Racial & Economic Integration of Alabama K-12 Public Schools

Prepared For A+ Education Partnership

My classroom on March 14, 2020 – the last day of school before we were sent home for COVID-19.

Sarah Emily Waldinger | April, 2023

Racial & Economic Integration of Alabama K-12 Public Schools

An Applied Policy Project

By Sarah Emily Waldinger

With guidance from Professors Kirsten Gelsdorf and Benjamin Castleman

April 26, 2023

Made accessible by

The Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy

University of Virginia

Charlottesville, Virginia

In partnership with

A+ Education Partnership

Montgomery, Alabama

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"Equality of treatment is accorded when the races are provided substantially equal facilities… Segregated public schools are not 'equal' and cannot be made 'equal'… We must consider public education in the light of its… present place in American life… Segregation of white and colored children in public schools has a detrimental effect upon the colored children… The impact is greater when it has the sanction of the law. For the policy of segregating the races is usually interpreted as denoting the inferiority of the negro group. A sense of inferiority affects the motivation of a child to learn."

Brown v. Board of Education, 1954

Contents

Acknowledgements 5
Disclaimer 5
Honor Code 5
Introduction 6
Abbreviations 6
Executive Summary 7
Client Overview 7
Defining the Problem 8
Identifying Modern Segregation 8
Background 10
Nuts and Bolts of Alabama's Education Funding System 10
Historical Context 11
Consequences 11
Evidence on Potential Solutions 15
Money Matters 15
Integration Methods 16
School Choice 17
Understanding What's Important: Criteria 19
Effectiveness 19
Cost 20
Equity 20
Feasibility 20
Three Paths Forward: Evaluating Alternatives 21
Attendance Boundary Rezoning (ABR) 21
Controlled Choice Policy (CCP) 24
Choice Information Campaign (CIC) 27
Analysis of Tradeoffs 31
Recommendation 31
Implementing CCP 32
Addressing Roadblocks 33
Conclusion 34
Appendix 35
References 39

Acknowledgements

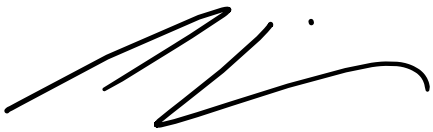
I would like to thank the Batten faculty and staff who have supported me throughout the past two years of studies, without whom this product would not exist. Specifically, I would like to acknowledge Professors Kirsten Gelsdorf and Benjamin Castleman for their dedication, direction, and encouragement. From road-trip analogies to homemade sourdough, they have pushed me to improve my writing, delve deeper into the research, and create a product I am proud of. I am grateful for the friendships I have made here, and the brainstorming, workshopping, and editing we pursued day-and-night. These friends have pushed me to be a better person, inspired me, and kept me grounded. Finally, I am thankful for A+ Education Partnership for their time and willingness to work with me. Corinn O'Brien has been a source of mentorship and guidance since my teaching days – without her passion for education policy and excitement in sharing with her community, I wouldn't be achieving this milestone.

Disclaimer

The author conducted this study as part of the program of professional education at the Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy, University of Virginia. This paper is submitted in partial fulfillment of the course requirements for the Master of Public Policy degree. The judgments and conclusions are solely those of the author, and are not necessarily endorsed by the Batten School, by the University of Virginia, A+ Education Partnership, or by any other agency.

Honor Code

On my honor as a student, I have neither given nor accepted unauthorized aid on this assignment.



Sarah Emily Waldinger

Introduction

My experience in the Teach for America Alabama Corps showed me firsthand how a lack of equity and unequal access to opportunities in the education space contribute to a debilitating cycle of poverty and modern-day segregation. This issue is rooted in de jure housing segregation and school funding policy, and has a wide variety of negative impacts on students and society. The relationships I formed with my students and their communities prompted me to pursue a Master of Public Policy degree, and when I was offered the opportunity to confront this huge challenge, I saw my experience coming full circle. In the following report, I will outline historical and modern inequities in the Alabama public school system, as they relate to racial and economic segregation. Though the root cause of segregation and its negative outcomes may be most effectively mitigated through modernized funding strategies, this report focuses on complementary strategies to promote integration and better outcomes for students. Integration strategies, paired with strategic funding, may have the power to change the education system and improve the lives of thousands of children.

Abbreviations

ABR	Attendance Boundary Rezoning
AL	Alabama
CCP	Controlled Choice Policy
CDD	Comprehensive District Design
CIC	Choice Information Campaign
CMS	Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public School District
CPS	Cambridge Public Schools
DOE	Department of Education
FRL	Free and Reduced Lunch
FTE	Full-Time Employee
MPS	Minneapolis Public Schools
RIS	Racially Identifiable School
SES	Socio-Economic Status

Executive Summary

The following report outlines the history of Alabama's public education system and tangential issues in order to paint a cohesive picture of how the state arrived at the level of segregation seen today. School- and district-level data on race and economic demographics from the Department of Education provide insight on how that history has impacted the current environment, while standardized test scores and other well-being-based measures clearly show many negative outcomes of racial and economic separation.

By understanding how we have arrived here, and by interrogating opportunities for dismantling the root causes, I have studied a variety of potential alternatives for improvement. My original research suggested that a reformation of the funding collection and disbursement methods would most effectively mitigate the historically embedded systems of segregation and racism in our public schools. My client decided to pursue this avenue for reform within the organization's 2023-2024 Strategic Plan. With progress being made on the funding front, my research pivoted to determine what methods would be most effective to integrate students by race and economic status to complement funding restructuring. These district-level alternatives include:

1. Attendance Boundary Rezoning
2. Controlled Choice Policies
3. Choice Information Campaigns

The alternatives were assessed on cost-to-implementer, effectiveness, equity, and feasibility criterion. Post-analysis of the literature and community input, my recommendation for A+ is to advocate for Controlled Choice Policies to mitigate school-level segregation within districts. This option allows for slow rollout and family input while achieving large impacts over time.

Client Overview

Corinn O'Brien, Vice President of Public Policy at A+ Education Partnership (A+), has generously dedicated her time, expertise, and ideas to this project and in her daily work in improving outcomes for Alabama's children. A+ is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization with a legacy of effective advocacy at the state level. The mission-driven organization works with appointed and elected officials to advocate and lobby for policies that create more equitable opportunities and better long-term outcomes for students. The organization does this by researching, writing, and presenting legislation to the Alabama State Legislature, creating and maintaining high expectations for college readiness standards, and generating best practices for teachers and school leaders. A+ is goal-oriented, and is continually working to ensure that "every child in Alabama has the opportunity and the support to succeed in school and to become a contributing member of society" (A+, n.d.). This report dovetails with their Strategic Plan, offering support for financial reform in conjunction with novel integration considerations.

Defining the Problem

Alabama public schools are racially and economically segregated,[1] leading to substantial horizontal and vertical[2] funding inequities.[3] The local and state tax-based funding structures allow for and exacerbate gaps between high- and low-wealth communities, with annual disparities up to $9,109 per student, or over $200,000 per classroom (ED, 2019). Racial and economic segregation has negative impacts on all students, regardless of identity, and on society as a whole. Colloquially termed "Black schools" are more likely to be Title I eligible, have higher shares of low-income students, and have fewer resources than parallel schools serving predominantly white students (NCES, n.d.). *Even within districts that have racial and economic diversity, too many schools are racially identifiable.[4] Through no fault of their own, the students within these segregated schools experience disparate short- and long-term outcomes.*

Identifying Modern Segregation

Between 2013 and 2022, based on the DOE's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, n.d.), there were 235 Alabama public schools with at least 75% of the student population identifying as Black or African American. These schools will subsequently be referred to as Racially Identifiable Schools (RISs). While there are schools with 75%+ shares of white students, these schools do not face the same stressors or systematic disenfranchisement that Black schools do, and therefore are not the main focus of this report. Other represented racial groups such as Hispanic or Native populations do not exceed the 75% threshold anywhere in the state.

RISs may only be addressed at the district or state level, as individual schools do not have control over their district- or school-level enrollment boundaries. This issue is most effectively mitigated in the short term by district-based solutions. For an RIS to be a symptom of a larger segregation issue within a district, that district must have a share of Black students lower than 75%. A number of districts and schools were eliminated from this analysis due to a lack of data or a lack of district diversity (see *Appendix Item 1: Sampling Restrictions and Data*). The alternatives outlined in this report are focused on the 108 RISs spread across 23 diverse districts[5] in the 2021-2022 school year. This trend has fluctuated only slightly over the last nine years, as seen in *Figure 1*. The average RIS count over this period of time is 106, with fluctuations between 102 and 108.

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[1] *Segregation* is the systematic separation of students in geographically close areas by racial identity or economic statuses (Mann & Rogers, 2021).

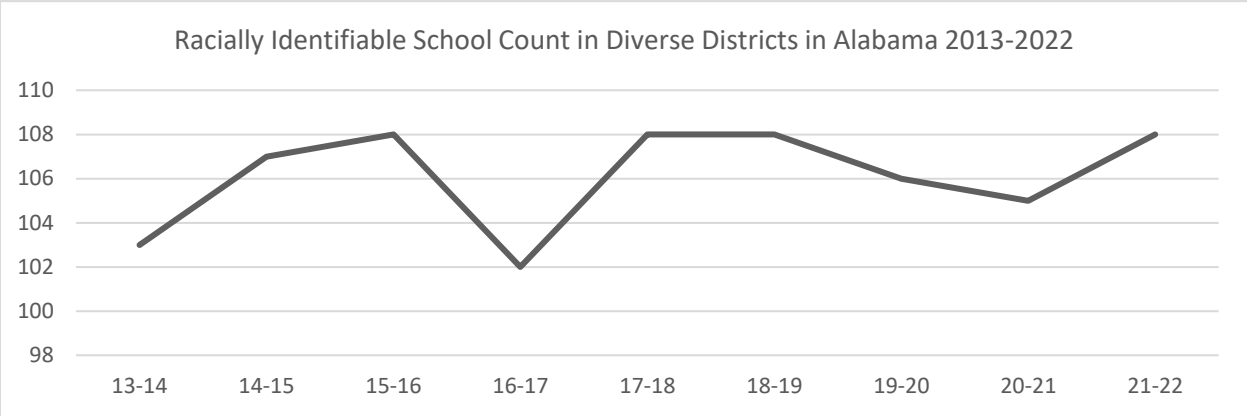
[2] *Horizontal equity* refers to equal treatment of equals. If schools were horizontally equitable, all 7th grade students would receive the same books and hours of teaching time. *Vertical equity* provides more resources to those who need them, and fewer resources to those who do not need them. If schools were vertically equitable, students who are struggling to read at their grade level would receive more intensive, individualized tutoring from teachers, while students who are reading above grade level would receive only general instruction. Alabama is not equitable in either way (Verstegen, 2015).

[3] Throughout this report, *equity* is defined as providing what is fair based on demonstrated need. Equitable policies provide each student or school what they need to succeed, while acknowledging that each student or school may have different initial or ongoing needs. This has driven the choices made throughout this report, such as scoping solutions to the local district level. *Inequity* refers to systems that contribute to a lack of equal opportunity or equal outcomes. Societal inequities in this report involve bias and prejudice related to race and economic status (EdGlossery, 2016).

[4] Schools that have shares of Black and African American students over 75% are racially identifiable.

[5] Diverse Districts have 10-75% Black and 10-75% white student populations.

