

# ■ YOUR TURN

Your chance to tell us what you think

## ■ YOU SAY

### Send children to neighborhood schools

**B**y an overwhelming majority, Your Turn readers oppose attempts to integrate schools by economic class, especially if it means assigning some students to schools outside their neighborhoods.

You gave many reasons: Children should have the right to attend their neighborhood schools. Forced economic integration—like forced racial

integration—will drive middle-class students to private schools. And, perhaps most cited, schools that are well run and equitably funded should be able to educate *all* students, regardless of the composition of the student body.

“Low-income students achieve just as well as others if there is strong parental involvement,” said Ohio board member George H. Bayless. “This is the

key, not economic level.”

Forty-three percent of you said there are better ways to improve the achievement of low-income students than integrating schools on the basis of family income. Another 34 percent said economic integration should be pursued—but only through the use of magnet schools and other programs that allow full student choice. Just 14 percent called for pursuing economic integration even if it means some students are assigned to schools outside their neighborhoods.

Finally, 9 percent choose “none of the above” for various reasons.

Several readers said adequate funding for schools serving low-income students was more of a concern than integrating these schools by income.

“Many [higher-income] parents can

## ■ WE ASK

### What should we do about illegal immigration?

STUDENTS WALKED OUT of school. Workers left their jobs. In New York, Washington D. C., Chicago, and other cities across America, immigrants—the vast majority of them Hispanic—rallied by the hundreds of thousands.

Most broadly, they were marching to show their emerging political clout, the power of a people who felt they had existed in the shadows for far too long. But the immediate cause of the demonstrations was more specific: a House-sponsored bill that would crack down on illegal immigrants and, in some cases, criminalize those who aid them.

If you're a board member or administrator, you no longer have to live in places like Houston or Miami to know that immigration affects public education. The student body is changing, and so are its needs. So while illegal immigration is not an education issue per se, the policies this nation pursues will inevitably affect the schools.

With that thought in mind, we'd like to ask this month: What should the United States do about illegal immigration? A divided Congress has weighed in. Immigrants have spoken. What do you say? Mark your selection and add your comments to the Your Turn reply card in this issue. Or e-mail your response—with June 2006 Your Turn as the subject line—to [your-turn@asbj.com](mailto:your-turn@asbj.com). We'll report the results in August.

A. Concentrate primarily on beefing up border security and cracking down on businesses that hire illegal immigrants. Do not offer citizenship to immigrants who are here illegally.

B. Enforce the borders, but also create a guest worker program that allows foreigners to work in the United States as long as they return to their home countries after a specified period of time.

C. Enforce the borders, but also create a guest worker program that allows immigrants the opportunity to work toward citizenship.

D. None of the above. (Please elaborate.)

**About the Your Turn survey:** These responses represent the views of the ASBJ Reader Panel, a self-selected sample of subscribers, plus other readers who choose to participate by postal mail, e-mail, or online at [www.asbj.com](http://www.asbj.com). The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect the opinions or policies of *American School Board Journal* or of its publisher, the National School Boards Association. **Join the panel at [www.asbj.com/readerpanel](http://www.asbj.com/readerpanel).**

afford extras such as family vacations, computers, and books, which give children a huge advantage,” said Michigan board member John Engfehr. “In my state, there can be a huge difference in funding between neighboring districts, so something should be done to level the playing field. Every child can learn, given the same opportunities.”

Similar funding disparities exist in Pennsylvania, said Kathy Pettiss, a board member from the Keystone State.

“State legislators and governors can no longer pass the buck to local school

boards and blame them for rising taxes,” Pettiss said. “This would allow local district funding to do the real work of individualizing education for each child and truly leaving none behind.”

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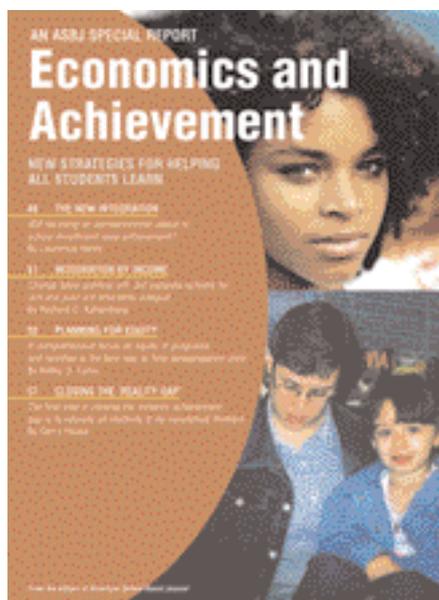
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A Georgia board member said that “low-income students deserve quality teachers and decent facilities as much as students at a higher socioeconomic level.” But he added that mandatory reassignments to achieve economic integration could cause more harm than good. “Making students travel to schools outside their own neighborhoods seldom creates goodwill between neighborhoods.”

