

Gardiner Foundation Project  
 Governance  
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### Document Overview

The following document is a summary of the current research Alana Andrews and Jennifer Watters-Delahunt completed for the Gardiner Fellowship at Molloy College. The summary of investigation includes a section on overarching themes, a timeline of historical events relevant to the overarching research question, a potential framework that can be used for the literature review, and our interview protocol.

### I. Overarching Themes

After a review of the literature and previous interviews conducted, we have determined 1 Key Framework and 4 themes about Long Island and the topic of Governance. