

## TRANSCRIPTION

- Robin J:** Good afternoon, everyone. For the sake of time because today is going to be a very, very rich conversation, I believe, I'm going to go ahead and get started. My name is Robin Jackson, and I am welcoming you today to today's *EquiLearn Virtual Roundtable*. I am the Products Coordinator here at the Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center, and I'm serving as your host and your technical director today.
- Robin J:** Today's *Virtual Roundtable* is entitled *Implications of De/segregation and School Choice*. This *Virtual Roundtable* will assist you in understanding the historical influences on contemporary desegregation patterns, understanding the connection between school choice policies and desegregation patterns, and understanding considerations school board members and other school leaders and community members can pursue to address these issues. Please consider this a time for an informal space to ensure that your thoughts and insights are being considered, and to leverage learning from other educators, and to ask questions.
- Robin J:** Here at the Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center, whenever we do any type of learning experience, we like to ground ourselves in our four commitments that we borrowed from Singleton and Linton. I'm going to go through them right now. The first is stay engaged. That means that sometimes during conversations about race, racism, or any other difficult topics, it's easy to check out and not be in the conversation when we're having it. So we're asking that you stay engaged in today's conversation to be sure that we're all learning and are on the same page.
- Robin J:** Second is speak your truth. Your truth is important and your truth is indicative of where you are, so it's important that you all stay engaged and

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Speak your truth in this conversation to be sure that you are getting out of the conversation as much as possible. Number three is experience discomfort. Sometimes these conversations are uncomfortable. That doesn't mean that there is anything necessarily wrong, but it does mean that there are things that are important and you feel them, and we want you to be able to move them through them in the conversation.

**Robin J:**

And finally, expect and accept non-closure. Especially in these types of conversations, we like to think that we would walk away with the answers and with something that we can go out and save the world and do something like that with. However, sometimes that doesn't happen, so we just ask that you be okay with not necessarily walking away with all the answers to all the world's problems. But we hope that you walk away with tools in order to be able to disrupt issues in your spaces.

**Erin S:**

Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Erin Sanborn. I am a Doctoral Research Assistant at the Midwest and Plains Center. Today I'll be serving as an assistant technical director. Please feel free to send me any chat message directly if you are having any connectivity difficulties. *EquiLearn Virtual Roundtables* are intended to be interactive so participants are asked to interact in real time via our teleconferencing format. However, we will state to reduce noise, we ask that all participants mute their microphones when not speaking. Lastly, the video camera function has been turned on, so if you have a webcam and would like to join, please feel free to do so by clicking the camera icon on the lower right portion of your screen. And again, please before we get started, take a moment and mute your microphones and make sure that they remain muted when you're not speaking. Thank you.

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**Robin J:** I'm so excited. I want to introduce today's facilitators. I introduced myself already and so has my colleague, Erin. But I want to take a moment to introduce Dr. Terah Venzant San... Sorry, Chambers. She is a Professor of K-12 educational administration and an Equity Fellow with the MAP Center. Her research interests included post-*Brown* K-12 education policy, and urban education leadership. Specially, she is interested in the ways within school segregated policies influence African-American students, academic achievement and school engagement, as well as the price of school success for high achieving students of Color, or what she calls, racial opportunity costs.

**Speaker 3:** Enter your pin ID followed by pound.

**Robin J:** Shameless plug, Dr. Venzant Chambers has a podcast on our website where she talks all about racial opportunity costs and it's really great. Take note of that and be sure to go through our website and check that out. And we also have Courtney Mauldin

**Speaker 3:** Enter your participant ID followed by pound.

**Robin J:** ...in K-12 educational administration program with a certification in Urban Education at Michigan State University. As an interdisciplinary scholar, her research in [crosstalk 00:05:38] youth voice is engaged in K-12 and can inform a more critical youth center school leadership practice. Just as my colleague, Erin, just mentioned, please, please, please be sure to mute your microphones so that we don't get the background noise that I just heard. Thank you, Dr. Venzant Chambers and Courtney for being with us today. And I also would like to introduce the panelists for today. Give me one second. I'm not sure... Is Daniel Hyliard here, Dr. Chambers?

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**Dr. Chambers:** I didn't see him log in yet. He may join us.

**Robin J:** I'm going to introduce him anyway.

**Dr. Chambers:** Yeah. He may join, so just go ahead. And if not, we'll be all right.

**Robin J:** All right.

**Dr. Chambers:** [inaudible 00:06:36]. Be an all-female panel.

**Robin J:** Yes. So Mr. Daniel Hyliard serves as a ninth grade dean at Pioneer High School in Ann Arbor Public Schools. His focus is on the academic success and transition of ninth grade students at Pioneer. Mr. Hyliard has been in education for over 18 years, and is currently completing his EdD at Michigan State University in Education Leadership, with a dissertation focus on the implementation of multi-tiered systems of support in secondary schools.

**Robin J:** Alena Zachery-Ross is the Superintendent of Ypsilanti Community Schools, and was formerly the superintendent of schools for the Okemos Public Schools and Muskegon Heights Public School Academy System, the first public charter school district in the United States. She is recognized as being responsible for turning around the entire district profile, including student discipline, student and staff attendance, dropout rate, and graduation rate. Mrs. Zachery-Ross is currently pursuing an EdD in Educational Leadership at Michigan State University.