Figure 1



Data obtained from the National Center for Education Statistics.

Background

On the national level, the US has an inequitable education system (Vinod, Wang, & Fan, 2001; Bennett, 2011) due to broad funding formulas and ongoing segregation between and within states and districts (ED, 2019). Reliance on state and local funding results in lower per-pupil expenditures (PPE) for students in low-income neighborhoods. Districts with higher proportions of nonwhite students receive lower PPEs by about $1,800 per student than counterparts in majority white districts (AU, 2020). Racial and economic segregation has been increasing[6] as the percentage of Black students attending almost exclusively nonwhite schools has increased by 12 percentage points since the 1980s (Mann & Rogers, 2021). Desegregation laws have relaxed since 2000 and segregation statistics have worsened. Subsequent patterns suggest that as racial isolation increases, school funding and achievement rates decline in nonwhite schools (Rosiek & Kinslow, 2016).

Nuts and Bolts of Alabama's Education Funding System

Alabama's story of segregation and inequity takes the nation's trends one step further. The state's PPE is 25% lower than the national average (ED, 2019), and PPE differs by district characteristics. In 2019, Mountain Brook, a wealthy district with 0.2% Black enrollment and 0.3% free or reduced lunch (FRL)[7] eligibility, had a local expenditure of $7,100 per student. For the Autauga School District, with 35% Black enrollment and 19% of students living below the poverty line, local funds contribute only $700 per student. Alabama is unique because schools rely completely on local funding for anything beyond the state's line-item and Education Foundation Program allocations (Meckler, 2019).

Local districts set mill rates for school funding, which dictate the amount properties are taxed. Mill values vary by property value, and districts must contribute 10 mills to the Alabama Education Trust Fund to receive state funding. Additional mills remain at the district level, contributing to geographic funding inequities (A+, TFA, 2022). Low-income districts rely solely on state funding, while wealthy districts retain up to $2 billion in locally collected funds annually.[8] Once funds are collected by the state, Alabama's Foundation Program determines district redistribution amounts based on census student counts. While this system attempts equality and allocates additional funds for special needs populations, the cost of educating students in different regions is not the same (A+, TFA, 2022). While recent years have provided Alabama schools with the largest budget in history (Crain, 2021), most funds are earmarked for specific

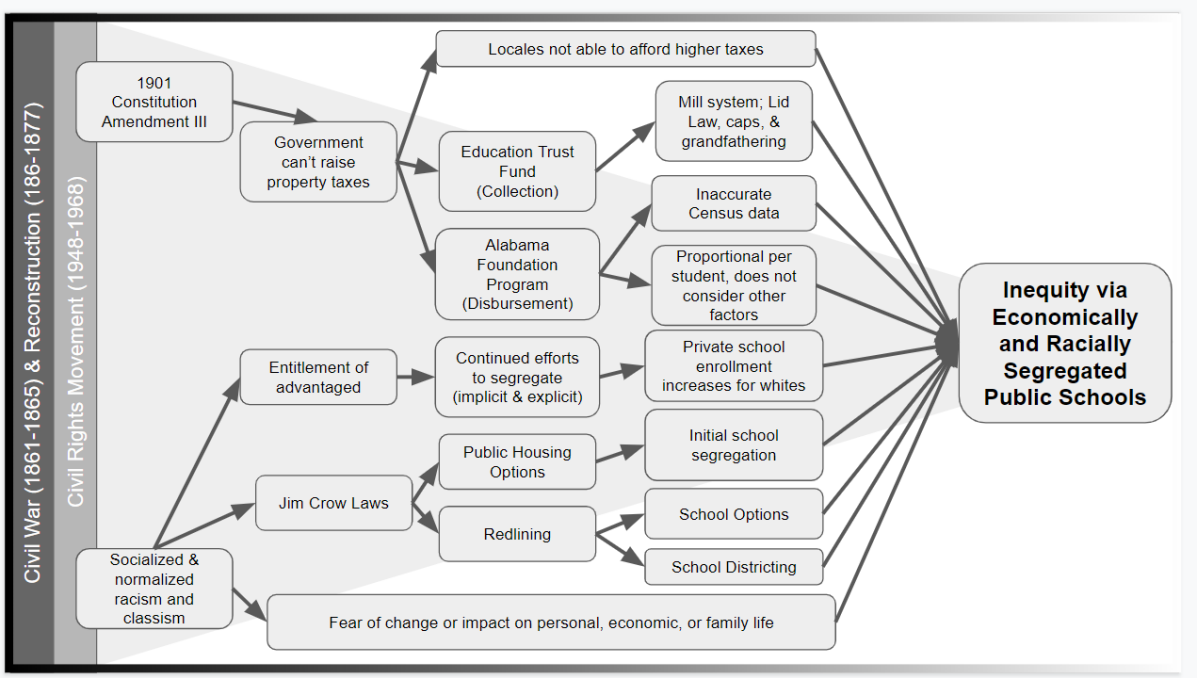
[6] As of 2018, Black students represent 15% of the public-school population and they enroll in schools that are on average 47% Black, while white students attend majority white schools. Rural areas are more segregated, with white students going to schools with 80% white students, and Black students going to schools with 57% nonwhite enrollment (Orfield et al., 2019).
[7] FRL is a common metric to assess socioeconomic status, and is a metric referenced throughout this report.
[8] Mill rates can increase based on local needs, but this must pass a local vote. Prior to the vote, a district court judge in the locale must approve the action. The Lid Law creates caps to the increases in mills, but districts collecting mills at rates higher than the Lid Law allowed before the Act were grandfathered in and allowed to continue collecting at high rates (Guyse, 2013). There is a legal barrier to disadvantaged districts from collecting more property taxes.

purposes; affluent areas add to their allocated amount through property taxes, while impoverished areas cannot.

Historical Context

Beyond modern funding trends, Alabama has a history of legitimizing racism. The 1901 Constitution enshrined Jim Crow laws by requiring segregated schools. In response to the landmark 1954 Brown v. Board decision, the state eliminated its guarantee of public education (EJI, 2019). In 1963, Governor George Wallace promised that Alabama would be "segregated forever" (BlackPast, 2013) as Freedom of Choice policies were developed to perpetuate dual Black and white schools based on parental choice rhetoric (Mann & Rogers, 2021). Many factors dating back to the Civil War have resulted in this engrained system, shown in *Figure 2*.

Figure 2



This chart was generated from the full body of research.

Consequences

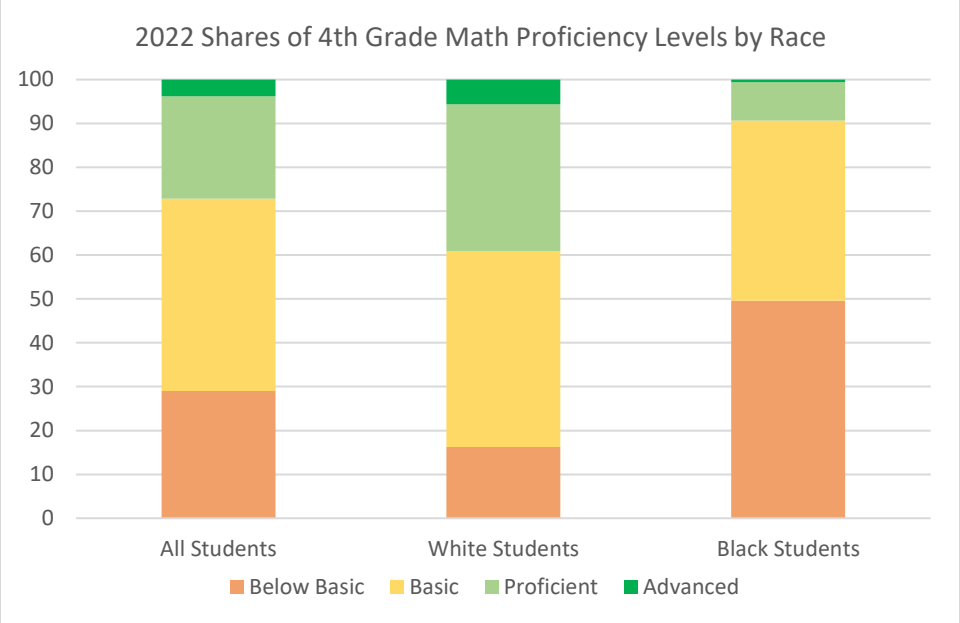
This legacy continues to inequitably impact our low-income and Black students, who disproportionately experience low achievement rates, lower quality teachers, higher teacher turnover, larger class sizes, higher dropout rates, higher rates of school violence, more severe disciplinary action, and more feelings of inferiority as compared to wealthier and whiter counterparts enrolled in well-funded schools (Mann & Rogers, 2021). An example of this can be seen in the characteristics of failing schools in the state; As of 2023, the 72 failing[9] schools are consistently poor and majority Black. 94% of students in failing schools are living below the

[9] Failing schools have substantial shares of students scoring below standardized test benchmarks for at least four years.

poverty line. Over half of the failing schools in the state are characterized by 94%+ Black student shares, and only one failing school is majority (51%) white (Stephens, 2014).

Another consequence of this system is the racial achievement gap. For example, Black students have lower math scores than white students and the state average. 50% of Black students score "below basic" in 4th grade, as seen in *Figure 3.* This rate increases to 68% by 8th grade (NCES, n.d.). This is an ongoing trend, and 2022's gaps are shown in *Figure 3.*

Figure 3

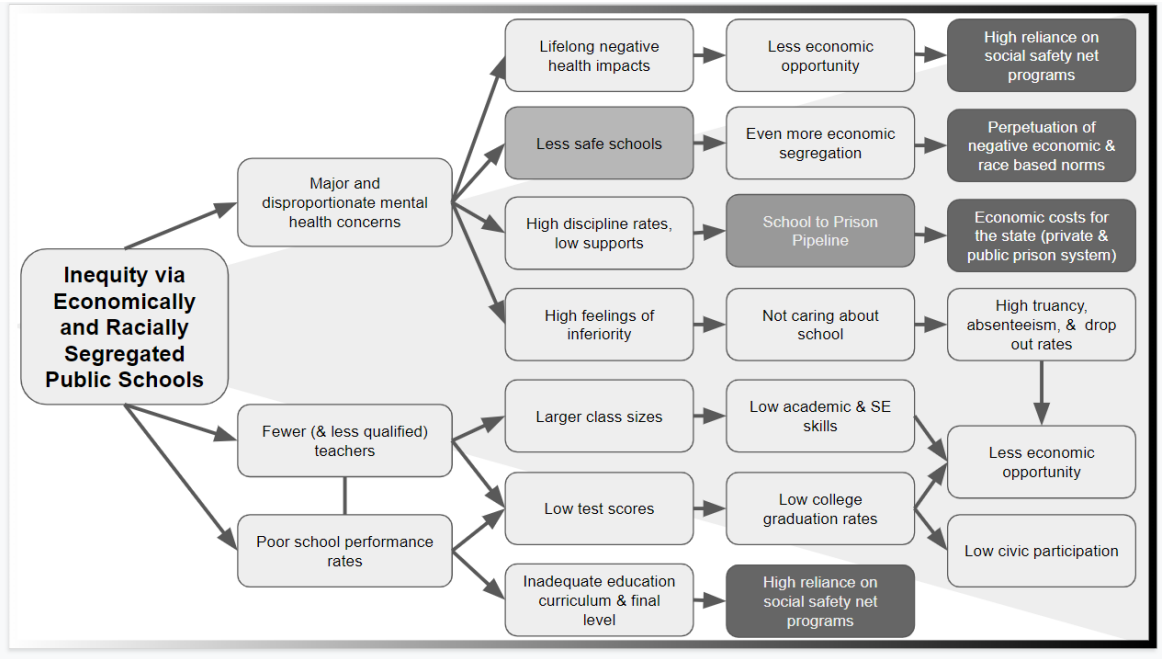


Data is from U.S. DOE's National Center for Education Statistics, from the National Assessment of Educational Progress' 2022 Mathematics Assessment.

