

Education and Civil Rights

"Segregation shaped me; education liberated me." ~ Maya Angelou

Overview

Students will explore education during the Civil Rights Movement through the examination of oral history interview excerpts, selections from "Freedom Schools" newspapers, poetry, and discussion. Incorporating reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language goals, this lesson will lead students to reflect on the importance of education and access to quality education in terms of personal growth, fulfillment and equality.

Essential/Compelling Questions

- What role does education play in the development of a person or a society?
- When education is denied, what are the consequences for a person, a group of people, or a society?
- How did segregation shape those who experienced it, specifically in terms of education?

NC Essential Standards

English Language Arts, Grades 6 - 8,

- Read and summarize texts, determine the central idea or theme of each. (RI.7.2, RL.7.2)
- Cite textual evidence to support inferences and explicit details shared in each text. (RI.7.1, RL.7.1)
- Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners on grade 7 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly. (SL.7.1)
- Analyze how particular elements of a story interact and analyze the interactions between individuals, events, and ideas in a text. (RI.7.3)
- Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content. (W.7.2)

8th Grade Social Studies

- 8.H.1.3 Use primary and secondary sources to interpret various historical perspectives.
- 8.H.2.2: Summarize how leadership and citizen actions (e.g. the founding fathers, the Regulators, the Greensboro Four, and participants of the Wilmington Race Riots, 1898) influenced the outcome of key conflicts in North Carolina and the United States.
- 8.H.3.3: Explain how individuals and groups have influenced economic, political and social change in North Carolina and the United States.
- 8.C&G.1.4 Analyze access to democratic rights and freedoms among various groups in North Carolina and the United States.
- 8.C&G.2.3 Explain the impact of human and civil rights issues throughout North Carolina and United States history

Materials

- Education & Civil Rights Accompanying PowerPoint available (in PDF format) in Carolina K-12's Database of K-12 Resources. Available here: <https://k12database.unc.edu/files/2018/01/EducationCivilRightsPPT.pdf>
 - To view this PDF as a projectable presentation, save the file, click "View" in the top menu bar of the file, and select "Full Screen Mode"

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- For an editable version of the PPT, email Carolina K-12 at CarolinaK12@unc.edu with the title of the PowerPoint in the subject line.
- Laptop connected to projector, internet and speakers
- Elijah Richardson transcript, attached
- 3 poems from “Freedom School Poetry.” The full PDF is available [here](#)
- “For My People,” by Margaret Walker; poem and questions attached
- Education Remains the Civil Rights Issue of Our Time, article attached and available [here](#)

Student Preparation

Prior to this lesson, instruct students to read and annotate the article [“The Forgotten Story of the Freedom Schools,”](#) by Jon H. Hale (*The Atlantic*, June 26, 2014.) Students should highlight at least 4 significant, interesting or surprising points and create one question for discussion.

Procedure

Considering Educational Inequalities

1. As a Bell Ringer/Warm Up, project [slide 2](#) of the accompanying PPT, which instructs students to observe and compare a black schoolroom and a white schoolroom from the 1960s. While students take 3-5 minutes to reflect, teachers can also play the song “Blackbird,” by Paul McCartney softly in the background. (The song is available for free streaming at <https://archive.org/details/111Blackbird>.)
2. Next, share and discuss the words posted on the discussion wall with the class, grouping similar words together and using them as a basis to highlight topics to be discussed throughout the lesson.
 - What do you already know about segregation? About segregated classrooms? How did you learn this information?
 - Based on the [pre-reading article](#) you completed for homework, what were some of the major problems that were faced after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed?
 - What was the most surprising thing you learned from the article? Why?
 - Do you believe educational opportunities are “equal” today? Why or why not?
 - Despite the fact that people fought so hard for equal access to education, many of us take education for granted today. Why do you think this is the case? Would you be willing to fight for your right to a quality education if it were denied to you? Why or why not?
 - Did anyone notice the song playing while you worked? If so, how would you describe it? How did it make you feel? What might its connection to the images be?
 - (Project [slide 3](#) and remind students of the lyrics.) What might these lyrics symbolize?
 - Let students know that Blackbird was written by Paul McCartney during the Civil Rights Movement of the 60s, with the blackbird symbolizing the strength of the fight black women in particular were waging. [Source](#))
 - (Project [slide 4](#).) Consider the quote by Maya Angelou, “Segregation shaped me; education liberated me.” What message is she conveying? How do you think segregation shaped children in the past? How would it shape your classroom experience today? In what ways can education liberate you?

