One morning last December, a crowd gathered at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute in Washington, D.C., for a discussion on school turnaround. Panelists debated whether the best way to fix persistently underperforming schools was simply to replace the administrators and teachers at the school, or whether reopening under new charter management was the only effective option.

But what if, instead of changing the principal, teachers, or management in the hope that this will turn around a
When asked this question, panelist Carmel Martin, assistant secretary for the U.S. Department of Education, said, "I think it's a really important question." But she quickly added, "We're focused on governance and the people [adults] in the building, which we think are critical ingredients."

Although few policymakers and wonks are talking about it, a small but growing number of schools are attempting to boost the achievement of low-income students by shifting enrollment to place more low-income students in mixed-income schools. Socioeconomic integration is an effective way to tap into the academic benefits of having high-achieving peers, an engaged community of parents, and high-quality teachers.

In the last decade, the number of public school districts that consider socioeconomic status in student assignment has grown from just a handful to more than 80 (Kahlenberg, 2012). Early adopters included La Crosse, Wisconsin, which created a districtwide plan to balance school enrollment by socioeconomic status in 1979, and Cambridge, Massachusetts, which made socioeconomic status the main factor in its controlled choice program in 2001. Newer additions include Bloomington, Minnesota, and Salina, Kansas, both of which used socioeconomic balance as a factor in redrawing school boundaries in recent years.

Adding to this list, a number of charter schools now actively seek socioeconomically diverse student enrollment as part of their design. They include schools like High Tech High, which began in 2000 as a single charter school and is now a network of 11 schools in San Diego, and Citizens of the World Charter Schools, which opened its first school in 2010 and is striving to create a national network of diverse charter schools.

Going against the grain in a country where many public schools are de facto segregated by income, these socioeconomically integrated charter schools have developed innovative methods for enrolling and serving a diverse student body.

The Case for Socioeconomic Integration

On average, students' socioeconomic backgrounds have a huge effect on their academic outcomes. But so do the backgrounds of the peers who surround them. Poor students in mixed-income schools do better than poor students in high-poverty schools.

Research supporting socioeconomic integration goes back to the famous Coleman Report, which found that the strongest school-related predictor of student achievement was the socioeconomic composition of the student body (Coleman et al., 1966). More recent data confirm the relationship between individual achievement and student-body characteristics. A 2010 meta-analysis found that students of all socioeconomic statuses, races, ethnicities, and grade levels were likely to have higher mathematics performance if they attended socioeconomically and racially integrated schools (Mickelson & Bottia, 2010). And results of the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress in mathematics show steady increases in low-income 4th graders' average scores as the percentage of poor students in their school decreases (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

Of course, multiple non-school-related factors could explain why low-income students in mixed-income schools outperform their counterparts in high-poverty schools. Students attending mixed-income schools might be more likely to have involved parents or live in a more affluent community, Socioeconomic integration improves student outcomes because mixed-income schools are more likely to have certain resources or characteristics that foster achievement.
Socioeconomic integration improves student outcomes. If it were possible to randomly assign students to schools, it would be easier to study the effects of socioeconomic composition on student achievement. However, the inability to manipulate school socioeconomic composition means that evaluating how important this factor is requires evidence from other sources. Fortunately, there are a few studies that provide estimates of the effects of socioeconomic composition on student outcomes.

Many researchers have argued that schools with a larger proportion of low-income students are less likely to perform well. Some of the best evidence that low-income students suffer comes from studies examining the effects of desegregation on student achievement. In a famous 1997 study of desegregation in traditional public schools, Roderick and Rumberger found that the relationship between socioeconomic composition and student outcomes was strong even after controlling for some other factors. They concluded that high-poverty schools were systematically less successful than schools with a higher proportion of middle-class students.

However, other studies have found that the relationship between socioeconomic composition and student outcomes is stronger when comparing outcomes for students randomly assigned to schools. Reid (2012) found that the proportion of low-income students in a school was as strong a predictor of student outcomes as any other factor. He calculated that only 1.1 percent of the variance in student outcomes could be explained by school socioeconomic composition. The economist Douglas Harris (2007) calculated that only 1.1 percent of the variance in student outcomes could be explained by school socioeconomic composition. He concluded that high-poverty schools were systematically less successful than schools with a higher proportion of middle-class students.

However, few researchers have directly compared the effects of socioeconomic composition on student outcomes in traditional public schools and charter schools. Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, and Wang (2012) found that charter schools, which are more likely to have a higher proportion of low-income students, were more likely to perform well than traditional public schools. In a study of the effects of desegregation in traditional public schools, they found that the relationship between socioeconomic composition and student outcomes was strong even after controlling for some other factors. They concluded that high-poverty schools were systematically less successful than schools with a higher proportion of middle-class students.

Despite the evidence of their advantages, many researchers have chosen to focus more on fixing schools rather than on breaking them up. Reformers have identified strategies for improving schools that could help other schools and districts create successful integration. They have identified strategies for improving schools that could help other schools and districts create successful integration. They have identified strategies for improving schools that could help other schools and districts create successful integration. They have identified strategies for improving schools that could help other schools and districts create successful integration.

Some researchers have argued that de facto school segregation is not harmful. However, there is evidence to suggest that this is not always the case. In a recent meta-analysis of studies examining the effects of desegregation on student achievement, Palardy (2005) found that the relationship between socioeconomic composition and student outcomes was strong even after controlling for some other factors. He concluded that high-poverty schools were systematically less successful than schools with a higher proportion of middle-class students.