**Robin J:** Dr. Sarah Lenhoff is an Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies in Wayne State University's College of Education. Her research focuses on education policy implementation in equity examined through the lenses of social and organizational psychology. Her recent

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research has examined district and school infrastructure to support school improvement, the effects of school choice policy on equitable opportunities for students, and the causes and interventions to address student absenteeism. Currently, she also co-directs a Detroit education research partnership and research practice partnership with Detroit Public Schools community district and Every School Day Counts Detroit Coalition.

**Robin J:**

Finally, Dr. Bryan Beverly is currently acting director of the office of K-12 outreach in the College of Education, where his work is centered on school turnaround efforts and instructional leadership. He holds a PhD in Educational Policy from Michigan State University, is an alum and co-coordinator of Michigan's educational policy fellowship program, and is an elected member of the Lansing Board of Education. His other professional interests includes work with Presidents Council State Universities - Michigan, the State of Michigan Office of the Governor, Gear Up, Michigan State University and the Michigan Association of Counties. You guys are amazing. Thank you for being here. And now, I'll hand it over to Dr. Chambers and Ms. Mauldin.

**Dr. Chambers:**

Sounds good. Can everybody hear me? Okay, great. Well, good afternoon, everyone. And first, I just want to say thank you to Robin and Erin and the rest of the team for putting this event together. I'm looking forward to our conversation today. I'm sure you all are too. Before we get started with the panel, I just wanted to spend a brief amount of time sharing some perspective on why we're talking about school choice and desegregation. Michigan is an interesting context to talk about this topic, which is why our panelists all have a Michigan connection. But the issues we're going to talk about will have resonance for all of you beyond the state of Michigan, and you know that because you're here at this webinar. But

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the broader context is what I want to focus on briefly. Plus, we have Dr. Lenhoff on the panel who's an expert on these policy issues in Michigan, so I'll let her talk about the Michigan context.

**Dr. Chambers:** The issue of school choice and desegregation has particular significance to me. I'm a scholar who focuses broadly on desegregation, but my more recent research has looked at the experiences of high achieving students of Color, often in suburban school environments. But now that I'm on the school board in East Lansing, I'm seeing the interconnection of school choice and desegregation in even more interesting ways. There are some historical considerations that have fed this trend across the nation, but particularly in the Midwest. For example, while desegregation got a slow start after the *Brown* decision, it moved swiftly by the end of the 1960s. And so by the end of the 1980s, every school district in the south had moved toward desegregation. The same momentum did not occur in the north because of the Milliken Supreme Court decision, among other things, which created a different kind of challenge to achieving desegregation by taking inter-district busing off the table. So this fueled white-flight and allowed families, particularly white families, to move to whiter school districts.

**Dr. Chambers:** But the policy context is changing again, with the introduction of school choice options, open enrollment, options for enrollment outside your resident school district, charter schools, magnet schools, all of these options are available now. And so because of the stark racial segregation that we still see in schools, when students utilize choice, it often creates more diversity in the receiving districts. But unlike the intentional desegregation that was called for in the aftermath of the *Brown* decision, the demographic shifts that we're seeing today often happen as a byproduct

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of school choice. And so school leaders find themselves facing a more diverse student body, but not necessarily with a clear plan for how to meet those students' needs.

**Dr. Chambers:**

I mentioned that this is the research I'm doing now. Robin mentioned the podcast that I did last year, so I would point you to that if you're interested in that. But for this conversation, now that I've set the historical context for how school choice and desegregation are connected, I want to spend our time today hearing from various folks who can speak to these implications sort of on the ground as they've experienced them in their schools contexts. So we have Dr. Lenhoff, who I mentioned, is a school policy expert here in Michigan. We have two school board members. I think Bryan will be joining us. He's in Lansing, and I'm in East Lansing. We're going to talk about our perspectives with that. And then we'll hear from two school leaders, Alena Zachery-Ross and then, Dan Hyliard, who I also hope will be joining, who will talk about their perspectives from the administrative level. So I'll turn it over to Courtney Mauldin, and she's going to serve as the moderator for our conversation today. So, Courtney.

**Courtney M:**

Hi everyone. I just want to echo what Dr. Chambers just shared. Thank you all for joining us today. We encourage you to post questions in the chat box throughout the conversation, but we want you to know that we'll set aside time at the end of the panel questions to actually address the questions that come through the chat box. So I'd love for us to start with Dr. Lenhoff, and just get some background information so that our participants are more aware about what it is that you do, and what your context is that you're coming from. So Dr. Lenhoff, could you tell us about yourself and share some of your experiences with school policy work in Michigan?