Introduction to Oral Histories with Benjamin Chavis Muhammad

3. Explain to students that since none of us actually lived during the period of our history when schools were segregated and similar educational opportunities were not offered to all races, we can learn from listening to people who did actually experience these times. Let students know that they will be listening to

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portions of several oral history interviews during this lesson, each of which will give them a personal perspective of how segregation “shaped” the interviewee’s experiences and life.

4. Project slide 5 and have students copy the “Shape Up Summary” shapes onto notebook paper and explain each category that they are to listen for and reflect upon.
5. Project slide 6 and tell students that they are now going to listen to two interview clips from Benjamin Chavis Muhammad. Born in 1948 in Oxford, North Carolina. Mr. Chavis Muhammad was an ordained protestant minister and well as a minister in the Islamic church. He was a political activist during the Civil Rights Movement, and is the great-great-great grandson of John Chavis, an African American who taught both whites and blacks during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Perhaps most interesting to students, they will learn in the second clip how Ben Chavis’s activism started when he was only a middle school student. Play the TWO short clips from Mr. Chavis-Muhammad <https://soundcloud.com/sohp/education-1-benjamin-chavis-muhammad> (2 minutes) and <https://soundcloud.com/sohp/education-2-benjamin-chavis-muhammad> (5:26).
6. Afterwards, discuss the clip as a class and allow students to share their reflections and further discuss:
 - What did you find interesting or important about these clips? What surprised you? What emotions or feelings did the interview create in you? Why?
 - How did Benjamin Chavis’s family history, especially as it relates to education, impact him as a child?
 - Why is the library an important component of equal education?
 - How old was Benjamin Chavis when he desegregated the Oxford library and why did he think this was important to do? What was he risking by refusing to leave without a library card?
 - How do you think Ben Chavis was impacted by this experience?
 - What does this teach you regarding the ability of young people to make a difference?

Elijah Richardson and Integration

7. Have students recreate another “Shape Up Summary” on the back of their paper and tell them you are now going to share a portion of an interview with Wilmington resident Elijah Richardson. Project slide 7 and provide a bit of background regarding the clip. Mr. Richardson was a student at Williston, the only black high school in Wilmington – but was forced to transfer to New Hanover High, a white school, during 1966-1968’s mandatory desegregation. Tell students that as they listen, they should follow along with the transcript (attached for distributing to students) since the recording is difficult to understand, as well as fill out their “Shape Up Summary.” Play the Elijah Richardson clip at <https://soundcloud.com/sohp/education-3-elijah-richardson> (6:40). Again, allow students to share their reflections afterwards and further discuss:
 - Why was Williston closed and how did Elijah feel about this? (“It was like a slap in the face.”)
 - How did he protest this closure?
 - What were some of the examples of racial problems at New Hanover High that he shared?
 - What problems within the educational system during desegregation does this clip highlight?
 - How do you think Mr. Richardson was impacted by this experience?
 - Based on what you heard in both the Benjamin Chavis and the Elijah Richardson interviews, in what ways has education changed or remained the same between the 1960s and today?

Exploring Freedom Schools

8. Review the information about Freedom Schools shared in the homework reading, making sure that students understand information such as:

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- In 1964, more than forty Freedom Schools opened to thousands of young black Mississippi students. Here they learned civics, politics, and history, curricula that helped them see beyond the degrading lessons supporting segregation and Jim Crow. Freedom School students became some of the movement's youngest activists and experienced the liberating effects of participating in the movement. At more than a dozen of these schools, students wrote, edited, printed, and published their own newspapers that captured these young people's reactions to Freedom Schools, to the civil rights movement, and to life under Jim Crow.
 - Discuss: Based on what you read in the [article](#) and heard in the interviews, why were Freedom Schools important?
9. Project [slide 9](#) and tell students they are going to receive a page from an actual [Freedom School publication](#) so that they can read some of the pieces written by Freedom School students. Have students partner up and pass out copies of the three attached excerpts to each set of students, letting them know that they will focus on either "Why Do They Hate Us? What Has the Negro Done?" by Florence Seymour., "Mine" by Alice Jackson, or "Isn't it Awful" by Edith Moore. (Teachers may want to inform students that they are welcome to read the other writings on the same page after they have discussed their assigned excerpt.) With their partner, students should discuss:
- What does the excerpt you read tell you about life for African Americans during segregation and Jim Crow?
 - What specific examples of inequality are highlighted?
 - What impact do you think segregation and Jim Crow had on black students based on this writing?
10. Afterwards, have a student volunteer read one of the pieces and afterwards have partners who read the same excerpt share their reactions and summarize their discussion. Go through all three excerpts and afterwards discuss:
- What did these excerpts have in common?
 - What connections can you make between these excerpts and the oral history interviews we heard?
 - How did segregation "shape" those who experienced it? How is education able to be a liberating force in someone's life?