Black students are not at fault for these disparities, rather their schools are not provided the resources to close the gaps.

Segregated schools have a cyclical relationship with segregated neighborhoods, each pressing the other to become more isolated over time. Segregated neighborhoods tend to be economically impoverished, lacking resources such as grocery stores, parks, reliable transportation, and healthcare access. Without educational opportunities or substantial community resources, employment opportunities are scarce and economic impacts are harsh for students upon graduation or otherwise exiting school (Turner & Greene, n.d.). These students experience detrimental short- and long-term challenges including economic immobility, low incomes, few higher-education opportunities, and higher homicide rates – the impacts of which last for generations (Lafortune & Barton, 2022). The racial and economic separation of communities widens inequities across every aspect of life. While the laundry list of consequences is incredibly difficult to navigate through simple causal connections, *Figure 4* outlines a variety of ways in which this problem impacts students and communities.

Figure 4



This chart was generated from the full body of research.
Shaded units are possible linchpins to emphasize for political support in the conservative state legislature.

These consequences are vital to reference and understand, in order to emphasize the importance of mitigating the problem at its root cause. A+ is working to mitigate many of these impacts through actions like the Numeracy Act, teacher and principal evaluation systems, and AP access (A+, 2022).

A+'s current initiatives center on students and demographic gaps, rather than economic statewide impacts of failing to mitigate the problem. Alabamians tend to respond quickly and fervently to government-led economic initiatives; The economic costs inflicted on the state would be the most efficient arena to focus in order to create political advocacy for change to the school system stemming from the public. For example, the quantitative evidence linking high poverty areas with high crime rates impacts both the students attending public schools in these areas and the state's criminal justice system overall. Increased crime rates can make schools more dangerous, in part by disrupting learning in the classroom (Turner & Greene, n.d.). Furthermore, Alabama has the nation's most overcrowded prisons, resulting in increasingly high costs to taxpayers. The prison system costs taxpayers $22,000/prisoner/year and is currently over 300% capacity (Waldinger, 2022). Pressing on this causal chain may provide an avenue for gaining grassroots support to improve the school-based problem. Another economic factor related to school inequity is the healthcare burden placed on the state; Alabama spends significantly more than other Southern states, and more than the average spending by states nationwide. With the negative health impacts of inequity on health, costs could be lowered by curbing the issue at its school-based root (Project AL, 2022).

The money being “saved” by not funding adequate and equitable public education weighs heavily on taxpayers. Promise lies with A+’s ability to invoke an economic argument for the narrowing of the gaps. While racism and classism explicitly contribute to the system, the most effective arguments for school funding reform or integration will likely be along economic lines (Kaiser-Schatzlei, 2022).

Evidence on Potential Solutions

Based on the scope of the problem – racial and economic segregation within diverse districts, rather than state-wide solutions – the following research focuses on evidence-based effects of increasing funding, school choice ventures, and various integration methods. When considering the following evidence, it is imperative to recall that students and families are feeling the effects of the current system, and would be personally impacted by changes. Segregation is widespread and highly integrated within the systems of our state. The data here details the real lives of millions of children; students and families have offered personal, emotional, formal, and informal testimony about their lives for researchers to obtain this information (Hannah-Jones, 2017). Policy options should be grounded in their real-life impacts.

Money Matters

A large body of research explores the impact of money on student outcomes, though the process takes years. Education funding is unique, as all 50 states experience and experiment with various options concurrently and continuously. At baseline, increasing PPE has a significant and positive causal effect on student outcomes defined by achievement scores and future earnings (Hanushek, 1981; Hedges et al., 1994; Greenwald et al., 1994). The effects are particularly large for low-income and nonwhite students (Baker, 2017). Increasing PPE is correlated with increased instructional supports, smaller class sizes, higher teacher compensation, more technology, and more general supplies – all of which have been correlated with positive student outcomes on their own (Nye et al., 2000; Han, 2021, Carrasco & Torrecilla, 2012). Increasing PPE by about 20% for low-income students can close the economic achievement gap created by the segregated school system; Studies have shown significant declines in adult poverty rates and increases in graduation rates by 10-20 percentage points (Martin et al., 2018; Greenwald et al., 1994).

The Supreme Court mandated Coleman Report found that the two largest predictors of academic success are a child's socioeconomic status (SES) and the SES makeup of that child's school; Students attending economically-integrated schools show higher language abilities, math scores, social cohesion, and appreciation of diversity than students in isolated schools (Kahlenberg et al., 2017). Correlative research has suggested that with the large opportunity gaps between districts linked to local wealth, the funding issue is in the distribution rather than collection of state-level funds (Verstegen, 2015). In response, since 2000, many states have adopted student-weighted formulas to determine dollar allocations. Though many states have created unique reforms, there is little direct empirical evidence to support an impact on equity. Common categories for funding weights include low-income student shares, unique student needs, rural areas, low enrollment rates, and ability of a locale to generate funds beyond the baseline needed for state support (Aldrich, 2022; Riley, 2016; Bruce et al., 2018; Verstegen, 2015; APA Consulting, 2015). In conjunction with PPE reforms, some states have increased district autonomy by providing lump funds and allowing local leaders to determine how funds are spent (Miles et al., 2003). Autonomy through decentralization of requirements allows principals to appropriate funds and determine staffing plans, class sizes, schedules, and teaching methods – naïve differences and correlated

effects suggest that these policies increase graduation rates for all students, and particularly for low-income and nonwhite students (Moon, 2018).

While PPE and increased school funding generally have a positive effect on equity, this shift alone doesn't guarantee the gains needed to truly move the needle on segregation's detrimental effects (Miles & Roza, 2006). A+ has added these types of funding considerations to their docket of strategic plans for the immediate future, therefore this report will turn towards integration-based solutions.

Integration Methods

Housing and education are intimately related policy areas that both contribute to integration-based solutions. School system litigation is complicated by the relationship between local and states' rights. Due to the location-based system, reforms have attempted to change residential housing patterns. There has been limited research on the effectiveness of this option, but researchers and practitioners mention it often (Rothstein, 2014). Housing reform for educational purposes has been cumbersome, as precedent suggests neighborhood and racially imbalanced schools are not unconstitutional. Legislation has actually fostered underlying locality segregation; De facto segregation is not only rooted in race, but in many socio-economic factors made permanent by legislation. Instead of attempting to prove that the system is segregated, advocates have suggested shifting mindsets to argue that for schools that are racially identifiable, states and districts should need to prove that they are not segregated by de jure means (Powers, 1973). While this argument has led to legislation in multiple states, race-based and adequacy litigation alone has been deemed an inadequate approach – many court cases have been won, but there have been negative unintended consequences in overall funding, and political climates and fiscal capacities are clear limitations (Martin et al., 2018). Intensive federal-level overhauls have been introduced through congressional bills suggesting tying federal funding to integration in metropolitan areas, but these bills died quickly without the necessary supports (Adams, 2019).

District-level solutions have attempted to shuffle students into different schools to promote racial and economic integration (Kahlenberg et al, 2019). This has been a common thread since desegregation began. Changing attendance lines within districts could prompt economic and racial integration without changing funding structures, and would be especially powerful when combined with baseline PPE requirements (Powers, 1973; Renzetti, 2020). Bussing allows for these attendance changes, and has been effective but has been almost universally eliminated due to community opposition from specifically wealthy and white residents and the embedded suggestion that the faulty function of failing schools is the problem, rather than inequitable funding structures that cause the problem (Barnum, 2019; Weller, 2022; Mendez & Quark, 2022). At the state level, rezoning districts has been a solution for federally court-ordered desegregation. Desegregation orders based on race-based incentives to change district lines or mitigate

secession have not been effective at changing the landscape thus far (Hannah-Jones, 2017; McDaniels, 2017).

In large districts, shifting attendance zones has created more equity and integration by exposure measures. Most notably, changes in New Jersey districts have resulted in both white and Black students in the public system outperforming their non-integrated peers. These are top-down, bureaucratic changes, but within a school-choice framework there is room for attendance flexibility. For example, New York City's public district shifted from a test-score-based placement system prior to the COVID-19 pandemic to a ranked lottery-based system since. The lottery system within districts allows families to list their top public choices, and then places them based on these preferences. Advocates of equity-minded solutions to segregation believe the lottery is an effective solution (Chatterji, 2020), while some prefer the merit-based approach to allow academically advanced students to access a more rigorous education (Closson, 2022; Adams, 2022). Evidence from Cambridge, Massachusetts supports public lottery systems as a way to create schools with a mix of students' family income backgrounds. This has led to a graduation rate 19 percentage points higher for low-income students and 17 percentage points higher for Black students than in neighboring non-lottery districts (Berwick, 2018; Kahlenberg et al., 2017).

Further suggestions that theoretically could be effective include voiding exclusionary zoning, placing low- and moderate-income housing options in predominantly wealthy suburbs, prohibiting landlord discrimination against housing voucher holders, and ending subsidies for communities that fail to reverse these policies. Laws in Alabama that could be the basis for solving this problem include an elimination of the secession-based allowances; currently, towns of 5,000 or more can secede their neighborhood schools from the larger district, and this has typically been used to keep schools segregated (Rothstein, 2014; Hannah-Jones, 2017). These ideas have not been enacted or tested, and due to their housing-based nature they are outside the scope of this APP.

School Choice

School choice has been used as an agent of integration. Charter and magnet schools are a way to help individual students leave the traditional public school system. These unique public schools have been introduced in many regions to mitigate segregation and the lack of opportunity for low-income and nonwhite students in traditional public schools. There is empirical research that supports school choice as a way to improve outcomes for these populations. Results suggest this has been effective in some areas and ineffective in others, depending on the empirical strategy and unique regional scenarios (Jeynes, 2012; Mickelson et al., 2008; OECD, 2010). Some charters have been found to create more racially isolated systems, as they are sometimes used as havens for white flight out of the traditional schools (The Civil Rights Project, n.d). In San Antonio, Texas, adding high-quality gifted and talented programs to schools in impoverished areas and reserving 25% of seats for students from outside districts created more socioeconomic diversity in schools.

The diverse-by-design system has drawn affluent students into previously failing schools via choice, and both equity measures and student achievement has improved in the regions within and beyond San Antonio (Hawkins, 2018).

While the above evidence suggest school choice has positive impacts on individual student outcomes and can aid with integration if implemented strategically, other bodies of research have found that choice methods increase segregation by family background (Soderstrom & Uusitalo, 2010). The catalyzing factor is often that when given a choice, wealthy and white families avoid schools with high rates of non-white students and high poverty rates. The choices of these families result in more school-level segregation than pre-choice implementation (Saporito, 2003). Still, a national study by Public Opinion Strategies in 2021 found that 75% of Black families want the ability to choose where their children go to school (NCPSO, 2021). School choice programs with an integration focus could be effective if implemented carefully.

