- **United States Department of Education Office of Innovation and Improvement** (<http://www.magnet.edu/modules/news/>) released two publications of interest as part of the *Innovations in Education* series: *Creating and Sustaining Successful K-8 Magnet Schools* and *Successful Magnet High Schools*. The contents of these guides and other guides in the *Innovations in Education* series are in the public domain and can be viewed and downloaded at www.ed.gov/about/pubs/intro/innovations.html.
- **National Center for Education Research (NCER)** (<http://ies.ed.gov/ncer/>) funded a grant that evaluates the effects of attending magnet schools on student academic achievement, to explore what factors might produce such an effect, and if magnet schools are better than public schools. For additional information, see <http://ies.ed.gov/funding/grantsearch/details.asp?ID=102> and <http://peabody.vanderbilt.edu/x8436.xml>.
- **Magnet Schools of America (MSA)** (<http://www.magnet.edu/index.php>) is a not-for profit, professional educational association representing approximately 2,000 magnet schools nationwide. Also see: <http://www.magnet.edu/modules/news/article.php?storyid=47>.

Key words and search strings used in the search:

magnet school, demographics; change in/effect demographics, poverty, diversity, student population measures of success; indicators of success, student outcomes, academic achievement, parent involvement, community involvement, attendance, graduation

Search databases and websites:

Sources For Rigorous Research Reports: Regional Educational Laboratory Program (REL); What Works Clearinghouse (WWC); Doing What Works (DWW); National Center for Education Statistics (NCES); National Center for Education Research (NCER); Institute for Education Sciences (IES); The Campbell Collaboration; Data Quality Campaign; IES Practice Guides

Other Federally Funded Sites: The Assessment and Accountability Comprehensive Center; The National High School Center; The Center on Innovation and Improvement; The Center on Instruction; ERIC

Additional Data Resources: Education Development Center; WestEd; American Institutes for Research; Google Scholar and Google

REL Northeast and Islands

The Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Reference Desk is a service provided by a collaborative of the REL program, funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES). This response was prepared under a contract with IES, Contract ED-06-CO-0025, by REL Northeast and Islands administered by Education Development Center, Inc. The content of the response does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.