



Making Schools Work Better for all Children

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Forty-five years ago this week, *Brown vs. Board of Education* was decided in court, banning the practice of legal segregation in our schools. However, the NAACP recently concluded that *de facto* segregation still exists, and that some of our schools are more segregated than ever before.

What to do? Well for starters, we turn this week in the hot-line to policies and prescriptions aimed at improving all schools. Only by doing so will our inner city schools improve, and we'll fulfill the intentions laid forth in *Brown vs. Board*.

For example, tying teachers' pay to performance and opening up the teaching profession to a wider variety of people as has been proposed by the Fordham Foundation (website is www.edexcellence.net) would certainly ensure more accountability in the classroom.

Or perhaps we should look at schools like Frederick Douglass Academy in New York City. Its high-schoolers are expected to take at least two Advanced Placement courses. FDA's demanding curriculum helps them pass at far higher rates than the city average on the New York Regents exams, the state tests needed for a 'college- prep' diploma. FDA middle-schoolers scored 32 percentage points higher than the city average on a standardized reading test, and 26 points higher in math. Students at FDA spend a lot of time at school. It's open from 7:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. on weekdays and is also open on Saturdays. "It's hard work," principal Gregory Hodge told *Investor's Business Daily*. "You have to have teachers who are really committed to the message and the mission of the school."

Perhaps we should stop being so compliance orientated and concentrate on what is being done to educate the children. For example, in Louisiana the Department of Justice will not allow The Children's Charter School to expand to the fourth grade, meaning parents that chose the charter school for their child will have to return to the school that they felt did not serve their child. "Justice" claims expansion will take money from the system and that will hamper the desegregation effort, and that school choice will shift the racial percentages in a way that they cannot predict and are not willing to consider. That the district is already highly segregated, that they are denying parents their school of choice, and that over twenty years of desegregation has been a total academic failure apparently means nothing to "Justice." Nor does the school's academic achievements in only one and one-half years of operation. Over 90% of the students are "at-risk" (the highest in the state, in fact) yet the majority of the students have met and exceeded the school's high standards. Apparently Department of Justice paperwork and compliance takes precedence over the parents' right to choose the school.

So while Brown vs. Board lives in spirit, we've much work to be done before all children receive the education they deserve.



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