STRONG CHILDREN'S RESEARCH CENTER

Summer 2018 Research Scholar

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ABSTRACT

Title: Assessment of the Feasibility of Socioeconomic Integration of Rochester City School District Schools through Reversal of Middle-Class Flight

Background: Rochester City School District's (RCSD) high-poverty, low-achieving schools are exposing the 26,687 students enrolled in them to an increased risk of intergenerational poverty and health problems associated with poor educational attainment.[1, 2] One explanation for the poor quality of these schools is the extreme concentration of poverty in the region resulting from 50 years of middle-class flight. School integration by socioeconomic status (SES) in a 60 to 40 percent ratio of middle-class to low-income students has been proven to improve school quality of an entire district and the academic performance of all students.[5, 6] However, a major barrier to school integration by SES is the perception that it is mathematically impossible to integrate high-poverty schools, like those in RCSD, as there are not enough middle-class families in the city.[8]

Objective: To investigate the feasibility of integrating RCSD schools by SES, in a ratio of 60 to 40 percent middle-class to low-income students, by introducing middle-class students into schools in the district. In addition, to test the hypothesis that the number of middle-class households leaving the city for the suburbs of Rochester each year would be sufficient to integrate RCSD in 20 years if they were to remain in the city.

Results: Estimation of the number of middle-class students necessary to integrate RCSD over a 20-year period was performed. The results indicate that 2474 middle-class students would be required per year over 20 years to fully integrate RCSD, without accounting for changes in child poverty rates over time. However, declining rates of children being born into poverty, through programs in Rochester such as the LARC initiative, would decrease the number of low-income students entering RCSD each year; over 20 years, it is predicted that the number of low-income students entering kindergarten in RCSD schools each year will decrease from 1851 to 1000 students. The number of middle-class students currently living in the district and entering RCSD schools in kindergarten is also predicted to increase from 449 to 1500 middle-class students. As a result, middle-class flight of only 974 households would need to be prevented to achieve complete SES integration of the district over 20 years.

Conclusion: SES integration of RCSD schools would not be feasible by solely relying on reducing middle-class flight to increase the number of middle-class students in the district. Efforts to decrease child poverty would decrease the number of low-income students entering RCSD, thereby increasing the number of middle-class students entering the district each year. This in turn would decrease the extent to which middle-class flight would need to be reduced (we are still determining the number of middle-class households leaving the city for the suburbs of Rochester). Our analysis suggests that decreasing child poverty and reducing middle-class flight would make SES integration of RCSD schools over a 20-year period attainable.

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