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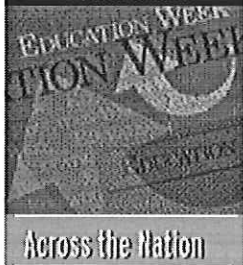
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Teachers Propose Integrating Schools By Socioeconomic Status

By Andrew Trotter

A task force of teachers is urging the Jefferson County, Ky., school district to integrate its schools based on students' socioeconomic status and "at risk" characteristics rather than race.

"We need children in our school that are a better mixture," Judith K. Sikes, a task force member, said in an interview last week. "These children are all coming to school from the same neighborhood. Everyone has the same baggage; there's not enough diversity socioeconomically."

A policy of assigning students to schools based on socioeconomic status, if adopted, would apparently make the district the only one with such a program in place, according to Kathy Christie, a policy analyst at the Education Commission of the States in Denver.

When the LaCrosse, Wis., district instituted such a policy in 1991, she said, reaction from parents was swift. "Board members were booted from office, and the program no longer exists."

But whether the policy will be adopted in the 92,000-student Jefferson County district is doubtful. District officials say the suggestion is impractical and doesn't address the real causes of low student achievement.

"It's the district's position that regardless of the [socioeconomic status] of the student body, in any school with the right instructional program, kids can be successful," William S. Eckels, the district's executive director of human resources, said.

Tracking Test Scores

Jefferson County currently balances the enrollment at each school by race to reflect the overall makeup of the district, which includes the city of Louisville and the surrounding suburbs. Since court-ordered busing ended there in 1991, school officials have enticed students to help meet racial quotas through a voluntary system of magnet schools and flexible neighborhood enrollment.



But some schools, while racially balanced, have high concentrations of children from poor households.

At Roosevelt Perry Elementary School, for example, where Ms. Sikes teaches 3rd grade, nearly 99 percent of the students qualify for the federal school lunch program, a leading indicator of poverty. The school posts among the

Read our story, "[La Crosse To Push Ahead With Income-Based Busing Plan](#)," Aug. 5, 1992.

"[Courts, School Boards Testing Strategies To Integrate Neighborhoods, Schools](#)," Feb. 26, 1992.

lowest average scores in Kentucky on the statewide achievement test, Ms. Sikes said.

"It reflects unfairly on the staff," she said. "They give you a benchmark [on the statewide test] over two years. If you don't make it, if you slip, they think you're in crisis."

Just as important, she said, high-poverty students miss out on the academic benefits of schooling with peers from middle-income families.

Some studies have found a strong correlation between school performance and the socioeconomic status of students.

"The primary effect on academic performance tends to be family income rather than racial category," said David Rusk, a Washington writer on urban policy who has studied that relationship in a number of cities, including Louisville.

The task force, which was appointed a year ago by the Jefferson County Teachers Association, made its recommendation last spring after conducting a survey of 341 teachers in 22 schools, including every grade level. The proposal received little public attention until last month, when local newspapers reported on it.

Mr. Eckels said he doubted that the survey reflected the views of most of the 5,000 teachers in the district.

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