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**Dr. Lenhoff:** Sure. Hello everyone. Thanks for having me. So I work at Wayne State University in Detroit and a lot of my work is based here in the city. And there's a lot of kind of history of school segregation here and school choice, so I think this is a really interesting place to do this work. A little bit of background about me. I actually grew up in Topeka, Kansas, the site of *Brown v. Board*, and went to desegregated schools, had a wonderful public school experience there, and was sort of unaware as a child of how little *Brown* actually worked to desegregate schools across the country. So many of you have probably heard... more recently, we've had kind of public reporting about how segregated our schools still are in the country, and a lot of research has suggested that we have even greater segregation than we did pre-board... Sorry, pre-*Brown*.

**Dr. Lenhoff:** So I'm really interested in how policy is sort of facilitating that segregation and how it maybe could improve the likelihood of desegregation, even across residential borders. So a lot of my work has to do with open enrollment, which is students being able to cross district borders and go to schools that aren't in their catchment areas. And so I'd love to... I don't know if now's the right time to kind of dig into a little bit of my research about what we've found in Detroit. Courtney, you want me to do that now or what...?

**Courtney M:** Yeah. So I think that would be perfect for going into the question that we have. Maybe you could put them together. So the question that I have specifically, is from your perspective, a macro-perspective, what would you say are the implications of school choice in desegregation efforts? So I think what you're going to share with your research will match perfectly with this question.



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**Dr. Lenhoff:** Yeah. So, I mean, on its face I think open enrollment has a lot of promise to aid in desegregating schools, right? The idea is that you're disconnecting students' residential address from where they go to school. We know that our residential segregation is deep. In a place like metro Detroit, it's pretty extreme. So you'll see Detroit, in the city, we've got about 85% Black residents. Across the region, it's less than 30%. So we have extreme residential segregation. And so one of the reasons why I think open enrollment is interesting to study is that it really has this kind of potential to create a pathway toward desegregating our schools.

**Dr. Lenhoff:** Right now, we have some of the deepest segregation in our schools in Michigan. And in Detroit, about 77% of our schools are racially isolated, meaning that they comprise 90% or more of the same race students. And you'll see in Detroit, that's a lot different than the metro area. So in our suburban schools in Detroit, just 14% of the schools are racially isolated in that way. So as you may know, we have open enrollment in Detroit. About a quarter of students who live in the city of Detroit actually go to school outside the city. So they cross the border. They go to traditional public school districts, or they go to charter schools outside the city. The charter schools are very racially isolated. So most of the largely Black students who are exiting Detroit for school are attending racially isolated Black charter schools. And about 10% of them are going to traditional public school districts. And a lot of my work has-

**Participant:** You got to scroll up.

**Dr. Lenhoff:** A lot of my work is focused on those students who are going to traditional districts since that's a real potential place for desegregation. Most of our suburban districts are not racially isolated. There's a lot more diversity there. So if students potentially could have access to non-segregated

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schools that could lead to kind of greater desegregation across the city, or across the metro area.

**Dr. Lenhoff:**

What we found is that state policy kind of facilitates districts in creating either pathways for desegregation or kind of constraints on those possibilities. So in Michigan, our state policy allows local districts to decide whether they want to be open to non-residents at all. So about 14% of the districts in metro Detroit, about 15%, don't allow school choice at all, and 60% restrict it in some way. So they restrict it to just students from their county, or they restrict the number of students that they'll allow in. And our research has found that any of those restrictions actually limits the potential for segregation. So because of the kind of unfortunate and strong correlations between race and socio-economic disadvantage, we see that families that are racially minoritized have a more difficult time navigating the school choice landscape if there are any kinds of restrictions or hoops that they have to jump through.

**Dr. Lenhoff:**

So for instance, a lot of suburban districts here do things like they create... can have a two week window in January where you have to apply for school choice during that window and if you miss it, then you're out of luck. Or they look at disciplinary records when determining admission. And because there's lots of research on the connection between race and over-discipline or exclusionary discipline, we see with that through that mechanism, sometimes racially minoritized students aren't sort of given the opportunity to exit if they want to. So there's a lot of ways in which districts can determine policies that either kind of facilitate or restrict the potential for desegregation.

**Courtney M:**

Thank you Dr. Lenhoff. So one last question for you for this segment of our time, you mentioned that open enrollment has the potential to create a

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pathway for desegregating schools. But how might other educators and these involved in policy work, how might they begin to address some of the issues that you're bringing up and discussing in terms of desegregation?

**Dr. Lenhoff:**

Yeah. It's really good question. I mean, both in Michigan but also across this country, we're seeing that our suburban districts are becoming more racially diverse, right? So they aren't as racially isolated as our city centers. And other researchers have found that in those contexts, Black students in particular are segregated within schools and within districts in ways such as tracking for college prep classes, or given certain opportunities for academic enrichment. And so I think I would encourage educators, district leaders, school board members to think about if they're seeing large numbers of students enter their school districts, and particularly if those students are of a different race than the majority of their residential population, then thinking about the ways in which the school structures themselves might be able to facilitate integration of the students into the full academic experience, and ensure that there's not things like opportunity hoarding going on in which white or affluent parents in the school are sort of fighting for privilege and advantage even as the school is becoming more diverse.