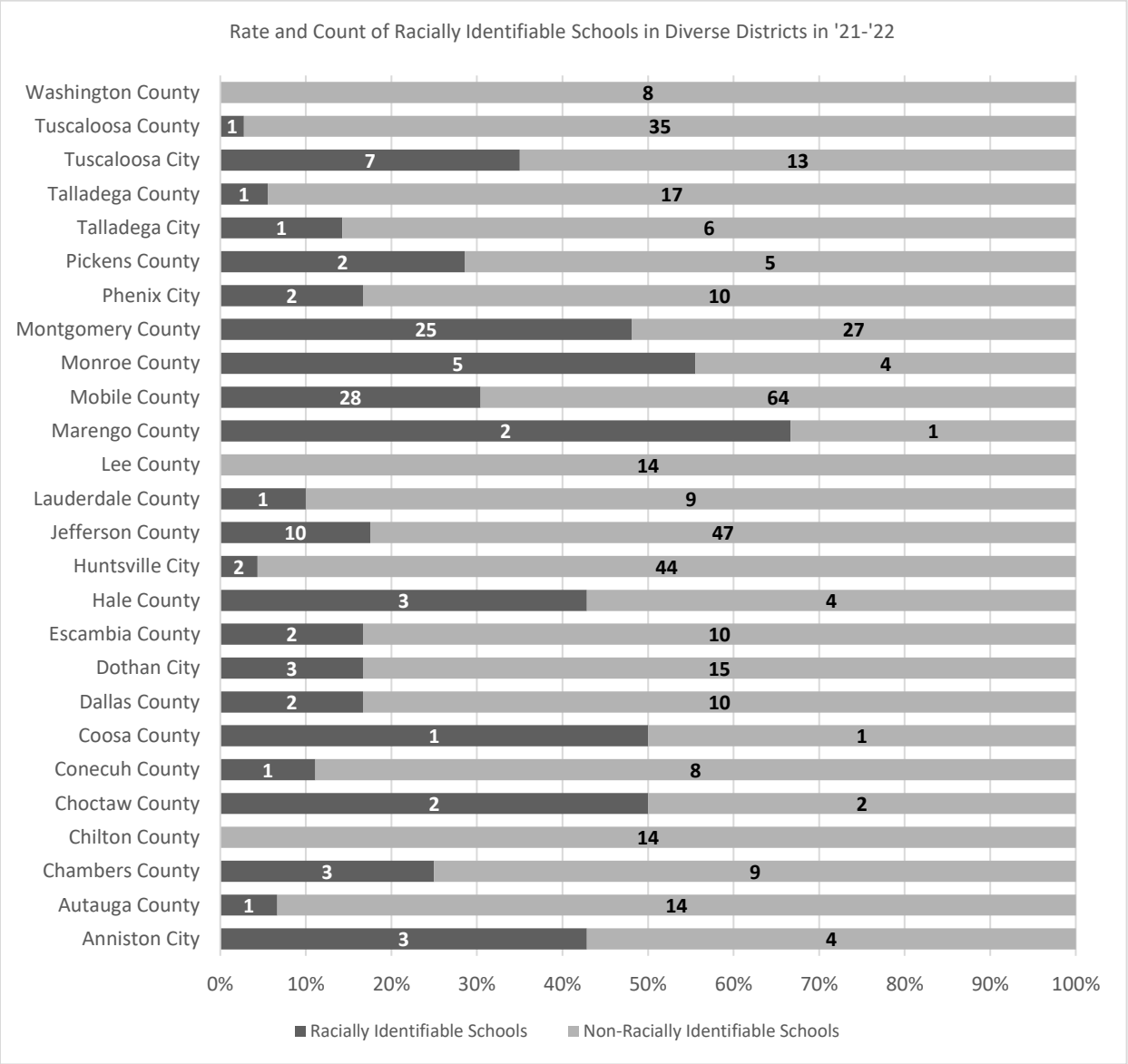
Understanding What's Important: Criteria

Four criteria have been selected to evaluate the following policy alternatives. The criteria will be applied to the alternatives to more easily compare them and assess necessary trade-offs.

Effectiveness

As of 2023, there are 108 RISs within 23 qualifying diverse districts across the state. To qualify for this status, districts had to have demographic data for the past three academic years, sufficient diversity, and school shares of Black students exceeding district shares of Black students. *Figure 5* includes diverse districts with at least RIS since 2013, and the count of RISs in the '21-'22 year.

Figure 5



Data obtained from the National Center for Education Statistics.

This criterion asks whether or not the alternative decreases the total number of RISs. Based on empirical evidence and extrapolations, by how many schools does the policy in question decrease the overall count? Forecasting effectiveness requires a degree of uncertainty, discussed within each policy alternative's analysis section below.

Cost

Rather than determining approximate expenditures for A+, this criterion is implementor-facing. What is the cost of planning for and implementing the policy alternative for diverse districts with RISs? Costs are calculated based on reports from states where the policy was implemented. Cost considerations and time horizons vary by policy. Cost-effectiveness is folded into this analysis; This is the *effectiveness* divided by the *cost*, providing a cost-per-unit of integrated schools.

Equity

Racial and economic equity are paramount to an effective policy, given the historical lens and future implications of failing to mitigate educational opportunity and outcome gaps. Empirical evidence, first-hand experience, stakeholder input, community opinion (local newspapers, blogs, op-eds), and books contributed to the overall valuation of equity considerations for each alternative.

To better understand how community members might assess the policy alternatives if they were to be implemented in their districts, an informal survey was administered (see *Appendix Item 2: Survey*). O'Brien and other Alabama Stakeholders shared their input. On the survey, the status quo scored a 1.67 on the equity scale, with a minimum score of 1 (not equitable at all) and a maximum score of 7 (very equitable). Anecdotes revealed that "the systems that are currently in place are not always striving toward access for all, and, in many cases, do not provide safeguards or protections for students when violation of rights and respect toward human dignity are violated in schools" (Waldinger, 2023).

Feasibility

It is vital to understand and address both district-level political feasibility and broader community concerns. Feasibility is assessed through the aforementioned survey both in terms of whether A+ might be able to advocate for a policy, and whether or not a policy had the potential for adoption and implementation in diverse districts from a local perspective. Concerns regarding implementation and community support are discussed for each alternative.

Three Paths Forward: Evaluating Alternatives

Attendance Boundary Rezoning, Controlled Choice Policies, and Choice Information Campaigns are three alternatives flowing from the research that may improve racial and economic segregation in diverse districts. Each alternative is defined, analyzed through the criteria, and compared to reach the ultimate recommendation of Controlled Choice Policies.

Attendance Boundary Rezoning (ABR)

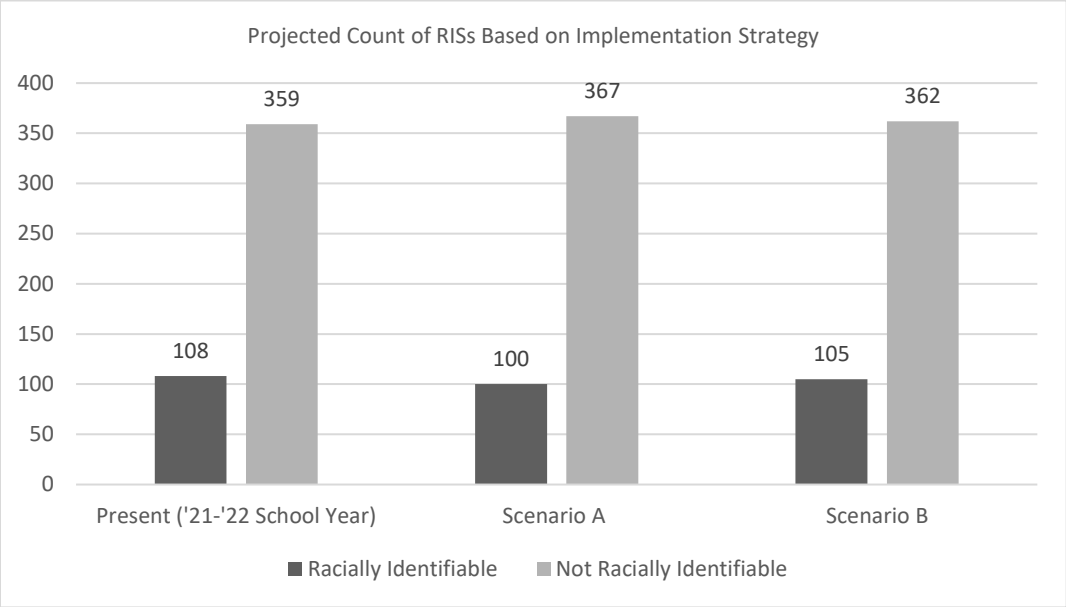
Strategically redrawing attendance boundaries for schools within diverse districts would change the racial and economic makeup of schools. As of 2020, there were 49 individual districts nationwide that have employed ABR in an effort to integrate, including five districts in Florida and Texas (Potter & Burris, 2020).

In 2019, officials in Minneapolis Public Schools recognized that their student placement process was not leading to integration and that some families had more options than others. The superintendent and school board subsequently initiated a ABR – the 2020 Comprehensive District Design (CDD) initiative (Whitler, 2022). To inform the CDD, MPS collected information on school capacity, enrollment trends, transportation barriers, and student demographics. All 58 MPS school boundaries were shifted to close the racial demographic gap between individual schools and the district on aggregate. Street-level attendance changes were made based on racial integration, with transportation considerations in mind (Whitler, 2022). School buildings with poor infrastructure were renovated, which added to overall costs but made the CDD more acceptable to families. The CDD went through the school board's resolution process and was approved in 2020 (MPS, 2020). *This alternative proposes that A+ advocates for diverse districts to adopt an ABR policy similar to MPS' recent reforms*.

Effectiveness

MPS projected the initial effect of the policy on the number of RISs in the district. The following effects were projected rather than observed, as this policy was adopted directly prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, which impacted school makeup but is not likely to repeat in future years. Prior to the changes, MPS had 41 RISs (using the 75% threshold) and 40 non-RISs. Immediately after implementation, the number of RISs dropped to 38. This is a 7.137% decrease in the number of RISs (Potter & Burris, 2020). *Figure 6* represents the conservative projections (-7.137%) of the effects of this policy in Alabama districts.

Figure 6



Evidence is based on the percent change in RISs in MPS applied to diverse districts in Alabama.

Scenario A -- If every diverse district were to implement the CDD, we would project the rate of RISs to drop by 7.137%. With 108 currently RISs at present, we should see about 8 schools shift to non-RIS status, dropping and the number of RISs to 100.

Scenario B -- This alternative may only affect districts that mirror the share of RISs in MPS. About 50% of the schools in MPS are RISs, whereas Alabama's diverse districts range from about 5% to 65% RIS. This alternative may only work for districts that are similar to MPS with 40-60% RIS rates. This includes Anniston City, Choctaw County, Coosa County, Hale County, Marengo County, Monroe County, and Montgomery County. These counties contain 41 identifiable schools, and 43 non-identifiable schools. The CDD is projected to decrease the number of identifiable schools in this subsample by 7.137%, equivalent to a decrease of about 3 schools. This would decrease the number of RISs in the full sample from 108 to 105.

