

No school should be an island of poverty

Imagine a public school where the children of doctors attend class with the children of fast food clerks. Imagine a school that draws students from Fairport and Greece, from Park Avenue and Hudson. Imagine a school where the test score gap between rich and poor is a crevice rather than a chasm.

There are schools like this all over the country. There's no reason that we can't have some in Rochester.

For the past couple of months, I have spent Monday evenings in the basement of Third Presbyterian Church with a group of people who want to make it happen.

We were the "Countywide Magnet Schools" work group of the Great Schools for All coalition, a group devoted to deconcentrating poverty in the Rochester School District.

Educational research shows that a school's chance of success increases greatly if the percentage of high-needs students is kept lower than 40. How many schools in the Rochester School District meet that criteria? Not one. At the Rochester elementary school named for Martin Luther King Jr., 98 percent of the students are considered economically disadvantaged.

In other parts of the country, this kind of economic segregation has gone the way of Jim Crow. Great Schools for All has taken a particular interest in schools in Raleigh, North Carolina. That region has a countywide district in which administrators have worked to keep the poverty population of schools below 40 percent. The GSFA website, (www.gs4a.org) points to data showing that roughly 70 percent of lowincome and minority students graduate on time in Raleigh, compared with around 40 percent in Rochester. Graduation rates for Raleigh's more affluent students remain at about 90 percent — similar to graduation rates in Rochester's suburban schools.

We don't have a countywide district, but that doesn't mean the Rochester region and its many school districts can't work together to deconcentrate poverty. The Countywide Magnet Schools work group looked for different ways to create high quality schools that could draw students from multiple districts. Other work groups explored ways to promote further expansion of the Urban Suburban program, promote regional planning, expand integrated summer learning programs and create more political and grass roots support for socioeconomically integrated schools.

All the groups will share our research and proposed action steps at an event Tuesday morning. Anyone is invited to the gathering, which will take place from 8 a.m. to 12:30 p.m at Mt. Olivet Baptist Church at 141 Adams St. in Rochester. Admission is free but registration would be appreciated. To register visit [gs4a.org/events/ spring-2015/](http://gs4a.org/events/spring-2015/)

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