

# EL

EDUCATIONAL  
LEADERSHIP

# SEPARATE AND

# STILL UNEQUAL

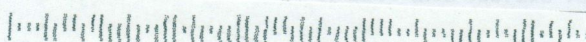
RACE IN AMERICA'S SCHOOLS

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# Separate and Still Unequal: Race in America's Schools



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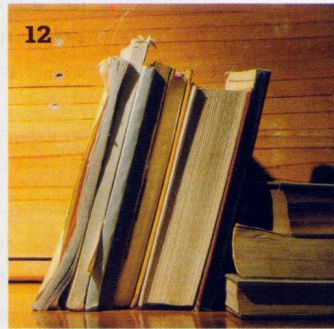
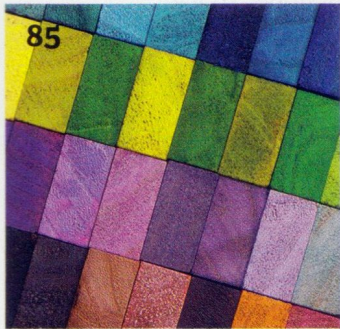
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Anthony Rebora

# 65 Years Later, Promises Unfulfilled

**T**his special issue of *Educational Leadership* looks at the topic of race and schools in the context of the 65th anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, which was handed down on May 17, 1954. As such, it is somewhat different in scope and substance than most *EL* issues. It offers more in the way of social-historical perspective, for example, and it may be more ideologically challenging and searching. The articles take a hard look, from different viewpoints, at the persistence of racial inequities—and racism—in our education system, despite the Supreme Court's mid-20th century directive to put an end to school segregation “with all deliberate speed.”



Ronn Nozoe

If this issue has a slightly different feel, however, its focus on civil rights and diversity is entirely in keeping with ASCD's mission and history. Way back in 1955, the budding membership organization passed a resolution in full support of the *Brown* decision, calling for public schools to be “open and free to the children of all people . . . to develop to their furthest potential.” In subsequent years, the association approved several additional resolutions recognizing and encouraging equity and cultural diversity as central goals of education. More recently, our Whole Child framework has called attention to the need for comprehensive and enriching supports for *all* children.

ASCD also has a long-standing commitment to raising awareness of

the social issues that affect education. “In order to grow as educators, we need to understand the full context of the history of the profession that we love and serve,” says Ronn Nozoe, ASCD's recently named interim executive director. “Part of that is understanding the historical roots of why education law is essentially civil rights law.”

Nozoe got his start in education as a language arts teacher in Hawaii and later became the state's deputy superintendent. Hawaii has not been immune from racial equity issues, with students from native Hawaiian cultures often facing systemic challenges and performing worse than their non-native peers on a wide variety of academic and well-being measures.

Nozoe says that one thing he learned in working to address this issue as a state official was the importance of dropping his preconceived opinions and solutions—which he describes, in the Hawaiian cultural paradigm, as coming from a “Western” framework—and trying to better understand the perspectives and concerns of those affected. This helped him and his colleagues work with parents and community groups to create programs that addressed their specific needs and incorporated their vision of education.

The lesson was reinforced for him, Nozoe says, when he became a deputy assistant secretary at the U.S. Department of Education during the Obama Administration and began to get a deeper grasp of the racial divi-

sions afflicting American education as a whole. Education leaders “have to do a better job of understanding the limitations of our inherited and learned perspectives,” he says. “We have to step back and create time and space and venues for open dialogue and multiple viewpoints.”

That's also a helpful way of thinking about this issue of *EL*. Through experience and reflection, the contributors are all deeply versed in educational equity and diversity issues—indeed, many of them are major voices in the field. Their articles include moments of pain and frustration, and they offer ideas and arguments that challenge accepted practices and ways of thinking about education and race—as well as call attention to our roles as educators and parents in “masking” and perpetuating inequities and divisions. But in helping us re-examine assumptions, ask tough questions, and acknowledge deep-rooted issues, they also offer inspiration and pathways to fulfilling the promise of *Brown*.

And that's ultimately what ASCD, as a mission-drive organization, hopes to encourage. “We have to continue to put this issue [of school segregation] front and center and bring visibility to it as an issue of social consciousness,” says Nozoe. “We have to make people see that the system may be OK for your kid or kids in your school, but is it OK for everybody's kid?” **EL**



*Anthony Rebora*



# Advisory

**Trends and  
Ideas on  
Race in America's  
Schools**

## Research Alert

### The Impact of Teacher Diversity

Research by the National Bureau of Economic Research and the IZA Institute of Labor Economics shows that, for black K–12 students, having even a *single black teacher* in elementary school can make a tremendous difference—improving a student's trajectory far beyond the elementary years. Being taught by a black educator is so salient that it can affect whether or not a student of color not only finishes high school, but enrolls in college, according to data analyses.