Day 2

Overcoming Unjust Limitations

11. As a quick warm up project [slide 10](#) and have students take a few minutes to consider and respond to the question:
- Consider your future life and career. What would you like to become if you had no limitations?
 - What do you see as your limitations (if any) and why? What could help you overcome your limitations?
12. Before discussing student thoughts, project [slide 11](#) and tell the class you want to show them a 50 second clip from the movie *Hidden Figures*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GDV1sQcpJa4> . Afterwards discuss
- What kept Mary from becoming an engineer?
 - What did it take for each of you today to not have the same road blocks as Mary had? Alternatively, what road blocks still exist for equal access to certain professions?
 - Were there limitations you identified when considering the warm up questions that related to this?
 - What role does education play in achieving dreams?

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Margaret Walker

13. Move to slide 12 and let students know that they are going to listen to a 2 minute (2:39) interview clip from the acclaimed African American writer Margaret Walker. Share some background on Margaret Walker and instruct students to create another Shape Up Summary on notebook paper (slide 5) to fill out as they listen to Margaret Walker: <https://soundcloud.com/sohp/education-4-margaret-walker> (2:39 minutes.) Afterwards allow students to share their reflections and discuss:
- Despite financial limitations, why did Margaret Walker not feel poor? What filled the economic gap for her?
 - What do you think her definition of the American Dream is? How does she represent the American Dream?
 - Despite the success Margaret Walker made for herself, what challenges do we know she would have unfairly faced?
 - Why was her sense of self-worth so important to her success?
 - What role do you think education, both at home and in school, played for her?
14. Tell students that in partners, they are going to explore Margaret Walker's poem "For My People." After students partner up, provide them with the attached copy of the poem, instructing them to read it independently, noting with words or sketches the images that come to mind in the left margin. After independently reading, partners should discuss the questions provided at the bottom of the poem. Have students report out on their thoughts:
- What images came to mind as you read the poem?
 - What struggles does Walker highlight that African Americans have faced throughout history?
 - Based on this poem, how do you think Walker would characterize the school experiences of African Americans during the 1900s?
 - What role should education play in the development of a person or a society and do you think Walker believes the school system provided such development for black children? What lines in her poem make you think this?
 - When education is denied or unequal, what are the consequences for a person, a group of people, or a society? What examples of this can you cite from Walker's poem?
 - What do you think Walker's vision for moving forward is? What do you think she feels it will take to reach this vision? What role might education play?
 - How does this poem connect to what you heard Walker say in her interview?
 - What is Walker's overall message in this poem?

Education Today

11. Ask students to consider the education system today and together, compile a class list of the pros and cons that come to students' minds. Ask probing questions, such as:
- In what ways has education improved since Jim Crow?
 - Are there aspects of education that have remained the same and/or that still need improving?
 - Are there new challenges related to civil rights we are faced with regarding education today?
12. Tell students they are going to listen to an interview from 1974 (post-Jim Crow) with Mr. Aaron Henry. Tell students to create one last "Shape Up Summary" and project slide 13 and let students know that Mr. Henry lived from 1922 - 1997, and during the 1950's he served as the president of the Mississippi chapter of the NAACP. In this clip Mr. Henry shares his concerns about schools in the 70s, and how they still had some of the same problems as they did during Jim Crow (such as segregation and biased texts/curriculum.)