Cost

The one-time cost for MPS's 81-school district was $11,500,000. While the initial cost was high, MPS saved $6,900,000 on transportation costs, as students had previously been bussed past their closest public school to their zoned location. The net cost after transportation savings was $4,600,000, which came out of the district's general funds (Whitler, 2022). Without considering transportation savings, the cost-per-school to implement the CDD is $141,975. When incorporating the savings, the net cost-per-school is $56,790. The cost estimates are likely on the high end because they include school renovations. Costs may be lower without renovations, though are likely needed for community and political support (Rowell, 2020).

Scenario A -- If every diverse district with RISs were to implement the CDD, 467 schools would be impacted. Both the RIS and non-RIS schools would incur the per-school cost of renovative and shifting boundaries. The net cost is $26,520,930. In terms of cost effectiveness, with a net cost of $26,520,930 and eight more integrated schools, each individual school that shifts from RIS to non-RIS is projected to cost about $3.3 million.

Scenario B -- If only the diverse districts with similar shares of identifiable schools to MPS implemented the CDD, only 84 schools would be impacted. The net cost is $4,770,360. In terms of cost effectiveness, with a net cost of $4,770,360 and three more integrated schools, each individual school that shifts from RIS to non-RIS is projected to cost about $1.6 million.

Equity

This alternative aligns with the literature on integrating based on racial demographics, while working within the existing district, housing, and funding systems. The CDD works with existing district and housing zone boundaries. The literature suggests that integration increases equity and improves the wellbeing of all students, regardless of race (Kahlenberg et al., 2019; Powers, 1973; Renzetti, 2020). Racially and economically diverse schools provide students exposure to peers of different backgrounds. Diversity in schools results in more social cohesion and improved academic outcomes (Kahlenberg, 2019). Empathy, satisfaction, critical thinking, intellectual self-confidence, and leadership skills increase for students in more diverse settings (Wells et al., 2016). Based on the survey, this alternative has an average equity score of 4.01. This indicates the alternative would improve equity measures beyond the status quo by 2.34 points, but only marginally beyond the scale's midpoint of 3.5 (see *Appendix Item 2: Survey*).

Feasibility

Attendance boundaries are determined at the district level and therefore require district resolutions. Resolutions are made through elected school boards and superintendents. Boards are composed of 5-21 members who serve 4-6-year terms without term limits (Ballotpedia, n.d.). The political feasibility of this alternative depends on the members of the board and the district superintendent's beliefs on the problem and efficacy of the solution. A+ may be able to lobby elected officials directly, provide general information, or garder constituent support to sway board members. Grassroots organizations and community members are also vital to the implementation of ABR.

Supporting arguments for implementation of ABR focus on school diversity as positive for all students, and vital for students currently attending RISs. Students may spend less time on busses, and many would attend school closer to home. This alternative poses a one-time cost with sustained benefits once implemented.

Arguments opposing ABR focus on the large cost and few case studies. Rezoning students to new schools mid-education is disruptive for their academic and social wellbeing. Families may oppose the redrawing if their children would be rezoned to a lower-performance school; Families may

remove their children from the district or choose amongst non-traditional school options rather than comply with rezoning, which has the potential to decrease diversity in the district overall (Rowell, n.d.).

There are also questions of legality (Armor, 2019). Court cases have fluctuated on the constitutionality of systems that sort students into schools by race to promote integration, and the upcoming Supreme Court ruling on affirmative action at the higher education level may imact the K-12 system. The Obama, Trump, and Biden Administrations have oscillated on this issue. Rather than focusing on racial demographics, ABR could redraw based on FRL eligibility rather than race. There is a large, positive, and statistically significant correlation (0.75) between the proportion of FRL students in a school and the likelihood of being a RIS. Black schools tend to serve a lower-income population than non-Black schools. There is evidence from other districts that school integration based on SES rather than race is effective (Cambridege Public Schools, n.d.). This strategy would have similar results, while mitigating legal challenges.

The survey asked stakeholders how feasible implementation might be. The average outcome was a 2.5, where 1 indicates that the alternative would be impossible to implement and 7 indicates that the alternative would be easy to implement. One former teacher shared that the alternative would be "better received if it was proposed by specific key figures in the state/district than by outside research consortiums or even state research institutions" (Waldinger, 2023). The stakeholder survey *did not* identify A+ as the introducer of this policy. A+'s representative shared that the organization would be interested in considering this option, but would need to learn more as political pressures may be too great.

Controlled Choice Policy (CCP)

Under a CCP, families would have the opportunity to choose between traditional schools, charter schools, and magnet schools through a rank-choice system (Potter & Burris, 2020). Family choice is then considered in conjunction with the district's demographic goals for each school, and the weight of the family's choice is markedly higher for FRL-eligible families. If families do not exercise their right to choose, students are automatically slated to a nearby traditional school based on the district's demographic goals.

Cambridge Public Schools (CPS) adopted their CCP to create diverse schools with equal access to educational resources. CCP was originally adopted in 1980 in an effort to desegregate using racial weights. The current plan uses a formula that emphasizes SES integration, and measures SES through FRL eligibility. CCP works towards balancing the student SES composition of each school to the district's average over time. Families have the option of disclosing whether or not they are FRL eligible, with the default being *not eligible*. More weight is placed on choices from families who are FRL. CCP aims to match families to their choice schools, but the family choice component is balanced against the district's interest in creating equitable schools, gender balance, enrollment numbers, and language requirements of dual immersion schools (CPS, n.d.). Concretely, this

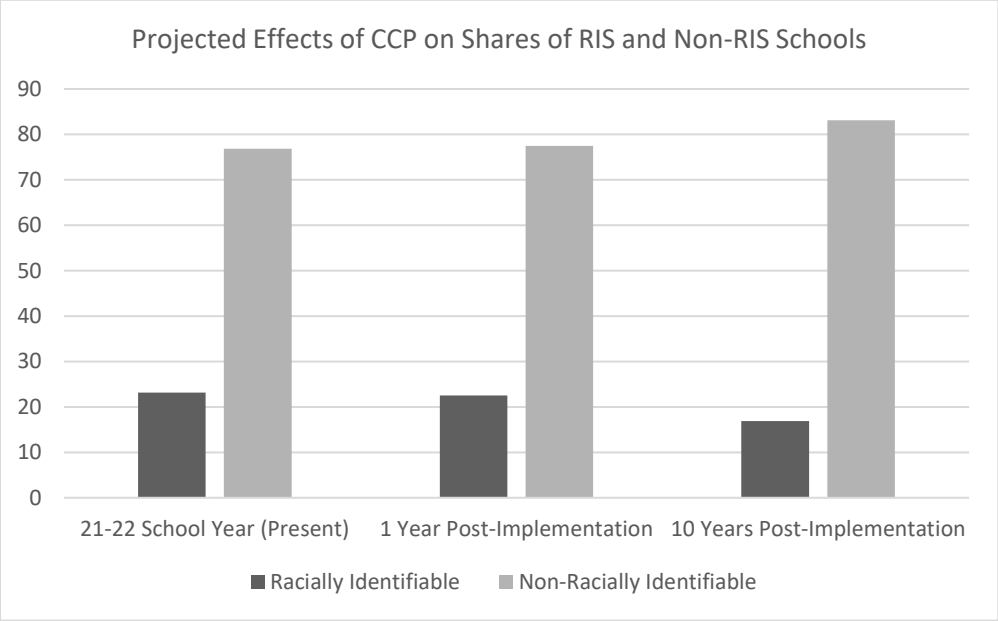
would mean that FRL families that rank-choice their preferences are more likely to be offered a spot at their top preference than families who are not FRL eligible. *This alternative proposes that A+ advocates for mirroring the CPS CCP policy within diverse districts.*

Effectiveness

In CPS, the weighted CCP program successfully increased the number of schools balanced by race and SES. *Balance* simply means that the share of FRL students in each school matches the share in the district (CPS, 2013). This is a useful benchmarking tool for diverse districts in Alabama because RISs have disproportionate rates of FRL students. Striving to mirror the district SES in schools would effectively decrease the total number of RISs.

Were a controlled choice program like CCP to be implemented in Alabama, I project the policy would decrease RIS prevalence by about 2.7% each year.[10] There are 467 total schools in diverse districts, of which 108 are RISs. After 1 year, about 3 fewer schools are projected to be RIS. After 10 years, about 29 fewer schools are projected to be RISs. *Figure 7* depicts these outcomes.

Figure 7



Percent changes in CPS extrapolated onto Alabama's diverse districts.

Cost

CCP requires an annual budget for implementation, though there are no initial cost burdens. Costs include FTEs and informational outreach. Each district must hire three FTEs at minimum:

[10] CCP increased the share of students going to non-RIS schools by 18 percentage points, from 66% to 84%, over 10 years. Assuming a linear relationship with more balanced schools over time, each additional year of a controlled choice system will decrease RISs by 2.7% each year.

1. A Data Analyst will analyze the choices and demographic data to determine each student's assigned school.
2. A Community Organizer will provide information to families on the program and how to make their choices.
3. A Communications Manager will facilitate information transfer between the team's decisions and impacted families and schools.

Central Office 12-month FTEs are paid between $52,000-$76,000 (Alabama Department of Education, n.d.). Three FTEs at $64,000, plus fringe benefits,[11] will cost the district about $249,600 annually. Informational outreach to families will cost the same amount as an information campaign (see *Choice Information Campaign: Costs*). It will cost about $31,000 annually for all students to receive outreach materials. In total, costs are about $280,600 annually per district. This is a conservative estimate. Additional renovation costs omitted from this analysis may make this alternative more politically feasible and acceptable for community members.

In terms of cost-effectiveness, each school in a diverse district that shifts from RIS to non-RIS will cost about $93,533 in the first year. For 10 years, the cumulative cost will be about $2,300,000 and 29 schools would be affected. The per-school cost over the long term is $96,758.

Equity

CCP was designed to be a more equitable option than both lottery systems that rely on random sampling and traditional placement tools that rely on historically-impacted attendance zones. Additional weight is placed on FRL eligible families' choices, adjusting for socioeconomic-based equity measures. This plan provides data on those schools that may need more support from district or state entities, as families typically choose higher-resourced schools. There is future opportunity for under-selected schools to be targeted for school improvement measures (Alves, 2016). The program will only increase equity outcomes if it is implemented with fidelity. It is possible that take-up rates by racial or economic subsamples may lead to decreased equity as compared to the status quo. Based on the survey, CCP has an average equity score of 4.12. This indicates the alternative is 2.45 points above the status quo on equity measures, though only marginally better than an average score of 3.5.

Feasibility

A+ supports charters and choice, and CCP is a structural solution functioning within district boundaries. Similar to ABR, CCP would have to go through the school board and superintendent. This alternative is projected to have increasingly larger impacts over time. This presents a nuanced struggle, as stakeholders want to see both early wins and long-term impacts for expensive policies over time. While ABR is a one-time sustained win, CCP will take time to build

[11] Multiplied by 1.3 to estimate cost of benefits to employer.

over many years. Slow progress could be deemed helpful or harmful for feasibility, as expressed by the supporting and opposing arguments.

Supporting arguments focus on the large impact this policy would have over time. It allows for family input, while clearly signifying that low-income families would have a larger say in their children's school placement. The rank-choice system is more comprehensive than open-enrollment for those currently attending failing schools. The cost-per-school shifted is high, but the breakdown of that cost to three FTEs per year is manageable from a district budget perspective. Additionally, the cost of this alternative is considerably lower than ABR.