**Dr. Lenhoff:**

So we've seen a lot of examples of even in these contexts where they're becoming more racially diverse, there's this opportunity for integration, that often there are privileges given to whiter, affluent families because of their ability to advocate for certain things that some other families may not be able to or are interested in. So I think being conscious of that possibility and kind of proactively pursuing policies and practices that are inclusive rather than exclusive would be something I would really think about as you're seeing kind of changes in these demographics.

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- Courtney M:** Wonderful. Thank you for sharing that. So as we move from the policy perspective, we were going to transition to speaking with Dr. Venzant Chambers and Dr. Beverly, who I think just popped on the screen. Welcome, Dr. Beverly, to the discussion. We want to get some background information from you all as well again, to help the participants be able to kind of situate all of the perspectives that they're hearing. And so I would love if Dr. Venzant Chambers and Dr. Beverly could share a little bit about your path to becoming school board members, and give us some details about your respective districts.
- Dr. Chambers:** Sure. I'll start since Bryan's kind of coming in from another meeting with a high ranking official on campus. So I didn't see myself serving on a school board. It's not a path that I had set for myself. But as I became more involved in the district and various initiatives, I kind of fell into it. And then I felt like my background in education might be useful. And so two years ago I came into an appointment on the school board, and then last year I ran for election. So I'm in the first year of my first four-year term. So this is my second year. Our district, just really quickly, we have about 3,600 students. We're right outside Lansing, which is the state capital here in Michigan. We have six elementary schools, one middle school, one high school. And I'll talk about some demographic information later. Bryan?
- Dr. Beverly:** Good afternoon, everyone. Sorry for the delay. During my graduate work in educational policy, I participated in a professional development program called the Educational Policy Fellowship program, which exposed fellows to policymakers and the policy making process. I have a practitioner background as well as an advocacy background, and I thought it was incumbent upon myself to become engaged in the policy making process at a local level. Along the same time I had... my daughter was approaching

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school age and I recognized that it was an opportunity for me to stop talking about what they need to do in terms of school reform and wanted to begin being part of the conversation about what we need to do, and recognizing that there was a seat open on the school board in Lansing. And so threw my name in the hat and was one of nine people jockeying for three seats and I, luckily, was able to finish third behind the two incumbents, and have been on the board five years now. Up for re-election not this fall, but next fall.

**Dr. Beverly:**

Lansing is described as an urban district. We have right around 10,000 students based in the capital city, in Lansing. We have three high schools, and we are a district-wide free reduced lunch because our proportion is high enough for us to be district wide. And so every student in our district receives a free breakfast and free lunch. And we have a highly diverse population as well. We have STEM enrollment decline that we had experienced over the past 15 years. It plateaued over the last two years, mainly because we've enrolled so many refugee and immigrant students, and English-language learner students that have helped balanced our enrollment decline.

**Courtney M:**

Okay. Thank you both for sharing some background information so we could have a fuller picture of what types of districts you are coming from. I'd like to ask for you both to share your perspectives about the implications of school choice and desegregation efforts from your perspective in your context.

**Dr. Chambers:**

I'll go first and maybe you can go first on the next one, I don't know. But as I mentioned... wait, implications of school choice and desegregation, is that what you asked?

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- Courtney M:** Yes. And desegregation efforts. Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Dr. Chambers:** Okay. So I've been doing research in this area for some time, but being on the school board has allowed me to see these things from a different perspective. The biggest thing I've seen is the complexity of what's happening on the ground. Michigan is just emerging from a decade-long recession, and it's really longer than that if you factor in the declining auto manufacturing and the impact on our community as a results. For a long time, we in East Lansing were bringing in less through property taxes as a results. We're still recovering from that. On top of that, the state is also paying proportionally less than they have in the past. In fact, my colleague, David Arson just released a report showing that Michigan ranks dead last of all states in terms of revenue growth. So we're spending only about 85% of what we were spending in 1994 on education. So it's up to districts to make up the shortfall.
- Dr. Chambers:** We don't have a lot of mechanisms to do that, so the one option we do have is the schools of choice program that Dr. Lenhoff described. The revenue that we bring in from schools of choice absolutely has allowed us to continue to offer critical academic programming during this period. It helps us stabilize our enrollment. We're about 44% students of Color, and 34% economically disadvantaged. Not all of our diversity comes from schools of choice. We have plenty of students of Color in the district, like my family. I haven't looked specifically at the numbers, but we've certainly become more diverse over time since schools of choice was introduced. And like many districts, we serve a lot of students well, but we continue to struggle with the racial opportunity gap among many of our minoritized student groups. We're working on hiring more teachers of Color but that's also been issue. But we have some diversity in our administrative team.

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The high school principal and our curriculum director are both African American. And then we have me on the school board. But we also have a superintendent, a White woman, who completely and authentically [inaudible 00:28:54] in pushing our equity consciousness. But we have a long way to go, but at least, I think we know that. Bryan?

**Robin J:** Before you speak, Dr. Beverly, I just want to remind everyone to please mute the microphones when you're not speaking.

