

LESSONS LEARNED FROM MAGNET SCHOOLS' EXPERIENCES WITH INTEGRATION EFFORTS: FACTS AND FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FOR SCHOOL DISTRICTS

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Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center

January 2022





About the Centers

Great Lakes Equity Center (Center) is an educational research and service center located in Indiana University's School of Education at IUPUI. The Center engages in equity-focused technical assistance and related research with educational and community agencies focused on systemic improvements to serve all learners with particular focus on educational access, participation and outcomes for those who have been historically marginalized. Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center is a project of the Center and provides technical assistance related to educational equity based on student race, national origin, sex, and religion at no cost to public educational agencies throughout its 13-state region in the Midwest and Plains.



Introduction

Lessons Learned from Magnet Schools' Experiences with Integration Efforts: Facts and Frequently Asked Questions for School Districts provides facts and frequently asked questions about magnet schools and their integration efforts.

This *Equity Tool* couples research on magnet schools with information collected from individuals leading and working in magnet schools across three distinct school and school district contexts.

The infographic developed is meant to be shared with various education stakeholders, including those directly involved in designing and implementing magnet school policies at the local level as well as those at state and federal levels who are in positions to create legislation that promotes the value and benefits associated with magnet schools intentionally structured for school integration.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM MAGNET SCHOOLS' EXPERIENCES WITH INTEGRATION EFFORTS

Facts and Frequently Asked Questions for School Districts

BACKGROUND OF MAGNET SCHOOLS:

Over 50 years after the first magnet school was created in the United States (Waldrup, n.d.), these schools still serve as an important strategy to assist in integration efforts. **Magnet schools are public schools that offer distinct curricula centered around a specific theme (e.g., performing arts, STEM, language immersion).** Some magnet schools were created as a result of consent decrees from court-ordered school desegregation. Enrollment is voluntary and families can often choose to send their children to magnet schools across neighborhood and school district boundaries (George & Darling-Hammond, 2021). Research on magnet schools points to myriad academic and social benefits, including increased student achievement, graduation, and attendance rates as well as less racial isolation and better intergroup relationships (Frankenberg & Siegel-Hawley, 2008).

3,484

magnet schools in the U.S.

5.3%

total student enrollment in public elementary and secondary schools

(NCES, 2020)

[Background image description: Black marker cartoon drawing of a schoolhouse]



[Image description: A lit lightbulb graphic]

HOW DOES YOUR MAGNET SCHOOL FIT WITHIN THE LARGER SCHOOL DISTRICT, OTHER SCHOOL DISTRICTS, AND EDUCATION PIPELINE?

HOW CAN MAGNET SCHOOLS MEET THEIR ORIGINAL INTENT OF PROVIDING CHOICE AND FOSTERING DIVERSITY & EQUITY?

Magnet schools **must be intentional** in creating policies that center equity and access. School district officials often hear from families about the importance of having the option to engage in school choice but also recognize that **"choice has very concerning implications around equity and access."** Implementing managed or controlled-choice programs that provide families with school choice options while simultaneously establishing desegregation goals can accommodate both preferences and establish and/or maintain diverse and equitable schooling environments.



[Image description: EQUITY in Scrabble tile letters, surrounded with scattered beads]

WHAT SHOULD MAGNET SCHOOLS CONSIDER WHEN IT COMES TO TRANSPORTATION?

Where the magnet school is located **matters**. It is important to place the school in an area that creates as short of a commute time as possible for students, and to examine the school zone's racial demographics **prior to school placement** (Ayscue et al., 2017).

Providing **free** transportation allows all eligible students to have physical access to the school. However, it is important to be mindful of commute times and what other types of access may be limited as a result when determining service areas (e.g., after-school activities).



[Image description: School bus graphic driving left]

WHY SHOULD CONTEXT BE AT THE FOREFRONT WHEN DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING MAGNET SCHOOLS?

[Image description: Seated person writing on a digital tablet photo]

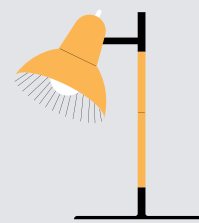


Context matters. Magnet schools are operating in a much different context than when they were initially established with the goal of creating integrated schools (Smrekar & Goldring, 1999).

Understanding the historical and sociopolitical contexts of desegregation in your community is **critical** to understanding the development of magnet schools and their ongoing importance in promoting and sustaining diverse school settings.

MAGNET SCHOOLS ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Initiated in 1976 by the U.S. Congress as part of the Emergency School Aid Act (Siegel-Hawley & Frankenberg, 2013) and authorized in 1985, MSAP continues to operate out of the U.S. Department of Education Office of Elementary and Secondary Education.



[Image description: A lit desk lamp graphic]

MSAP “provides grants to eligible local educational agencies to establish and operate magnet schools that are operated under a court-ordered or federally approved voluntary desegregation plan. These grants assist in the desegregation of public schools by supporting the elimination, reduction, and prevention of minority group isolation in elementary and secondary schools with substantial numbers of minority group students. In order to meet the statutory purposes of the program, projects also must support the development and implementation of magnet schools that assist in the achievement of systemic reforms and provide all students with the opportunity to meet challenging academic content and student academic achievement standards.” (U.S. DOE, n.d., para. 2)

HOW CAN THE COMMUNITY BE BEST INFORMED ABOUT MAGNET SCHOOLS' GOALS AND ADMISSION PROCESSES?