Opposing arguments can be separated into two buckets. Community members who support integration, or those with students attending RISs at present, may oppose CCP because the results are long-term. Rather than an instant change, this alternative will take time and consistent upkeep. Conversely, others may oppose this policy because of its implications for families with students currently zoned for a high-performing school or a school they like. These families, particularly those who do not qualify for FRL, may be placed in schools that they deem as unsatisfactory, creating strong opposition.

Based on the survey, this is a policy A+ is interested in learning more about and potentially advocating for. The survey indicates that the alternative would be possible to implement, though not easily. Community members shared concerns that misinformation about school choice may lead to widespread opposition and that state-wide data inaccuracies could prevent CCP from working – still, choice and lottery systems do exist in the state, indicating that implementation would not be impossible.

Choice Information Campaign (CIC)

Alabama has school choice opportunities for students. Options include traditional public schools, 13 public charters, 30 magnets, 400+ privates, online academies, and homeschooling. While charters and magnets have unique applications, the format is not universal. For example, in Mobile County students are placed into magnets based on a lottery system after they meet entrance criteria, while other magnets may require pre-enrollment assessments or a minimum grade point average (Montgomery Public Schools, n.d.). Mobile County, Huntsville, Montgomery, Tuscaloosa, and Phenix, are diverse districts with magnet schools.

Beyond public options, the average annual private school tuition for elementary school is $7,452 and for high school is $7,921. There are two scholarships through the statewide Education Scholarship Program (Our Focus, n.d.) and the Alabama Accountability Act of 2013. Both come in the form of a tax credit. Families who are enrolled in FRL are eligible for the former, and those slated for failing public school are eligible for the latter. Families can transfer students from their zoned school to another public school during the open enrollment period if their zoned school is

failing. Of the 79 schools identified as failing in 2022 (WBRC Staff, 2022), 29 are RISs in diverse districts (NSCW, 2023).

With the multitude of options, a CIC may improve educational outcomes for students whose families exercise their right to choose. There is strong support for educational options in the Black community; 75% of Black families want the power to choose their child's school regardless of geographic boundaries (NCPSO, 2021). A study done on the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public School District (CMS) analyzed the effects of providing transparent and easily accessible information. Providing low- to middle-SES families with school choice information, academic outcomes, and odds of admission through a take-home information sheet resulted in more families choosing higher-scoring schools for their children. The proportion of families choosing non-guaranteed schools increased by between 5 to 7 percentage points.

This alternative suggests that A+, diverse districts, or another agency facilitate a campaign to share choice information with students at RISs. RISs are much more likely to be failing than other schools (see *Background: Consequences).* By increasing information about choice options, families slated for these schools may learn about open enrollment or other opportunities they may prefer to pursue.

Effectiveness

Based on CMS' results, providing a simplified list of high graduation-rate-schools to middle schoolers had the largest impacts. The information resulted in students enrolling in high schools with 1.5-percentage point higher graduation rates, which are typically low-poverty and non-RIS schools. Providing the same information on district websites did not alter family's choices or student enrollment. Online interventions with individual customization, including a recommendation tool and search engine, induced students to enroll in high schools with 1-percentage point higher graduation rates (Cohodes et al., 2022). Providing statistics on test scores and choice information resulted in significantly more families choosing higher-scoring schools for their children. The impact of information on observed choice behavior was largest for families with higher-scoring schools in relatively close proximity, implying that information is most effective when families have quality alternatives nearby (Hastings & Weinstein, 2007).

While the statistics for individual students are compelling, the impact on the number of RISs is ambiguous. Information may lead families zoned for RISs to leave, but this will not change the share of RISs in diverse districts; It is unlikely that families would move their children into RISs. One study on choice take-up rates in San Diego, California, found that only 4% of Black students in a district implementing information sharing about a lottery choice system actually applied to change schools. Following the application, only about 0.34% of Black students attended their choice school. Assuming parity, this projection suggests that only about 200 students in Alabama attending RISs would both want to go to a different school, and actually enroll (Koedel et al., 2008). For those students who do take-up choice there are positive impacts. In a DC program that helps low-income students attend private schools, graduation rates for low-income students

increased by 21 percentage points (Schwalbach & Selvey, 2019). This alternative may have meaningful impacts on those individual students, but in aggregate there will likely be minimal change in the main effectiveness measure (Koedel et al., 2008).

Cost

This alternative will pose a cost for the organization running the CIC. This may be an undertaking A+ is interested in, diverse districts may choose to pursue this on their own, or a third party could take up this option. Costs associated with this alternative are based on design, materials, and distribution.

Professional copywriting and design for a physical pamphlet or one-pager would cost about $500. Content would need to be specific to each of the 23 diverse districts for the best outcomes, and changing the base design will cost $200 for each version. The total cost for the design portion would be about $5,100 (PsPrint, n.d.). There are 226,288 total students enrolled in the diverse districts, 28% (62,785) of whom attend RISs. Bulk brochures[12] cost $0.09 each. For 300,000 brochures, the projected cost is $27,000. For 70,000 brochures (only for students in RISs), the projected cost is $6,300 (PsPrint, n.d.). Schools will be charged with distributing the information to students, as the evidence in the effectiveness section used this method. Mailing brochures instead would add $0.63 per student, costing $142,561 for all students and $39,554 for RIS students only. Digital supplements may be advertised on individual school and district websites, which will likely be free to upload to existing sites.

In aggregate, with distribution through schools, this alternative is projected to cost the implementor between $11,400[13] for a portion of students and $32,100[14] for all students annually. This alternative will not have any downstream costs for students, schools, families, or communities unless a significant number of students change schools.

Equity

This alternative may improve opportunities and outcomes for specific students, but could also increase segregation if low-income or Black student have barriers to attending choice schools beyond a lack of comprehensive information. Informing families about their choices allows those with the means to choose (transportation, funds, time) to relocate their students. There may be a difference in race or economic status of those who are able to make this decision and those who cannot. Higher-SES families may choose to enroll elsewhere, increasing segregation in their initial school. The remaining students would then be lower-SES and more racially isolated than in the status quo. Still, if CIC is effective for some Black or low-SES families there would be positive impacts for those students who would otherwise remain in their zoned school. Based on the

[12] 8.5”x11” full color both sides tri-fold on 100lb gloss text paper stock
[13] Cost for design ($5,100) + printed brochures for RIS-enrolled students ($6,300).
[14] Cost for design ($5,100) + printed brochures for all students ($27,000).

survey, this alternative scored a 3.64 on equity considerations. This score is 1.97 points higher than the status quo, though lower than ABR and CCP measures.

Feasibility

This alternative is feasible for A+ to support or take on, as the organization has previously supported the passage of the Alabama School Choice and Student Opportunity Act (A+, 2015). This alternative would further support the Act, and allow for wider take-up of choice. A+'s survey results reveal that the organization would like to learn more to determine whether or not this would be feasible. This alternative would not require superintendent or school board approval, though acceptance and support would make implementation easier.

Supporting arguments for this alternative focus on the ease of implementation. Information for school choice options is available for those who look for it, and no systemic change is necessary. This alternative would make the process of learning about school choice easier, and does not change anything about the district- or state-level status quo. This is a lower cost alternative, and could be implemented by any interested organization.

Opposing arguments focus on the negative effects of school choice, the lack of a substantial effect, and the high cost for information dissemination that is already on the internet. Some community members may feel that this alternative does too little to impact the problem, while others may suggest that it is too costly for an effect only on a small number of students.

Regardless of opposition, this alternative is politically feasible. Neither elected official support or community input, though vital from an equity perspective, are necessary for CIC implementation. School-level administrators and staff would need to approve to facilitate distribution, though mailing the information would be possible if they opposed.

Analysis of Tradeoffs

The alternatives are complementary, and considered in tandem they may have a larger effect than considered alone. Conversely, each alternative may be siloed and implemented independently. *Figure 8* compares the alternatives in order to make a singular recommendation.

Figure 8

Criterion → Alternative	Effectiveness	Cost	Cost-Effectiveness	Equity	Feasibility
Attendance Boundary Rezoning	8 fewer RISs	$26,520,930 one time	$3.3 million per school	4.01 Medium	Low
Controlled Choice Policies	3 fewer RISs in year 1; 29 fewer in year 10	$280,600 annually; $2.3 mil 10 years	$93,533/school in year 1 $96,758/school in year 10	4.12 Medium	Medium
Choice Information Campaign	0 fewer RISs; About 200 students annually	$32,100 for RIS students, one time or annually	0	3.64 Low	High

Green indicates an alternative is strong on a given criteria. Yellow indicates medium strength, and red indicates poor outcomes.

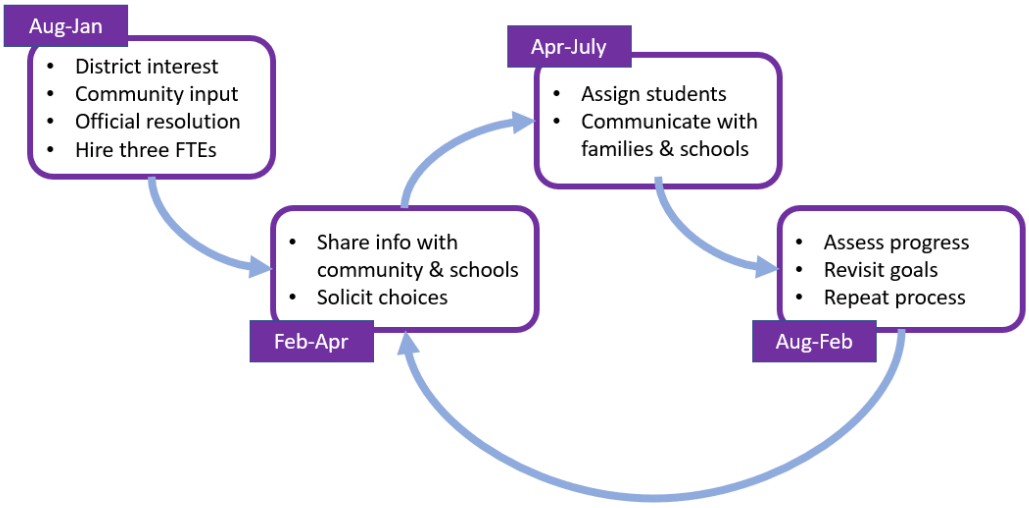
Recommendation

CCP and ABR are structural solutions, while CIC reveals what mechanisms already exist. Based on the tradeoffs illustrated above, CCP is the most impactful alternative in the short- and long-term. This alternative has an immediate impact, with a greater impact over time. It has the option of being phased-in slowly, and is not entirely bureaucratic, making it more palatable than ABR. It has the strongest equity measure of the proposed policies, and could create large impacts on the levels of segregation in diverse districts that choose to implement.