**Dr. Beverly:** Thank you for that reminder. I would just highlight the fact that Lansing is still operating under a court order from the 1970s around desegregation in transportation specifically. And so Lansing has had its challenges around desegregation. As it relates to school choice, I think that Lansing has benefited in some areas because of school choice and then have been on the negative side based on school choice as well. So I say benefit in the fact that it's forced us to be more competitive in terms of programmatic offerings. If you look at some of the programs that Lansing offers, those offerings aren't found in other surrounding districts. Some of those offerings include international baccalaureate programs, Chinese emersion programs, Spanish emersion programs, Montessori programs like that early age groups. And so schools of choice has kind of forced our hand in terms of programmatic offerings.

**Dr. Beverly:** But in terms of enrollment, Lansing, being... like I said, again, described as an urban district, has seen more than our share of students who live in the city but are attending school in the surrounding districts. And so that has had a negative impact in terms of funding obviously, with the funding being so closely coupled with enrollment. But I think that we've been intentional in terms of making sure that our programmatic offerings support the students that we do serve.

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- Courtney M:** Okay. Thank you for sharing. Dr. Chambers, we got a note that the last 30 seconds of what you said wasn't really able to be picked up. Could you repeat or summarize what it is that you said?
- Dr. Chambers:** I mean, I was just saying that we're working towards becoming more diverse in our teachers and our administration but it's just-
- Dr. Beverly:** That's a consistent goal for Lansing as well. We have recruiting efforts to historically Black colleges, historically Latin-serving institutions as well. We have a fairly diverse school board. There are two African Americans, three Hispanic Latinx. There is a Pakistani, and three Caucasians on the board. So it's a fairly diverse board as well.
- Courtney M:** Okay. So what would you all say is the relationship between East Lansing and Lansing when it comes to this issue of open enrollment that Dr. Lenhoff was able to share a little bit about earlier?
- Dr. Beverly:** Sure. I would start by saying that everyone in Ingham county, the county based organization of schools has a kind of a "gentleman's handshake" around schools of choice and not actively busing into particular school district boundaries for students. I know that that's not the case in every county in our area, but there's been an agreement among superintendents in our area. I think that in terms of student achievement, Lansing aspires to some of the academic achievement status that East Lansing has held for quite some time. They've been highly ranked in the state ranked top to bottom state rankings for several years now and Lansing aspires to that. There's no secret, Lansing loses quite a lot of students to surrounding districts, East Lansing being one of those. But again, I think that that competition has spurred Lansing to become more proactive in their academic offerings. I'm think about how we can distinguish ourselves from

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surrounding districts, and I think that students come to Lansing, they feel supported as well as feeling prepared for post-secondary options.

**Dr. Chambers:**

Yeah. So this one hits a little too close to my heart. So we, Lansing and East Lansing, are in a county with 12 different school districts in it, and then there are a few schools outside the district that are options too, charters, private schools in the mix. So students have a lot of options. But while we get students from all over, I'm also cognizant that we take quite a few students from Lansing. And it's a little bit of cognitive dissonance from me because I'm a huge fan of the Lansing school district. As Bryan has been talking about, they've been making some incredible strides lately and offer strong academic programs, and I know that there has been some historical sort of... maybe mistrust is too strong of a word, but we in East Lansing now have a superintendent like I mentioned, who's committed to creating a strong equity plan, and making sure that we're treating all students well regardless of their residential standing.

**Dr. Chambers:**

But if students are going to leave their district, I'd rather have them come to East Lansing where I know we're working hard to create a place where they're nurtured. And I just personally don't know that about all of the other options in our area, but that's still a sticky situation. I feel completely uncomfortable with the fact that ultimately, we're competing with one another instead of working to strengthen each other. When Lansing is strong, East Lansing is strong, but the state has created this adversarial relationship that even though we kind of tiptoe around it, it's not good for kids. And so as a researcher, I know what the right thing to do is for kids from the research. I know what the research says. But as a school board member, I know that the truth is often more complicated. I'm not giving up and I'm going to keep fighting. And Dr. Beverly is right there with me, I

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know. And part of that fight is having the kinds of conversations that we're having today. So that's what I would say.

**Courtney M:** Okay.

**Dr. Beverly:** I would concur with those comments.

**Courtney M:** Okay. So we're going to transition into speaking with Mrs. [Alena] Zachery-Ross, but then we're going to come back to a lot of the questions that have been posted in the group chat throughout which we really appreciate you all sharing your questions because they are going to be perfect for the discussion we've been having and want to continue to have. So let's see. Are you there, Mrs...there you are. All right. So for Alena, we'll have you do a similar kind of background, telling us about some of the various school context you've worked with and engaged in, and then from there, if you could share about any demographic shifts that you've witnessed over time with the implementation of school choice policy.

**Alena Z-R:** Thank you. Hello everyone. I will just talk about my experiences as a superintendent. This is my third superintendency. My first superintendency was in a school district that is truly segregated. It's in the lake shore of Michigan, and the school district actually exists and that's why it's the first of its kind in the nation because of almost the whole portion of the area wanting it to be segregated. It is 100% African American students attending there. The school district was closed by the state because of academic and financial difficulties. However, the other school districts in the area did not want the schools... Sorry. They're getting out of a session here in East Lansing. So sorry about that. We're doing a session here at MSU. So because of this... Sorry about this. Because of the difficulties, we saw quite a bit of segregation because the school district was created so that the

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students who are not accepted at schools of choice in the other areas could attend this school district.