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While listening, students can record on their shape up summary any words, phrases, sketches, etc. that will help them remember the key points of the clip. Play the 4:16 clip from Aaron Henry at <https://soundcloud.com/sohp/education-5-aaron-henry> . Afterwards allow students to share their reflections and further discuss:

- What is Mr. Henry's argument regarding neighborhood schools?
- According to Mr. Henry, how do you truly learn about other people different than you?
- What current debates regarding school diversity, neighborhood schools and busing still exist today?
What are the pros and cons to busing?
 - Teachers can find numerous examples of school districts struggling with how to diversify schools and grappling with the busing debate via a quick internet search.
- What are the problems with textbooks according to Mr. Henry? Do you think the issues he notes present in the 1970s are still an issue today? What evidence can you cite that supports or refutes his argument?
- Many politicians, educators, civic leaders, etc. claim that education remains the civil rights issue of our time. Do you agree or disagree with this and why?

13. As an optional culminating assignment, have students read the article "[Education Remains the Civil Rights Issue of Our Time](#)" (also attached) and write a response to John King based on what they have learned, additional research and their own opinion regarding education as a civil rights issue today. Students should select specific points that King makes then offer evidence to either support or refute his claim.

Excerpt from the Oral History Interview transcript of Elijah Richardson - Southern Oral History Program

August 17, 1978

Interviewer: Larry Thomas

Transcribed by: Martha Maddox

Larry Thomas: Let's go to your high school days, in '68. Where did you attend high school?

Elijah Richardson: I attended high school at Williston Senior High.

LT: Which years?

ER: This was black school. I attended from 1966 until 1968, at which time desegregation was mandatory and therefore after '68 I got transferred to a predominantly white high school. At that time we lost Williston as black institution.

L.T.: How did you feel about that at that time?

E.R.: Well, I had serious reservations about attending white school and my form of protest was that I was pretty good football player and that I played for Williston while I was at Williston and I did not want to see Williston close. I could not understand how people could let it be closed.

L.T.: Did you voice your opinion? Did you let other people know how you felt?

E.R.: At the time that I found out that this was true fact, I was in New York City that summer working.

L.T.: When did you find out Williston was going to be closed?

E.R.: That summer, we left Williston in May with no idea of what was going on.

L.T.: In May of '68?

E.R.: Yes, May of '68, in which I was to attend in September.

L.T.: You were definitely looking forward to going to Williston?

E.R.: Right, as senior because it had certain advantages and it was something that I had looked forward to my entire life.

L.T.: Where are you from, the Northside of town, Brooklyn?

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E.R.: Northside, my form of protest, as was saying, was that I decided not to play football for Williston High School and there was coach at the time, pretty famous black coach in Wilmington and he was transferred to Hoggard High School which was on the South side. He being my coach at Williston...he wanted us to transfer to Hoggard.

L.T.: This was your senior year?

E.R.: Yes, this was my senior year, but I decided to stay at Hanover and not play for anyone. So as we progressed through that school year, I'd like to say that in September when did return to school, and I attended New Hanover High. There were so many racial problems that we had an after school forum to...

L.T.: You say from the first day these problems arised?

E.R.: Yes. I can remember person who is now dead, he was kicked out of school the very first day because at the top of the stairs he hit white boy in the nose and broke his nose.

L.T.: Was there any provocation involved?

E.R.: The provocation was that they closed down our school and demanded that we go to another school.

L.T.: This was specific incident that was provoked by that.

E.R.: Just hatred of having to attend that school. This violence was very current thing, but it started from day one.

L.T.: Was this consistent, like every day or what?

E.R.: Well, I'm sure you could probably find someone who was in fight at least once day.

L.T.: Who was usually the aggressor?

E.R.: I would think black people were the aggressors, but it was only through racial provocation that we knew that the person we had to take these messages to were the white middle class people about white middle class kids. Therefore, we were, in their opinions, always the aggressors, but from my experience I knew that some of these things were provoked like racial slurs, but we were all very young, like 18, and from 16 to 18 there is lot of fighting.

L.T.: Is this one of the main reasons? Can you cite specific incidents that provocation might have jumped off— racial slurs— and started fights. What I'm trying to establish is what started these fights?

E.R.: Okay, you probably have most of your fights in gym class.

L.T.: Right.

E.R.: Where there is physical contact and an element of hatred among both races. You have young white kids that were not afraid of black people and you have black people that were not afraid of white people. So, you would find in setting where there is physical contact like basketball or playing touch football or just being in the gym playing volleyball.

L.T.: Did you personally ever get into any of these altercations?

E.R.: No, didn't, but I was the spokesman for the black people. I would speak at these forums and list the demands and state what our purpose was and why we felt we were thrown into system that we were very unaware of.