“There is no other way [than eco-

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achieve—if adults expect great things from them.

“I began my school career in a segregated school system,” Jackson said. “We had all African-American teachers. We had outdated school books. The majority of my friends were poor and would have been considered ‘at risk’ by today’s standards. Yet, those of us who, in the seventh grade, were in the first integrated class, tested high in English and math. Teachers and teacher expectation make a difference. The importance of an education was stressed every day.”

A different set of expectations often prevails today, Brown said.

“I believe it is the mind-set of both the school system and the student that sustains the ‘achievement gap,’” she said. “I believe there is an ‘expectation’ gap. We have grown to accept that race and socioeconomic standing determine a child’s learning ability. ...

“My standing question is this: Who was any more disadvantaged than our slave ancestors? Why were they able to learn to read, often self-taught. Why were they able to invent and design products we rely on today?”

“We need to work to change the mind-set of our students, parents, administrators, and teachers. African-American students must see themselves as teachers, lawyers, and doctors. Somewhere along this educational path, we have become sidetracked.”

## ■ LETTERS

### A political agenda?

A reasonable person might conclude that NSBA’s policy is to “get away from the neighborhood schools argument” because this recommendation is listed in Kelley Carey’s “Planning for Equity” in the *ASBJ* Special Report: Economics and Achievement.

However, in my 25 years of service on an elementary school board, my experience has been that parents of all socioeconomic backgrounds prefer

their children to attend nearby schools that offer high quality education. Thus, I disagree with the implication that anyone who favors neighborhood schools must be a racist whose goal is segregation.

I also urge the editors of *ASBJ* to make a clear distinction between articles that are intended to be informative (as implied by the heading “Special Report”) and those that are intended to push the author’s political agenda—just as we try to teach our students to recognize the difference between facts and opinions.

*Richard E. Mayer*  
Trustee, Goleta Union School District  
Goleta, Calif.

**Editor’s Note:** This argument—one made by Mr. Carey before in *ASBJ*’s pages—is no doubt controversial to some readers. No one will disagree that parents want their children to attend high-quality schools in nearby neighborhoods. At the same time, because of housing patterns and other economic factors, Mr. Carey argues that, at the exclusion of other approaches to student assignment, neighborhood schools can, and often do, result in homogeneous, segregated campuses.

Mr. Carey’s opinions—along with those of the other authors in the magazine—do not necessarily reflect NSBA policy, as *ASBJ* notes each month on our contents page. Since 1891, it has been our mission to “serve as a free marketplace of ideas and an open forum of opinion on the issues and developments affecting education.”

### Katrina’s kids are our kids

“Schooling Katrina’s Kids” [April] was an excellent portrayal of the challenges facing Texas school districts and the more than 40,000 Hurricane Katrina survivors in our schools. My district, Alief Independent School District, has enrolled approximately 3,000 of these children—the highest percentage increase in the state.

Affected districts will receive one-time federal impact aid of about \$3,000

per student. However, the academic and social needs of these students and their families will not end at the close of this school year. A recent survey by Alief ISD revealed that 80 percent plan to start the 2006-07 year with us, and a large number will make Texas their home.

Many of the Katrina survivors have extreme academic deficiencies, and most are performing several years below standard grade level, as shown by results on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills. Approximately one-third are classified as “severely at-risk” and will need intense intervention to meet the Texas standard. We are extremely concerned about these children. In our opinion, it will take two to three years to reinforce the basic skills they need to be successful.

In addition to these long-term academic challenges, Texas school districts must deal with an uncertain financial future. Budgeting will be challenging due to the high mobility rate of the Katrina evacuees.

Additionally, our entire school funding system is in flux since the Texas Supreme Court ruled that local *ad valorem* taxes are an unconstitutional state property tax.

We no longer think of our new students as “Katrina Kids”—they are now part of the Alief family. Our goal is to provide the programs and services all children need to succeed. We fervently hope that those not affected by last fall’s hurricanes understand that Texas school districts need long-term assistance and support to help us meet this goal.

*Sarah Winkler*  
President, Alief ISD Board of Trustees  
Director, Texas Association  
of School Boards

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