**Alena Z-R:**

I then, was superintendent of a mid-sized district that did not really participate in schools of choice. There was very limited numbers that were accepted, and so we had very few schools of choice students there. And as you heard earlier, part of that was the socio-economic status, as well as the diversity that would be brought to the district. And so there was a very strict policy on having very limited numbers of schools of choice students. Where I am now is a mid-sized district right outside... I'm about 40 minutes from Detroit. We are right in the middle of university area so we're a pocket... less than a quarter of a mile from Eastern Michigan University and a mile from University of Michigan.

**Alena Z-R:**

So we have quite a bit of diversity. There's 70% diversity. And the students of Color in the district, 50% of them are African American students. We have Asian, Indian. It's quite a bit of variety. The school district is 100% free and reduced because of the high numbers of students who live in poverty. And we have a diverse population of staff members. The implications there are great however, because although you see the diversity of students in our district, we have about 4,000 students in our district. However, there are 8,000 students who live within the Ypsilanti community schools district boundaries. 3,000 of them attend schools of choice, and many of them are students who would really bring our diversity numbers higher, but those parents choose to go to our suburban counterparts who are more segregated.

**Alena Z-R:**

What's really interesting in my school district is that as the school board and administration saw the flight of those students, we opened a magnet school in our district. Within the district, that magnet school is an international

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baccalaureate school, and we see that it is very segregated. It includes a lot of parents and community members who live right within our boundaries who would truly not typically attend our schools. And so these parents choose this school, the IB school, and it is very segregated. And so we really look at those numbers and try to find out what we can do about it. Many of the parents do... they know how to navigate the system. And so they navigate the system really well, and some of the policies that we even have in place, now that I'm new to the district, we wonder about.

**Alena Z-R:**

Because if you attend the paid preschool program there, you can automatically... you don't have to go through the schools of choice raffle. You automatically are moved to the next grade within that school. So these parents get into preschool, they pay for preschool, and their children almost fill the entire building because they choose to come there in that way. So I see the implications of schools of choice truly causing our districts to suffer, our urban, inner city districts to suffer because the students and families who don't have the ability to choose or to be transported somewhere else, they are left in our schools, and typically, they are those who are either socioeconomically challenged, or they represent a group that is a minority group sub-pool.

**Courtney M:**

Thank you, Mrs. Zachery-Ross. That was very helpful. Before we transition into Q&A, I couldn't help but notice that you all are having some really... not different perspectives but perspectives that are needed so we're getting a fuller picture. But I would like for you all to kind of cross-converse, if that's a thing. This is completely not planned. But I think that it would be helpful to kind of hear you all build off of what you've heard other panelists say because I'm sure that it's also providing you all with some nuanced perspective to this issue of open enrollment, school choice, and

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desegregation efforts. So just maybe two minutes for you all to kind of converse across what you've heard. And then we'll move into the Q&A. If you want, Dr. Chambers, we could start with you.

**Dr. Chambers:** Oh, I was trying not to go first.

**Dr. Lenhoff:** If you want, I can jump in, Terah.

**Dr. Chambers:** Go ahead, Sarah. Yes, please.

**Dr. Lenhoff:** I just had one thought, which is that one of the things we've identified in our research is that there are just these competing incentives for opening your district borders to other students, right? I mean, there's obviously this financial incentive that's fairly straight forward. The more students you enroll, the more per person funding you can get, the better you can increase the academic experiences of your students. But there are these potential costs in terms of how do you adequately educate all students well, and particularly if students are coming into your district who are much further behind academically than the students in your districts, which a lot of research [inaudible 00:44:03] in Michigan, that's typically what we see, as well as these kind of perceptions of maybe kind of race or economic disadvantage.

**Dr. Lenhoff:** In our research we found that districts in metro Detroit, were more likely to be open to non-resident students the further away they were from large populations of Black students sort of indicating that there's maybe a, whether it's intentional or not, some sort of assumption that certain students might have a negative effect on your test score performance or some other dimension. So just want to mention that.

**Courtney M:** Anyone else before we transition into the Q&A portion?

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**Dr. Chambers:** I think I just would say... The thing that I'm surprised... No, not surprised by but just reassured by is that despite all of the ways that we know students of Color can be negatively affected in this process, when I work with school leaders, there is a genuine desire and interest by most to do something about these things when we realize what is happening. And I'm encouraged by that, that people are trying to do the right thing, most of the time. Yeah. Let's get into the Q&A because I know that there were a lot of questions in the chat.

**Courtney M:** Yes. So we're going to transition over to Erin, and Erin, if you could help me filter through some of the questions that we received as we started the discussion, and then those that came towards the middle and then the end. We have a couple of minutes to address a good amount of the questions.

**Erin S:** Yeah, sure. We have one question that came from Paula Jordan, and please feel free to chime in if I'm not correctly addressing your question. Her question was, it seems like a lot of the dialogue has been centered around students of Color and she was asking when we talk about school choice desegregation efforts, do you ever get into addressing the issues that are being experienced amongst students with disabilities?