L.T.: What were some of the things that you were talking about?

E.R.: The basic issue was this first time, why did we have to attend this school? Explain to us better than, why? Well, having some understanding, did not see how the city fathers could close down perfectly healthy, physical facility, such as Williston and say we're going to close down three high schools and put 2,000 of you in one high school and 2,000 in another when it could have been equally distributed. In other words, it was slap in the face to see the black high school closed down. I felt like the facilities were better than one of the white high schools.

Isn't It Awful?

by EDITH MOORE, age 15, McComb

Isn't it awful not to be able to eat in a public place
Without being arrested or snarled at right in your face?

Isn't it awful not to be able to go to a public library and
get an interesting book
Without being put out and given a hateful look?

Isn't it awful not to be able to sleep peacefully nights
For fear you may get bombed because you want your rights?

Isn't it awful not to be able to get your schooling where
you please?
Just because of our race, color and creed we cannot feel
at ease.

Why Do They Hate Us? What Has the Negro Done?

by FLORENCE SEYMOUR, Gulfport

It's enough to make you wonder, it's enough to make you cry,
That every race hates the Negro, good Lord, I wonder why?

You can travel, and travel, you can travel this country
through,

You'll find every race hates the Negro, no matter what
they do.

You can scrub and mop their kitchens, and work from morning
'til night,

But every race hates the Negro, and just won't treat
them right.

You can wash and shine their cars and have their meals ready
when they come,

Now tell me why do they hate us, what has the Negro done?

They say that monkeys are our ancestors, the beginning of
our race,

But we have never killed a President, kidnapping children is
out of our place.

We are Jim Crowed on every corner and everywhere we go,
Not only in the South, but clear to the White House door.

We are Jim Crowed on the trains and in restaurants when
we want a meal.

But they never Jim Crowed the Negro when he was on
the battlefield.

They won't allow us to have our business, no where in
the heart of town.

And if we own too fine a home, they will come and burn it down.

We have to live in rat dens, and huts on the edge of town.

It doesn't matter where we live, they mean to keep us down.

They pay us the lowest salaries, and work us almost for fun.

Now tell me why they hate us, Lord? What has the Negro done?

Mine

by ALICE JACKSON, age 17, Jackson

I want to walk the streets of a town,
Turn into any restaurant and sit down,
And be served the food of my choice,
And not be met by a hostile voice.
I want to live in the best hotel for a week,
Or go for a swim at a public beach.
I want to go to the best University
and not be met with violence or uncertainty.
I want the things my ancestors
thought we'd never have.
They are mine as a Negro, an American;
I shall have them or be dead.

For My People by Margaret Walker

For my people everywhere singing their slave songs
repeatedly: their dirges and their ditties and their blues
and jubilees, praying their prayers nightly to an
unknown god, bending their knees humbly to an
unseen power;

For my people lending their strength to the years, to the
gone years and the now years and the maybe years,
washing ironing cooking scrubbing sewing mending
hoeing plowing digging planting pruning patching
dragging along never gaining never reaping never
knowing and never understanding;

For my playmates in the clay and dust and sand of Alabama
backyards playing baptizing and preaching and doctor
and jail and soldier and school and mama and cooking
and playhouse and concert and store and hair and Miss
Choomby and company;

**For the cramped bewildered years we went to school to learn
to know the reasons why and the answers to and the
people who and the places where and the days when, in
memory of the bitter hours when we discovered we
were black and poor and small and different and nobody
cared and nobody wondered and nobody understood;**

**For the boys and girls who grew in spite of these things to
be man and woman, to laugh and dance and sing and
play and drink their wine and religion and success, to
marry their playmates and bear children and then die
of consumption and anemia and lynching;**

For my people thronging 47th Street in Chicago and Lenox
Avenue in New York and Rampart Street in New
Orleans, lost disinherited dispossessed and happy
people filling the cabarets and taverns and other
people's pockets needing bread and shoes and milk and
land and money and something—something all our own;

For my people walking blindly spreading joy, losing time

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being lazy, sleeping when hungry, shouting when
burdened, drinking when hopeless, tied, and shackled
and tangled among ourselves by the unseen creatures
who tower over us omnisciently and laugh;