As school officials, you are community liaisons. In order to provide the most equitable enrollment process, you can diversify your communication and increase your support. Consider sharing **clear, concise language** online, in print, and in person (e.g., open house) in multiple languages and community locations, at multiple times. If video streaming and recording are options, having events captioned assists members of your community who are hearing impaired and posting them on the families portion of your website helps provide easier access. For any digital images provided on your website, alternative text is helpful for those who are blind or visually impaired. By varying your delivery methods (i.e., language, visual and audio formats, dates and times, location), this provides initial assistance with the application process. In order to provide direct assistance with the application process for families, school officials should offer individualized or group application completion support, multiple timelines for application due dates and student selection, and facilitate incoming families being able to converse with current families about their experiences.



[Image description: People in video conferencing graphic]



[Image description: Digital text communication bubbles graphic]



[Image description: Child reading a book while sitting on a stack of big books graphic]

Discipline should be considered an influential factor on school culture in magnet schools. **Restorative discipline practices can decrease suspension and expulsion rates, improve academic outcomes, and strengthen school community relationships.** These practices focus on addressing harm over punishment (Hays, 2021; High, 2017).

HOW SHOULD DATA BE USED TO INFORM DECISION-MAKING AROUND RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, AND STUDENT SUCCESS?

Solicit feedback. Data should be easily accessible and disseminated to all interested parties. Look for trends across demographics, grade levels, and years. Routinely interpret data and discuss data-informed changes in a timely manner.

View data **without** a deficit-based approach but be mindful of an asset-based one; an asset-based approach needs to be clearly defined or it can actually be a deficit.

[Image description: Five-person meeting with digital devices photo]



SAMPLE QUESTIONS ON DISCIPLINE IN MAGNET SCHOOLS

- Does the dress code prohibit Black students from wearing culturally-specific natural hairstyles?
- When examining disciplinary data, are students routinely being removed from a particular teacher's classroom?
- Is there a disproportionate number of students facing disciplinary measures from a particular racial demographic? What about in special education?

WHAT RESOURCES MAY HELP SUPPORT THIS WORK?

Connect with your regional Equity Assistance Center! The Midwest & Plains Equity Assistance Center is a Great Lakes Equity Center project and provides technical assistance related to educational equity based on student race, national origin, sex, and religion at no cost to public educational agencies throughout its 13-state region.

Advisory councils can also be helpful in moving forward the work of magnet schools. They can provide financial assistance as well as connect schools with education stakeholders in the community.

Connect with people doing similar work in other school district contexts and learn from their experiences engaging in integration efforts.

Seek out grant opportunities in your local community as well as at state and federal levels and think about who you may be able to partner with on these grants (e.g., research-practice partnerships).

HOW CAN WE MAINTAIN AND INCREASE OUR ENROLLMENT?

- Develop and implement a continuous improvement plan using data and school community feedback.
- Ensure professional development, leadership, curriculum, and instruction is culturally responsive (George & Darling-Hammond, 2021; Horsford et al., 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1995).
- Challenge teachers to reflect on their biases that may lead them to discipline a student from a racially minoritized group for the same behavior ignored when exhibited by white students.
- Administrators must examine school policies for their racial implications and systemic disadvantages they might cause (Diem & Welton, 2021).

DEVELOPING AND CULTIVATING PARTNERSHIPS ARE CRITICAL TO THE SUCCESS OF MAGNET SCHOOLS

Coalition-building: work with your school board and community organizations

Partnerships: engage a local university and your community; look to other schools who have had success in establishing and maintaining diverse magnet schools

HOW DO WE ENSURE THAT OUR ADMISSION POLICIES SUPPORT OUR INTEGRATION EFFORTS?

Actively prioritize race and socioeconomic status (SES). Although prioritizing race alone may assist in racially diversifying schools, the *Parents Involved* (2007) ruling disallows race from being the sole factor considered. In response to this and similar rulings, programs often replace race with SES.



[Image description: Five students with backpacks walking toward a school building photo]

However, SES-based policies do not guarantee racial diversity in schools. Race and SES prioritized together is more effective. Although they will not serve as the sole factors, they should be distinct ones. For instance, lottery systems can be the most impactful, but only if they are weighted and have multiple timelines (Ayscue et al, 2017). It is important to be clear on your definitions and parameters for these two factors; they should not be synonymous with or diluted by other factors.



[Image description: Six adjacent closed doors, five white doors and one yellow door along a corridor]



[Image description: Profiles of two heads looking at each other with thought bubbles above each graphic]

TARGETED, EQUITABLE OUTREACH TIPS

WHO:

YOU! Every member of the school community

WHAT:

can take steps toward centering equity and access by

WHEN:

offering evening- and weekend-based recruitment events,

WHERE:

both at the school and at prominent community-based locations,

WHY:

in order to be culturally responsive in outreach.

HOW:

Advertise in more racially and economically diverse communities!

ADDITIONAL MAGNET SCHOOL RESOURCES



[Image descriptions: Logos LEFT: Magnet Schools of America, RIGHT: Learning Policy Institute]





About the Authors

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Recommended citation: Smotherson, B., & Diem, S. (2022). Lessons learned from magnet schools' experiences with integration efforts: Facts and frequently asked questions for school districts. *Equity Tool*. Midwest & Plains Equity Assistance Center (MAP EAC).

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