**Dr. Beverly:** I would just offer that for Lansing, our programs that support students with disabilities have been an avenue for families to choice into the district. Lansing has strong programs that support autistic students, strong programs that support visibly impaired as well as severally physically impaired students. And so it's those programmatic offerings and structures that are in place families find quite beneficial to their students. And we've seen folks willing to travel with their children from a fairly far distance to take advantage of those programs.



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**Alena Z-R:**

I didn't address schools of choice with students with disabilities because in my current district, and what I've found in other districts as well, is that our local school districts do a wonderful job of providing robust and diverse programs and services for our students with special needs. So the students with disabilities tend to stay in the district and not go outside of the district because of the services they can receive in the local school district. Our typical schools of choice options are those that are charters, and they don't offer the types of services that are in our local school district. Another thing to think about, in Michigan, our intermediate school districts offer the services for our most severe students of need. So it doesn't matter what school district within our county the student would attend, they can still access those services within our schools. So we see less of a move with those students with disabilities in comparison to the other students with schools of choice.

**Dr. Chambers:**

Yeah. I think I would just make the global point too that, in general, Michigan is not doing well with funding for students with special needs. I don't think that should be a surprise to anyone, but it is an important kind of layering factor here that school districts are doing well, or striving to do better in spite of state funding, not because of it. And so you layer that on top of the other issues the other panelists have talked about, on top of the issues that Dr. Lenhoff mentioned around you need to provide your own transportation and do a lot of these things, it complicates an already very complicated landscape in ways that are not supportive to students with special needs at all.

**Erin S:**

Okay. And I know this question by Mr. Hasan was addressed in the chat box a little bit, but what are some of the responses that you've received

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from parents, caregivers that take advantage of open enrollment? Oh, was I on mute when I asked that?

**Dr. Chambers:** No, you weren't.

**Erin S:** Oh, okay. Sorry.

**Dr. Chambers:** I'm going to jump in here but I feel like I'm not the right person to respond to this. But it's interesting to me because on the one hand I hear every reason. I hear like, "We chose to come East Lansing because you have such great programs for special needs students." Then at the same time, I'll hear people who, "Oh, we choiced out of East Lansing into another district because they have better support services for students with special needs." So it's all... The perception is very widely varied, and research sort of suggests that too, that parents choose school... Actually, probably Dr. Lenhoff has better information about this but that parents choose schools based on factors that don't necessarily align with traditional measures of what a good school is and in some ways, that's good because those measures are problematic. But it also demonstrates that there are all kinds of motivating factors for why families choose or not chooses districts schools.

**Dr. Lenhoff:** Their social networks. That's the big one, right? People talk to their friends and their family. I mean, that's what a lot of the research has suggested, that that can really overwhelm even really high test scores or other things. And also, we found in Detroit that... like you were saying transportation. Distance to school really matters. We see a ton of school choice right around the border where your closest school is actually a choice school across the border rather than in the city. So things like that, kind of convenience factors also matter.

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**Dr. Chambers:** It's frustrating. Sorry to say again, but one of the schools in our district, one of the elementary schools that I think is one of our best elementary schools has some of the lowest test scores. And so there are some people who choose not to send their kids there when it's a great school, has a really strong leader, and is making, I mean, incredible strides in their school, doing really great, innovative things. But because people see test scores, and they're all kind of things that go into those kind of measures, they don't want to choose that school, and I think that that's... It's just, it's frustrating to me as a school board member, as a community member, as a parent to see this really great school and people have this perception that it's not as good. And that's not true.

**Erin S:** Dr. Chambers, I think that that is a good lead into one of our last questions. In Michigan, do you find examples of districts using both qualitative data and quantitative data as a means to show the achievement of a school environment? And that question, I hope, that's coming from Sarah Dennis and please feel free to chime in if I'm not getting exactly.

**Dr. Chambers:** Okay. I'll say really quickly that this to me is one of the negative implications of the era of high stakes testing and accountability that we're in that people feel compelled to follow the data, and to make data-driven decisions when the data is not on its own, really going to necessarily inform good decision making. We have moved away, in part because those are measures that don't count anymore, from student voice, from qualitative measures of what is important for kids, from all of these kinds of things that we know from our experience, especially some of the old heads in the audience who know back in the day when we didn't have this kind of high stakes testing environment, that we still cared very much about what tests said, what test scores were telling us and grades, but also these other

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factors. I think I am right in line with you in saying that there are other things that matter other than test scores and grades and more qualitative measures. I'm a proponent of student voice. These things should be taken into account too.

**Dr. Lenhoff:**

I'll just add that Michigan recently instituted a parent dashboard as part of our student information system and that allows school districts to report on the special programming they have at schools, whether they have before or aftercare, enrichment, things like that. And at least in metro Detroit, a lot of districts including or main public district here are taking advantage of that. I mean, they're trying to give comprehensive information about the entire schooling experience so that parents at least are able to access that information and use that in their decision making.