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when combined, have enough diversity to facilitate an interdistrict integration plan. The availability of these geographic opportunities varies widely in states across the country (Mantil, Perkins, & Abberger, 2012).

Some diverse charter schools were started by first identifying a geographic opportunity for integration that traditional public schools were neglecting. For example, Blackstone Valley Prep Mayoral Academy serves four adjacent Rhode Island communities, drawing students evenly from two higher-income suburbs and two lower-income cities. Larchmont Charter School in Los Angeles, California, was started by a group of parents from Hollywood who were frustrated that the demographics of their community, one of the most diverse neighborhoods in L.A., were not reflected in the area's schools.

Political opposition to adjusting attendance boundaries is another challenge. In Wake County, North Carolina, frequent student reassignments created controversy over the school district's long-standing socioeconomic integration plan. Opposition culminated in 2010, when a Tea Party–backed majority on the school board voted to end the plan. This group, however, was replaced in the next election by a pro integration majority. Similar backlash greeted a new school-boundary plan in Eden Prairie, Minnesota, that also balanced students by socioeconomic status.

Some charter schools pursuing socioeconomic integration have shown how systems of school choice can be used to foster diversity as an alternative to redrawing attendance zones. A weighted lottery is the simplest way for schools to ensure that they enroll a diverse student body while still relying on choice-based enrollment. For example, DSST Public Schools, a network of charter middle and high schools in Denver, Colorado, reserves a minimum of 40 percent of seats at the flagship campus for low-income students; Blackstone Valley Prep in Rhode Island reserves 60 percent of seats. High Tech High weights admissions lotteries in its elementary, middle, and high schools by students' home zip codes, which creates socioeconomically, racially, and ethnically diverse student bodies because of housing patterns.

Choice-based schools can also maintain a diverse balance by intentionally targeting underrepresented groups of students when publicizing their school. Capital City Public Charter School and E. L. Haynes Public Charter School are both located in Washington, D.C., where weighted lotteries are not permitted. Both schools maintain socioeconomically diverse enrollment through strategic recruitment for the lottery pool. E. L. Haynes, for example, receives many applications from middle-class families who proactively seek information because of the school's reputation, and it therefore directs all its recruitment efforts—from distributing information outside grocery stores to speaking at neighborhood association meetings.

Serving a Diverse Student Body

Once an integration strategy is in place, schools and teachers must also adapt to serve a diverse group of students. Mixed-income schools can draw criticism from both directions with respect to how well the school community and individual classrooms are integrated. On the one hand, students in diverse schools are sometimes separated into tracked classes along lines that mirror socioeconomic status, and students may further self-segregate during free time. In that situation, middle-income and low-income students are cheated out of some of the peer interactions and access to broader social networks that diversity can offer. On the other hand, schools that intentionally maintain heterogeneous classes must consider the research suggesting that these classes can negatively affect the academic progress of higher achievers (Brewer, Rees, & Argys, 1995).

Individual success stories and a review of research suggest that it is possible, by offering all students a single challenging curriculum, to reduce the achievement gap without harming the highest achievers (Burris, Wiley, Welner, & Murphy, 2008; Rui, 2009). However, ability grouping remains a hotly debated topic that is particularly relevant at socioeconomically diverse schools, where students enter school with a wide range of knowledge and skills (see Petrilli, 2012). How can...
hour of highly specialized, small-group experiences to others.

Students of all backgrounds benefit from differentiation is a challenge for teachers, but one case, the schools' low-income students also beat the state proficiency standards for all students.

At City Neighbors Charter School, an elementary school in Brooklyn, created project homogeneous groups chosen for their interests to take the class at an honors level by completing extra assignments. Teachers assign the squads that promote community cohesion and development—to facilitate programs for students. Teachers regularly adjust student placements based on individual needs.

Some charter schools are also tackling diversity by grouping students by mixed ability as much as possible. “It's not just diversity in the classroom...” A Promising Direction

Leaders at High Tech High realized they needed to offer honors classes so that students could have the weighted grade point averages needed to be admitted to top universities. “It’s also integration in practice and in behavior...” Socioeconomic Integration

The honors level by competing extra outperformed their low-income peers sometimes by dramatic margins. In all schools whose low-income students sometimes beat the state proficiency standards, the schools' low-income students sometimes beat the state proficiency standards. What approaches they're used to or will be effective with them. Although difficulty in some classrooms, low-achieving students without support or enrichment in different sub-
classes with an honors option, allowing students to break up concentrations of poverty and provide more diverse learning environments for all students.

In the lower grades, students who would not otherwise spend time with an eye toward grouping students for an intensive. Teachers assing the squads that promote community cohesion and development—to facilitate programs for students. Teachers regularly adjust student placements based on individual needs.

In the middle grades, students at City Neighbors start their day with half an hour of highly specialized, small-group experiences to others.

Founding faculty member, described the members' complementary skill sets. “There's quite a mix of what children understand and how they can respond to each other’s learning styles.”

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Seen at City Neighbors Charter School, a K–8 school in Baltimore, Maryland, a mix of what children understand and how they can respond to each other’s learning styles. “It's not just diversity in the classroom...” A Promising Direction

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