For my people blundering and groping and floundering in
the dark of churches and schools and clubs and
societies, associations and councils and committees and
conventions, distressed and disturbed and deceived and
devoured by money-hungry glory-craving leeches,
preyed on by facile force of state and fad and novelty, by
false prophet and holy believer;

**For my people standing staring trying to fashion a better way
from confusion, from hypocrisy and misunderstanding,
trying to fashion a world that will hold all the people,
all the faces, all the adams and eves and their countless
generations;**

**Let a new earth rise. Let another world be born. Let a
bloody peace be written in the sky. Let a second
generation full of courage issue forth; let a people
loving freedom come to growth. Let a beauty full of
healing and a strength of final clenching be the pulsing
in our spirits and our blood. Let the martial songs
be written, let the dirges disappear. Let a race of men now
rise and take control.**

Discuss:

1. What images came to mind as you read the poem?
2. What struggles does Walker highlight that African Americans have faced throughout history?
3. Based on this poem, how do you think Walker would characterize the school experiences of African Americans during the 1900s?
4. What role should education play in the development of a person or a society and do you think Walker believes the school system provided such development for black children? What lines in her poem make you think this?
5. When education is denied or unequal, what are the consequences for a person, a group of people, or a society? What examples of this can you cite from Walker's poem?
6. What do you think Walker's vision for moving forward is? What do you think she feels it will take to reach this vision? What role might education play?
7. How does this poem connect to what you heard Walker say in her interview?
8. What is Walker's overall message in this poem?

Education Remains the Civil Rights Issue of Our Time

May 17, 2017 by John B. King Jr.

Today marks the 63rd anniversary of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision.

On this anniversary, we celebrate the progress we have made as a nation in bringing educational equity and opportunity to millions of students in America. Our nation's high school graduation rate is at a record high and dropout rates are at historic lows. And more African American and Latino students are going to college than ever before. But we still have much further to go to make real the promise of an equitable and excellent education for every student in our nation.

With the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board*, the court made it clear that "separate and unequal" is unconstitutional. Yet, more than six decades later, we can look across our country and see communities that are more segregated by race — and by class — than they were decades ago.

We can look across our public schools and see that we have failed to close opportunity and achievement gaps, especially for young people of color and other historically underserved students.

And we can look across our classrooms and see that we continue to offer our most vulnerable students less — less access to high expectations and safe learning environments; less access to outstanding teachers and challenging coursework; and less access to the services and supports that these, and all, students need to thrive.

Indeed, this challenge we face is not new, but it is as critical for us to address now as ever before, especially when a majority of students in our public schools are low-income students and students of color.

As President Lyndon Baines Johnson stated more than 50 years ago, "[O]ur aim must be higher; our reach must be farther; our pace must be faster. Our society and its members must aim for, and reach toward, the goals and the values of excellence."

So we have urgent work to do as a country to accelerate progress for our students and to truly provide them with excellence and equity in our public schools. But I believe we stand better positioned to do this work because of our new education law, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

The law reauthorizes the original Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) signed by President Johnson in 1965. ESEA was a civil rights law then, and ESSA is a civil rights law now.

It is both our responsibility and moral obligation to build on the civil rights legacy of ESEA by implementing ESSA with a laser focus on ensuring that low-income, high-need students receive the resources they need and that all children — especially the most vulnerable — are provided with the world-class education they deserve.

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And to truly fulfill *Brown v. Board*, we also must commit ourselves to the work of increasing diversity, with an understanding of its benefits. Diversity offers the kind of contact and meaningful connections with people from various backgrounds that have been shown to boost students' empathy and to reduce bias. Students' experiences in diverse classrooms can positively impact their achievement and expose them to different perspectives and cultures, which can help prepare them to contribute to our society and our democracy. Indeed, we must make it a priority to ensure that all our children — including White students — regularly learn next to classmates who are different from themselves and encounter educators and leaders of color in their schools.

Especially at a time when the federal government is disinvesting in our public schools and withdrawing from accountability, it is up to states and districts to step up and take the lead. Community and faith leaders, civil rights groups, parents and families, policymakers and administrators, businesses and nonprofits, and educators and education advocates also all have a role to play in this important work.

Everyone with a stake in the success of our children must reaffirm our collective commitment to providing the highest quality education to all students — regardless of race, background, or circumstance — so they may succeed in college and careers and prosper in life. On this anniversary of the historic *Brown V. Board* decision and every day, education remains the civil rights issue of our time.