**Alena Z-R:**

Absolutely. Schooling now, where it's about, unfortunately we're about teaching and learning yet we are so much about marketing now that we're talking about the school of choice issue, we try to market all of our special programs. We try to market how we engage all types of learners. The thing that is in the paper, the thing that leads parents to make decisions and have perceptions about our schools is about our high stakes testing, which has changed every year in Michigan. So we do understand that there's so much more about a student than those summative test scores, yet this is what is publicized and how our schools are ranked.

**Dr. Beverly:**

I would concur with Alena's comments. I would also offer that Lansing takes student voice and parent voice quite seriously. Our office of school culture regularly surveys students, but also has held several focus groups among students around programmatic offerings, around district configuration, around curricular needs, and the same thing engaging our parent advisory council around those same content areas and topics. And

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so we take all of that quite seriously when we're developing strategic plans and then also implementing.

**Courtney M:** Okay. We're going to close the Q&A session here, but again, we want to thank you all for joining us today. And we also want to encourage you to tune into the previous podcast that Robin plugged for Dr. Chambers earlier, where she discusses how to support high achieving students of Color through the reduction of racial opportunity cost. I mention this podcast because she does give perspective and a detailed introduction on the relationship of *Brown v. Board* in the desegregation era if you're looking for more information, and to also look out for other upcoming... it's a vodcast, an upcoming vodcast that we'll be working on that also discusses more in depth questions that came out of this panel today.

**Dr. Chambers:** Thanks Courtney.

**Courtney M:** So I transition over to you, Robin. Thank you all.

**Erin S:** Okay, thank you so much, Courtney, for sharing that resource. And I put it in the chat box at the beginning, and I put it in again at the end, in case anybody wants to access it there. We want to thank each of you for participating in today's *EquiLearn Virtual Roundtable*. We also want to provide a special thanks to Dr. Terah Venzant Chambers and Courtney Mauldin for taking the time to be with us today, and an additional thank you to Alena Zachery-Ross, Dr. Sarah Lenhoff, Dr. Bryan Beverly for taking the time out of their schedules to be part of the roundtable, and sharing their expertise with us. We really appreciate it.

**Erin S:** In addition a couple of resources that we felt were connected to this topic. The first is a resource by Dr. Sarah Diem, and it's another *Virtual*

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*Roundtable* that's available for free access entitled *Making the Case for School Integration*. A second resource we'd like to share is one of our more recent *Equity Dispatch* newsletters entitled *Developing Authentically Socially-Just Spaces at the Systemic Level*. This newsletter is speaking to educational leaders within systems who, through policy and practice, pigeonholed K12 educators into inauthentic social justice roles. Next, we want to encourage you to visit our website for tools and resources in our Equity Resource library, such as our bi-monthly *Equity Dispatch* publication, our *Equity Spotlight* podcast series, and our *Equity Tools*. You can access all of these materials on our website, as well as stay abreast of upcoming events via our calendar of events.

**Erin S:**

Speaking of upcoming events, we have a couple coming up. First is two additional *EquiLearn Virtual Roundtables*. The first one is August 29th entitled *Advancing Inclusive Education for Students of Color with Learning Disabilities*. If you follow us on Facebook, the event for that went out today, and you'll be able to find information for that via our website, our Twitter or our Facebook. In this *Virtual Roundtable*, there will be an open dialogue space for those committed to inclusive education with a push to move from thinking about inclusion into general education to thinking about equity by design for students of Color with learning disabilities.

**Erin S:**

The second roundtable will be on September 30th, 2019, entitled *Magnet Schools in the 21st Century: Viable Integration Strategies or Sites of Segregation?* In this *Virtual Roundtable*, individuals from across the Midwest and Plains region that utilize magnet school admissions in their student assignment policies will discuss the pros and cons of magnet schools in their current school choice context, and offer insights about their

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efforts to provide integrated schooling environments. For more information, please visit our events calendar on our website.

**Erin S:**

Next, please join us for our fall Equity Leaders Institute on September 16th through the 17th, here in Indianapolis, Indiana, titled, *Moving Beyond Critical Reflection to Critical Action: Policy and School Governance*. This conference brings together educators and stakeholders from local and state education agencies to spend two days increasing participants' capacity to advance and sustain equitable practices in teaching and learning. Organizations are encouraged to send teams. For more info, please email us at [glec@iupui.edu](mailto:glec@iupui.edu).

**Robin J:**

Thank you so, so much, Erin. As Erin mentioned, please follow us on all of our social media. Follow us on Twitter at [@GreatLakesEAC](https://twitter.com/GreatLakesEAC). As a matter of fact, directly after this, for the next 15 minutes, we will continue the conversations. A lot of you had a lot of really good questions that we did not get to, so feel free to jump on Twitter with the hashtag #MAPEquity and continue those conversations. Also, like us on Facebook at Great Lakes Equity Center/Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center. And finally, last but not least, we have lots of professional learning like this all the time, and we are always looking forward to making them better. So Erin will post in the chat right now, our post-session questionnaire. We actually do look at that feedback and we incorporate it. So please take a moment to fill out that post-session questionnaire for us. I'd like to thank all of our panelists one more time for taking time out of your schedules today to be with us, and thank you for all the participants for being here today, as well.

**Dr. Chambers:**

Thanks, everyone. This has been great.

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