Implementing CCP

The first step of implementing the CCP is to share information about this policy option with diverse district officials and community members. Focusing first on districts with fewer RISs would improve likelihood of acceptance and implementation with fidelity. Tuscaloosa County, Talladega City, Talladega County, Lauderdale County, Conecuh County, and Autauga County are diverse districts with only one RIS, which would make CCP effective quickly. Progress should begin at least a year prior to implementation, and may follow the flow exemplified in *Figure 9.*

Figure 9



After a district expresses interest in CCP, the School Board would need to create a task force to assess the systems change needed within the district. This task force would need to collect demographic data for each school and the district as a whole. Next, the task force would determine the speed at which the community will want to make change. A slow, progressive change rate might decrease FRL shares at RISs by 2-5% annually, while a more dramatic change may attempt 15-20% annually. Slow change is likely to be more politically feasible. School goals will include meeting (rather than exceeding or underutilizing) enrollment capacities, and mirroring district demographic characteristics including FRL rates and racial identities at the school level. The goals for each school within the district for years 1-10 will be presented to the school board. Throughout this process, the Board should communicate and solicit opinions from the community. Local newspapers may help to spread information about the policy, and the community should be encouraged to attend public forums with the Board to discuss and ask questions. Ultimately, the Board must pass a resolution to approve of the change in policy (see *Appendix Item 3: Example Resolution*).

After the resolution is approved, the community should be formally made aware of the change. Community input is necessary for CCP to create change, as it is based heavily on family input. Families need to be informed on when and how they will make their rank-choice lists, and when they will be notified of their placement schools. Next, three Central Office FTEs should be hired. The CCP Team must consist of a Data Analyst, a Community Organizer, and a Communications Manager, who all report to the Board.

In the spring and early summer before implementation, the CCP Team will be charged with soliciting choices and FRL eligibility from every family in the community via online, mail, and in-person options. After information is collected, the CCP Team will take time to align family choices with district goals, functionally placing students in their new schools. The CCP Team would then need to provide this information to all families and schools within the district. This process will need to be cyclical, with small changes being made each year to achieve the 10-year goal of eliminating RISs and creating balance between school and district characteristics.

Addressing Roadblocks

In the decision stage, there may be substantial pushback from elected officials and community members that stalls implementation. A+ may help to mitigate these barriers by sharing information and assisting the Board Task Force in understanding how the policy might be implemented in the unique district. By starting with districts with only one RIS, personalizing the policy to match district needs, and focusing on small (2-5%) enrollment shifts, implementation will be more feasible.

CCP is a slow-change policy, with continuous upkeep after initial implementation. If too many families are assigned to schools that they deem undesirable, the policy may be stalled. Again, the small changes in enrollment over time may solve this issue. With marginal changes in the first few years, followed by more substantial changes once the community is accustom to the rank-choice system, CCP may become engrained and ritualistic. The 10-year goal horizon was specifically chosen because students spend about 10 years in school (considering optional kindergarten and high dropout rates). A+ may advocate for the continuation of the policy through grassroots support, or an addendum to the Board Resolution that commits the district to the policy for 10 years.

A+ may choose to be involved in any stage of this process, but will be needed most actively in the district and community interest stage. Grassroots and grasstops support will be needed for the initial resolution to pass, and A+'s legacy of effective advocacy could improve the likelihood of initial interest and take-up. Finally, A+ may drum up community involvement and active family choice by sharing information with their wide network across the state and in individual districts.

Conclusion

Though the ultimate recommendation is CCP, I believe that widespread change in our education and housing systems is needed to generate true equity of resources, opportunities, and outcomes for Black and low-income students in Alabama and throughout the nation. If implemented, CCP has the potential to create change that would improve the educational opportunities of hundreds of students. This option would dovetail well with the state-level funding reforms A+ is actively pursuing, and I am looking forward to seeing the benefits of the organization's incredible work.

I am grateful for this opportunity to delve into the policy options to mitigate school segregation. This has been a passion project that has reminded me of my *why.* The work is not done, and I am looking forward to continuing to pursue equity for students throughout my professional career.

Thank you for reading this report.

Appendix

Item 1: Sampling Restrictions and Data

Racially Identifiable Schools are schools where students who identify as Black or African American make up 75% or more of the population (Potter & Burris, 2020). These are sometimes termed "Black schools" by the community. Other racial identities do not satisfy the criteria to be considered an RIS anywhere in AL. Schools that were missing racial demographic data in the last three years (19-20, 20-21, 21-22) were eliminated from the sample. Of 1314 schools with data, 235 schools were RISs at some point between 2013 and 2022. Of those 235 schools, 130 were located in diverse districts. Of those 130 in diverse districts, 108 schools had data for the past 3 years.

Diverse Districts are districts where between 10% and 75% of students identify as Black. Districts missing data in the past three years were eliminated. 143 of the 204 districts had data. Of those, 93 districts met the 10-75% threshold for Black student share. Single-pathway districts were eliminated and districts with <10% and >75% white students were eliminated, leaving 86 diverse districts.

Diverse Districts with Racially Identifiable Schools satisfied the above conditions, and had at least one racially identifiable school in the 21-22 school year. To find these numbers, DOE data from the past 9 completed school years was downloaded into Excel. First, school level race and FRL demographics were assessed:

School Name	ANSI/FIPS	School ID	School Ty	Location Z	Location C	Web Site U	Agency Na	Locale [Pu	School-wi	Black 21-22	Black %	White 21-22	White %	Enroll 21-22	Racially ID?	% Free Lunch 21-22
A M WINDHAM ELEMENTARY	01	01010800:	1-Regular	36322	Daleville	http://ww	Daleville C	32-Town:	1-Yes	121	23.67906	257	50.29354	511	0	70.45009785
ABBEVILLE ELEMENTARY SCH	01	01017400(	1-Regular	36310	Abbeville	http://ww	Henry Cou	42-Rural: [	1-Yes	189	48.71134	153	39.43299	388	0	82.21649485
ABBEVILLE HIGH SCHOOL	01	01017400(	1-Regular	36310	Abbeville	http://ww	Henry Cou	42-Rural: [	1-Yes	187	59.17722	100	31.64557	316	0	88.29113924
ABC ELEMENTARY	01	01035100:	1-Regular	36720	Alberta	http://abc	Wilcox Co	43-Rural: I	1-Yes	106	99.06542	1	0.934579	107	1	88.78504673
ABRAMS ELEMENTARY SCHO	01	01003300:	1-Regular	35020	Bessemer	http://abr	Bessemer	21-Suburb	1-Yes	178	82.40741	1	0.462963	216	1	86.57407407
ACADEMY FOR ACADEMICS A	01	01018000(	1-Regular	35816	Huntsville	http://ww	Huntsville	12-City: M	†	231	56.75676	127	31.20393	407	0	39.55773956
ACADEMY FOR ACADEMICS A	01	01018000:	1-Regular	35810	Huntsville	†	Huntsville	12-City: M	†	148	56.70498	82	31.41762	261	0	18.77394636
ACADEMY FOR SCIENCE FOR	01	01018000(	1-Regular	35801	Huntsville	http://ww	Huntsville	12-City: M	†	180	57.14286	88	27.93651	315	0	59.36507937
ACADEMY FOR SCIENCE FOR	01	01018000:	1-Regular	35810	Huntsville	†	Huntsville	12-City: M	†	136	60.71429	53	23.66071	224	0	27.23214286
ACCELERATION DAY AND EVE	01	01001970:	1-Regular	36606	Mobile	http://ww	Accelerati	12-City: M	1-Yes	389	85.87196	42	9.271523	453	1	71.96467991
ADAMS ELEMENTARY SCHOO	01	01016200:	1-Regular	35903	Gadsden	http://ww	Gadsden C	13-City: Sr	1-Yes	237	57.94621	37	9.046455	409	0	81.17359413
ADAMSVILLE ELEMENTARY S	01	01019200(	1-Regular	35005	Adamsville	http://ada	Jefferson (	21-Suburb	1-Yes	196	69.25795	42	14.84099	283	0	82.68551237
ADDISON ELEMENTARY SCHO	01	01035800:	1-Regular	35540	Addison	http://ww	Winston C	42-Rural: [	1-Yes	1	0.328947	298	98.02632	304	0	14.47368421
ADDISON HIGH SCHOOL	01	01035800:	1-Regular	35540	Addison	http://ww	Winston C	42-Rural: [	†	3	1.056338	278	97.88732	284	0	17.95774648
AH WATWOOD ELEMENTARY	01	01031800:	1-Regular	35044	Childersbu	http://wes	Talladega	32-Town:	1-Yes	113	46.12245	111	45.30612	245	0	75.10204082
AIRPORT ROAD INTERMEDIA	01	01012900:	1-Regular	36020	Coosada	http://ww	Elmore Co	21-Suburb	1-Yes	216	38.91892	279	50.27027	555	0	55.31531532
ALABAMA CONNECTIONS AC	01	01021000(	1-Regular	35614	Athens	http://ww	Limestone	31-Town:	†	2217	32.44074	3844	56.24817	6834	0	54.27275388
ALABAMA VIRTUAL ACADEM	01	01014100:	1-Regular	36027	Eufaula	http://ww	Eufaula Ci	32-Town:	†	1806	41.17647	2157	49.17921	4386	0	46.46602827
ALBERT P BREWER HIGH SCH	01	01024800:	1-Regular	35670	Somerville	http://ww	Morgan Co	42-Rural: [	†	11	1.608187	601	87.8655	684	0	30.99415205
ALBERTVILLE ELEMENTARY S	01	01000050(	1-Regular	35950	Albertville	http://ww	Albertville	32-Town:	1-Yes	45	5.050505	314	35.2413	891	0	46.24017957
ALBERTVILLE HIGH SCHOOL	01	01000050(	1-Regular	35950	Albertville	http://ww	Albertville	32-Town:	1-Yes	59	3.543544	680	40.84084	1665	0	34.71471471
ALBERTVILLE INTERMEDIATE	01	01000050(	1-Regular	35950	Albertville	http://ww	Albertville	32-Town:	1-Yes	32	3.463203	338	36.58009	924	0	43.3982684

regression | Race ID by school 10 yrs | Race by district 10 yrs | RaceID SchDist Cross ID | Race ID Schools in Divers ...

