A TALES OF TWO SCHOOLS
Race and Education on Long Island
ERASE Racism’s documentary, A TALE OF TWO SCHOOLS: Race and Education on Long Island, follows David and Owen, two African American teenagers during their senior year of high school. Even though the students have a lot in common, their experiences diverge as a result of the racial and economic differences in their schools districts. A TALE OF TWO SCHOOLS spotlights these differences and the results of such disparities. The film also focuses on the benefits that diversity provides for all students and makes the case for change.
Long Island schools fail to provide high quality education to those students who need it most.

This presentation shows that the region is failing to provide the best education to all its students and offers solutions to improve Long Island's public schools.
A major key to the Island’s long-term sustainability will be its ability to provide a quality education for all its young people at a cost which is affordable to taxpayers. Currently the region is burdened by some of the highest property taxes in the nation, the majority of which can be attributed to the school component. However for the amount that is spent on taxes, the quality of education should be much higher. Inefficiencies in school spending are largely the result of the region’s segregated school districts. In comparison to the rest of the State, and the nation, Long Island is unusual, both in how many school districts it has and how economically segregated they are. As you will see, this drastically affects how Long Islanders are taxed, how that money is spent, and the resulting educational outcomes for the region.
We currently have 124 school districts. Nassau contains 56 and Suffolk 68, placing them seventh and fourth—out of 3,066 counties in the nation—in the number of districts per county. Each of these 124 school districts acts as a completely autonomous taxing authority.

This makes it impossible to effectively allocate resources to meet the needs of every student.
Different Districts + Different Resources
= Different Opportunities

Vast differences in resources and funding cause greatly disparate educational opportunities across school districts.
On average, wealthier districts spend nearly $8,000 more per student than poorer districts.
Long Island’s school districts are also segregated by race. Many people would be surprised to learn that Long Island is the third most racially segregated suburban region in America.
Our racially segregated neighborhoods produce racially and economically segregated classrooms. This means that black and Latino students are systematically denied access to well-funded schools and as a result are denied the opportunity for a high quality education.
Scientific research confirms that all schools can greatly improve their quality of education by creating racially and ethnically diverse classrooms. Not only do racially diverse settings prepare students to be citizens in a diverse society, but study after study has shown that young people learn more and are more inclined to think critically.
Research has shown that when classes are mixed by race and ability, all students benefit! In 2000, the last year biology classes were tracked in Rockville Centre, 48% of black and Latino students passed the State Regents exam, and 85% of white and Asian-American students passed the exam. In 2001, with heterogeneous classes and a more rigorous curriculum, the pass rate for blacks and Latinos shot up to 77%. What about the whites and Asian-Americans? They climbed to 94%.
We CAN Solve This Problem.

Long Island has the resources and ability to rethink our educational system in order to provide a top tier public education to every child. Here are some options.
If districts followed town and city boundaries, none would have an overwhelming proportion of poor students and all would be racially diverse. Also, more resources would be available to target specific needs, which would allow schools to capitalize on economies of scale. Recently, local and state officials have proposed consolidating districts as a way to reduce school costs and taxes.
ERASE Racism examined the effect of uniting neighboring school districts as a way to optimize funds and create diversity. For example, if school district lines were redrawn along town and city lines, we could create a total of 15 districts, which would be far less segregated by race as well as income.
Solution 2: **Eliminate funding disparities**

Example: Pool Commercial Property Taxes

Homeowners in districts with commercial development, pay as low as **29%** of the school district tax levy, while those in districts without commercial properties can shoulder more than **90%**.

-LI Index, 2009 Report

Eliminating funding disparities between districts will help ensure that all students in Long Island can afford the educational resources needed to obtain a quality education. This is also a good strategy to transition to fewer districts. One option is to alter the school tax funding system. For example, we can pool commercial taxes from large regional businesses. This would help eliminate the homeowners’ tax burden in communities with a small number of commercial properties.
As shown in A TALE OF TWO SCHOOLS DOCUMENTARY, Rockville Centre is one example of a successfully integrated school by race and socio economic status. Other options include creating magnet schools that offer admission to students across boundary lines. These high-standard schools greatly benefit students in districts that lack the resources to offer in-depth instruction in science, mathematics, or the arts, allowing students to develop their strengths, no matter what that strength may be.
Solution 4: Enhance educational opportunities for students in low performing schools

Example: Inter-district transfer programs

A study of Boston’s METCO program found that academic achievement for the transfer students closely mirrored the high achievement of the suburban students.

- LI Index, 2009 Report

Through the use of creative collaborations, students in under-achieving schools can receive enhanced educational experiences today by using existing structures like BOCES to bring qualified teachers and others resources to the students while larger structural changes are underway. Another option is allowing students to attend schools in highly resourced districts through a transfer program. Historically inter-district transfer programs have allowed students from struggling urban schools to attend schools in nearby suburban districts. The programs are voluntary for both the transferring students and the receiving schools. Since a rigorous curriculum is taught to all students, inter-district transfer programs provide students from under-resourced schools with the opportunity to achieve academic success.
The State Education Law has a “Distinguished Educator” provision that can be utilized to help school boards operate effectively. A regionalized employment structure, which includes regional collective bargaining for school district employees may achieve cost savings and equitable access by all school districts to the most qualified and experienced personnel.
The social and economic costs of inadequate education are very high.
A high school dropout earns about $260,000 less over a lifetime than a high school graduate and pays about $60,000 less in taxes.

Increasing the high school completion rate by just 1 percent for all men ages 20-60 would save the U.S. up to $1.4 billion per year in reduced costs from crime.

Health-related losses for the estimated 600,000 high school dropouts in 2004 totaled at least $58 billion, or nearly $100,000 per student.

Annual losses exceed $50 billion in federal and state income taxes for all 23,000,000 U.S. high school dropouts ages 18-67.

America loses $192 billion—1.6% of GDP—in combined income and tax revenue with each cohort of 18-year-olds who never complete high school.

Americans with inferior and incomplete educations are more likely to be unemployed, unhealthy, and incarcerated. They have the potential to improve the economy and ease tax burdens if they receive at least a high school education, and will help contribute to our society to an even greater extent with a college degree.
“Equal educational opportunity means that all children (and the public schools that serve them) have access to those resources, inputs, and services necessary to...achieve established outcome goals.”

- Education Law Center (ELC)

There are better ways!

Long Island cannot thrive as a region without a quality and affordable public education system that offers an equal opportunity for success to all students, regardless of race, socio-economic status, community resources or learning abilities.
There are many ways to take action, but one of the first steps is voicing your opinion. We want to hear from you. Please send your emails to education@eraseracismny.org