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Afterword

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Afterword

by MARGARET EGAN, SYMPOSIUM EDITOR

A meaningful education should be an unquestioned right in a free, modern and advanced society. However, the reality is that for most children, the public education system in America is failing. The *Public Interest Law Reporter* Symposium and Issue, “Separate and Unequal? The Socio-Economic Realities of Public Education in America” sought to expose the realities of the poor state of public schools, particularly urban public schools. We did just that.

Our presenters and authors have dedicated their lives to creating schools that every child needs – and deserves. Since *Brown v. Board of Education*, however, there has been a gradual re-segregation of schools. While this re-segregation may not always be explicitly race-based, there is little question that its roots are based in a cruel socio-economic reality. As our presenters and authors discuss, those students in failing schools are disproportionately minority students.

In fact, all of our presenters literally went into the hallways and classrooms, in Chicago and around the nation, to show you what has occurred since *Brown*.

There was discussion of the effects of reform at Chicago Public schools, the failures of the current public school funding structure in Illinois, the specialized needs of the poorest students, the practical progeny of the *Brown* decision and, finally, the potential mechanisms for reform. During these presentations, each of our panelists explored both the problems and the potential solutions in these critical areas.

Education has particular resonance here in Chicago. The Chicago Public Schools have been a source of great experimental reform. Some argue that the system's efforts to close failing schools in favor of charter schools has allowed many more children to obtain that meaningful education. Others suggest that these reform efforts help too few and ignore too many vulnerable students. Rather than closing some schools and forcing unlucky students into failing schools, many argue that funding should be increased to improve all schools both inside and out.

Is more funding always the answer? Or is proper funding the solution? PILR provides you with the arguments. Yet, as it stands, particularly in Illinois, the public schools' funding formula disproportionately favors children living in wealthy districts. As a result, children in wealthy districts have access to better teachers, administrators, counselors, equipment and opportunity. Is that proper?

Meanwhile, children in poor districts struggle to access most critical services. Few serious advocates for childhood education can disagree that the funding formula must be reformed so that children living in poor neighborhoods and those with specialized needs also have an opportunity at a meaningful education. When students struggle to satisfy their basic needs – such as food, health care, safety and transportation – the challenge to receive a basic education is much, much greater.

A student in the South Bronx wrote, "America the beautiful, who are you beautiful for?"¹ As the new presidential administration begins to craft and implement their education policy, PILR and the authors in this issue share the hope that advocates, policy makers and principals will be able to work with the administration to create real change in our public schools – change that helps educate all of America's children.

¹ JONATHAN KOZOL, *SAVAGE INEQUALITIES: CHILDREN IN AMERICA'S SCHOOLS* 112 (HARPER PERENNIAL 1991).