Highlighted schools represent Black shares of over 75%. Next, district data was pulled from the DOE for the same years:

Agency Name	County Name [District]	13-14 Black #	Black %	13-14 White #	White %	13-14 Enroll	13-14 Total schools	14-15 Black #	Black %	14-15 White #	White %	14-15 Enroll	14-15 Total schools	15-16 Black #
ARAB CITY	Marshall County	7	0.268507863	2530	97.0464135	2607	4	6	0.233918129	2451	95.55555556	2565	4	5
ATHENS CITY	Limestone County	810	24.70265325	1919	58.52394023	3279	7	836	24.44444444	1917	56.05263158	3420	7	845
ATTALLA CITY	Etowah County	254	14.53921007	1333	76.3022324	1747	3	254	14.75886113	1286	74.72399768	1721	3	247
AUBURN CITY	Lee County	2062	26.29096009	4664	59.46704067	7843	11	2157	26.55422873	4755	58.53748615	8123	11	2141
AUTAUGA COUNTY	Autauga County	2271	23.76517371	6658	69.67350356	9556	15	2376	24.58609272	6614	68.43956954	9664	15	2420
BALDWIN COUNTY	Baldwin County	4030	13.30867541	23467	77.49744064	30281	47	4005	13.0899464	23540	76.93816185	30596	45	4039
BARBOUR COUNTY	Barbour County	804	82.97213622	62	6.398348813	969	4	773	83.56756757	48	5.189189189	925	4	740
BAYPOINTE RESIDEN	†	†	#VALUE!	†	#VALUE!	†	0	–	#VALUE!	–	#VALUE!	–	0	†
BESSEMER CITY	Jefferson County	3675	91.98998748	86	2.152690864	3995	9	3611	91.14083796	88	2.221100454	3962	9	3378
BIBB COUNTY	Bibb County	786	22.79582367	2554	74.07192575	3448	10	749	22.31158773	2488	74.11379208	3357	9	736
BIRMINGHAM CITY	Jefferson County	23406	94.15882211	262	1.053986644	24858	83	22739	93.00584891	282	1.153421408	24449	53	22803
BLOUNT COUNTY	Blount County	91	1.101561554	7025	85.03813098	8261	17	99	1.224944321	6819	84.37268003	8082	17	97
BOAZ CITY	Marshall County	29	1.310438319	1590	71.84816991	2213	5	27	1.193106496	1592	70.34909412	2263	5	28
BOYD SCHOOL	†	†	#VALUE!	†	#VALUE!	†	1	–	#VALUE!	–	#VALUE!	–	1	†
BRANTWOOD CHILD	†	†	#VALUE!	†	#VALUE!	†	1	–	#VALUE!	–	#VALUE!	–	1	†
BREAKTHROUGH CH	Perry County	†	#VALUE!	†	#VALUE!	†	†	†	#VALUE!	†	#VALUE!	†	†	†
BREWERPORCH CHI	†	†	#VALUE!	†	#VALUE!	†	0	–	#VALUE!	–	#VALUE!	–	0	†
BREWTON CITY	Escambia County	423	38.10810811	663	59.72972973	1110	3	429	37.5	681	59.52797203	1144	3	421
BRYCE ADOLESCENT	†	†	#VALUE!	†	#VALUE!	†	1	–	#VALUE!	–	#VALUE!	–	0	–
BULLOCK COUNTY	Bullock County	1337	88.77822045	18	1.195219124	1506	5	1316	86.6359447	18	1.184990125	1519	4	1269
BUTLER COUNTY	Butler County	2015	61.17182757	1182	35.88342441	3294	7	1985	62.20620495	1104	34.59730492	3191	7	1980
CALHOUN COUNTY	Calhoun County	1299	13.83976135	7586	80.8225016	9386	19	1230	13.32322357	7399	80.14514731	9232	18	1262

Single-pathway districts and those without data, highlighted in gray, were eliminated from the study. Districts in black text had shares of white and Black students both between 10-75%, and therefore were sufficiently diverse. Districts in red texts were too racially homogenous for this analysis. Next, schools and districts were concatenated to identify the overlap.

School Name	School Ty	Location :	Location (	Web Site	Agency N	Locale [Pu	School-wi	Black 21-22	Black %	White 21-22	White %	Enroll 21-22	Racially ID?	Black 20-21	Black %	White 20-	White %	Enroll 20-	Racially ID	Black 19-2	Black %	White 19-	Wh
SOUTHLAWN MIDDLE SCHO	1-Regular	36108	Montgome	http://ww	Montgome	12-City: M	1-Yes	476	83.65554	18	3.163445	569	1	498	84.55008	23	3.904924	589	1	462	85.71429	12	2.2
SOUTHSIDE HIGH SCHOOL	1-Regular	36701	Selma	http://sou	Dallas Cou	42-Rural: I	1-Yes	291	92.97125	5	1.597444	313	1	262	93.90681	0	0	279	1	301	98.36601	3	0.9
SOUTHSIDE PRIMARY SCHO	1-Regular	36701	Selma		Dallas Cou	41-Rural: I	1-Yes	157	90.75145	2	1.156069	173	1	174	93.04813	1	0.534759	187	1	210	96.33028	1	0.4
SOUTHVIEW ELEMENTARY S	1-Regular	35405	Tuscaloos	http://sver	Tuscaloos	41-Rural: I	1-Yes	601	92.31951	23	3.533026	651	1	525	90.20619	24	4.123711	582	1	540	91.68081	25	4.2
SPENCERWESTLAWN ELEMEI	1-Regular	36606	Mobile	http://http	Mobile Co	12-City: M	1-Yes	396	89.79592	14	3.174603	441	1	426	89.87342	20	4.219409	474	1	446	88.66799	22	4.3
SUMTER CENTRAL HIGH SCH	1-Regular	36925	York	http://ww	Sumter Co	43-Rural: I	1-Yes	367	99.18919	2	0.540541	370	1	392	98.49246	1	0.251256	398	1	409	99.27184	2	0.4
SUN VALLEY ELEMENTARY S	1-Regular	35215	Birmingha	http://ww	Birmingha	12-City: M	1-Yes	589	95.15347	4	0.646204	619	1	598	95.98716	5	0.802568	623	1	693	96.38387	8	1.1
TALLADEGA COUNTY CENTR	1-Regular	35160	Talladega	http://tcch	Talladega	42-Rural: I	1-Yes	115	87.78626	15	11.45038	131	1	112	79.43262	26	18.43972	141	0	123	83.10811	22	14
THE ALBERTA SCHOOL OF PE	1-Regular	35404	Tuscaloos	http://alb.	Tuscaloos	13-City: Sr	1-Yes	554	83.43373	49	7.379518	664	1	542	84.16149	41	6.36646	644	1	615	88.36207	30	4.3
THE PATHWAY	1-Regular	36617	Mobile	http://pat	Mobile Co	12-City: M	1-Yes	230	74.67532	52	16.88312	308	0	102	71.32867	35	24.47552	143	0	121	74.69136	29	17
THE RBHUDSON STEAM ACA	1-Regular	36701	Selma	http://cha	Selma City	32-Town: I	1-Yes	343	98.56322	1	0.287356	348	1	436	98.41986	6	1.354402	443	1	396	99.24812	2	0.5
THURGOOD MARSHALL MID	1-Regular	36401	Evergreen	http://mm	Conecuh C	33-Town: I	1-Yes	147	91.30435	5	3.10559	161	1	166	92.22222	6	3.333333	180	1	163	93.14286	6	3.4
TIPTON DURANT MIDDLE SC	1-Regular	36701	Selma		Dallas Cou	41-Rural: I	1-Yes	199	92.99065	2	0.934579	214	1	213	95.5157	2	0.896861	223	1	230	99.5671	1	
TUSKEGEE INSTITUTE MIDDL	1-Regular	36088	Tuskegee	http://ww	Macon Cou	32-Town: I	1-Yes	237	92.94118	1	0.392157	255	1	246	92.83019	2	0.754717	265	1	231	96.65272	1	0
TUSKEGEE PUBLIC ELEMENT	1-Regular	36083	Tuskegee	http://ww	Macon Cou	32-Town: I	1-Yes	278	94.23729	0	0	295	1	281	94.61279	1	0.3367	297	1	308	94.47853	3	0.9
UNION SPRINGS ELEMENTAR	1-Regular	36089	Union Spri	http://unic	Bullock Co	32-Town: I	1-Yes	443	76.77643	10	1.733102	577	0	444	78.16901	8	1.408451	568	0	471	76.96078	16	2.6

Red text indicates a RIS in a non-diverse district. Black text indicates a RIS in a diverse district. These are the schools and districts this analysis is interested in reforming:

Agency Name [Public S	New #	Total School 2	How many race ID sc	Agency Name [Public S	13–14	14–15	15–16	16–17	17–18	18–19	19–20	20–21	21–22
Anniston City	1	7	3	Anniston City	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Autauga County	2	15	1	Autauga County	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Chambers County	3	12	3	Chambers County	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Chilton County	4	14	1	Chilton County	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Choctaw County	5	4	2	Choctaw County	1	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2
Conecuh County	6	9	2	Conecuh County	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1
Coosa County	7	2	1	Coosa County	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Dallas County	8	12	2	Dallas County	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Dothan City	9	18	4	Dothan City	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	2	3
Escambia County	10	12	3	Escambia County	0	0	2	2	2	2	0	2	2
Hale County	11	7	3	Hale County	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Huntsville City	12	46	6	Huntsville City	4	5	5	2	3	1	1	1	2
Jefferson County	13	57	10	Jefferson County	7	8	8	8	10	10	10	9	10
Lauderdale County	14	10	1	Lauderdale County	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Lee County	15	14	1	Lee County	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Marengo County	16	3	2	Marengo County	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Mobile County	17	92	31	Mobile County	29	29	29	28	28	29	28	28	28
Monroe County	18	9	5	Monroe County	3	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Montgomery County	19	52	29	Montgomery County	24	24	24	23	26	27	26	25	25
Phenix City	20	12	4	Phenix City	4	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Pickens County	21	7	2	Pickens County	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Talladega City	22	7	2	Talladega City	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
Talladega County	23	18	1	Talladega County	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1
Tuscaloosa	24		1	Tuscaloosa	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Tuscaloosa City	25	20	8	Tuscaloosa City	8	8	8	7	7	7	7	7	7
Tuscaloosa County	26	36	1	Tuscaloosa County	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1
Washington County	27	8	1	Washington County	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
		503	130		13–14	14–15	15–16	16–17	17–18	18–19	19–20	20–21	21–22
			126	Racially Identifiable School D	103	107	108	102	108	108	106	105	108

The alternatives in this paper are focused on diverse districts with RISs in the 21-22 school year. The blue highlighted rows are diverse districts that contained RISs in the past nine school years, but do not have any in the current cycle.

Item 2: Survey

The survey was available for one week to A+ and Alabama Stakeholder representatives. These representatives came from my personal and professional network of coworkers, friends, and advisors living and working in Alabama. Ten respondents were contacted directly and asked if they would like to participate. If they said yes, they were sent a link to a Google Form containing the following questions:

1. How do you define "equity?"
2. How racially equitable would you rate the current AL education system? Why did you choose that level?
3. Each alternative was outlined.
    a. Might this policy…
        i. Increase racial equity within the district?
        ii. Improve conditions in schools?
        iii. Improve student wellbeing?
        iv. Improve student academic outcomes?
        v. Provide teachers with what they need to be successful?
        vi. Provide students with what they need to be successful?
    b. What is the likelihood this policy could be implemented in diverse districts in AL?
    c. Please share any additional thoughts, comments, or questions about this policy alternative.
    d. For A+, additional questions for each policy included
        i. Is this alternative something A+ would be interested in learning more about?
        ii. Is this alternative something A+ would be able to advocate for, considering possible political pressures?
4. What is your role within the AL Education System?

Item 3: Resolution Example[15]

SCHOOL DISTRICT _____

School Board of Education

DATE

Resolution Enacting the Controlled Choice Policy

Whereas, policy level factors exist within THE DISTRICT that exacerbate racial and economic segregation of students between schools.

Whereas, dispartities in outcomes and experiences exist for students of different races and economic backgrounds.

Whereas, these systematic policies result in differences in educational experiences and opportunities.

So, therefore, be it resolved that the School Board hereby approves the proposed racial and economic characteristic goals for each school within the district for the next 10 years.

Further be it resolved that these goals will be met by implementing a Controlled Choice Policy whereas families will indicate what school they would like their students to attend through a rank-choice system.

Further be it resolved that families indicating FRL eligibility will receive higher consideration of their school choice desires.

Further be it resolved that three FTEs will be hired by the Central Office to implement this policy.

Further be it resolved that the Superintendent is directed to bring forth for School Board approval capital plan proposals to faithfully implement this policy and provide monthly updates to the Board on progress for accountability.

Signed _____

Date _____

[15] This resolution was based on a Minneapolis Public School example (MPS, n.d).

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