The results—from two related studies of academic indicators for students in North Carolina and Tennessee—indicate that black students who had at least one black teacher in elementary school were 7 percent more likely to graduate high school and 13 percent more likely to enroll in college than peers who didn't have a black teacher in grade school. Researchers found similar patterns about the power of having a same-race teacher when looking at long-term college enrollment data for black students.

These data are especially striking because the



effects of learning from a black teacher persisted 10-plus years after students had that experience.

One of the studies, looking at 100,000 North Carolina students, found that having a black teacher in 4th or 5th grade reduced low-income black males' chances of dropping out of high school by 39 percent. Black youth of both genders who'd had had a black teacher were also more committed to pursuing higher education. The second study found that African American students in Tennessee who'd had a

black teacher in grades K–3 were more likely than those who hadn't to take a college entrance exam, among other indicators of college interest.

The reports, both titled "The Long-Run Impacts of Same-Race Teachers," are available at <http://ftp.iza.org/dp10630.pdf> (IZA Institute of Labor Economics) and [www.nber.org/papers.html](http://www.nber.org/papers.html) (NBER).



# What Black Educators Built

**Vanessa Siddle Walker**

I began teaching in a fully desegregated high school in 1980 under J.A. Freeman, one of the three black principals who survived desegregation as a high school principal in North Carolina. As a young teacher, I embodied the vision for integration. I was the product of a desegregated high school and an elite, predominantly white college. No one I knew talked about the massive firings of black teachers and principals across the South as retaliation during desegregation. I knew nothing about the activities of the black principals and teachers who worked against inequality in formerly segregated schools. In fact, from my perspective, segregation was simply dead. So I ignored the whispers about the earlier life of my principal who had led the segregated black school and instead focused on how to be a good teacher.

I learned to engage with colleagues as we reviewed major education reports at faculty meetings and discussed in small groups how we might apply the ideas in our school. It was normal for my principal to appear unsolicited in the door of my classroom and listen for a few minutes before quietly departing. I heeded his instructions that all teachers should greet students as they entered and exited class. I especially remember the academic competition with

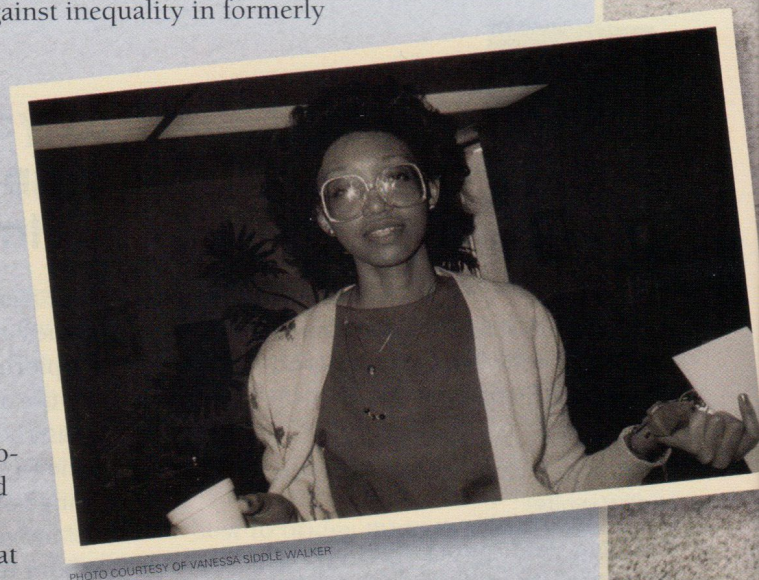


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# WHY SCHOOL

*I am the product of integrated schools. Here's why, despite the challenges, I believe efforts to further and support integration are indispensable today.*

**Pedro A. Noguera**

Is integrated schooling in the United States a goal still worth pursuing? This is neither a cynical nor a hypothetical question. As we contemplate the significance of the 65th anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court's *Brown* decision, this basic question carries special pertinence. Today, all the evidence shows that even as American society is growing more racially and ethnically diverse, many of our schools are headed in the opposite direction. Moreover, no major political leader has stepped forward either to call attention to this trend and its implications, or to offer ideas on what might be done to reverse it.

Across the country, many schools today are characterized by growing racial and socioeconomic isolation. However, this does not mean that *Brown* was a failure. Most legal scholars still regard *Brown* as a historic, groundbreaking decision, one that warrants rarified status among Supreme Court rulings. Despite later setbacks, *Brown* did bring about an end to legally sanctioned racial discrimination, or what might fairly be regarded as "American apartheid." The Supreme Court's unanimous ruling in the case is credited not only with starting the process of eliminating racial barriers in education, but also with setting precedent for the elimination of racial barriers to voting, housing access, employment, transportation, and other facets of life in America that are essential to full citizenship (Grant-Thomas & Orfield, 2009).



African American children on their way to school in New York City in 1965 pass a group of white mothers protesting school-desegregation efforts. The school integration movement was at its height during the author's youth in the New York area in the 1960s and 70s.

DICK DEMARSCO/THE GRANGER COLLECTION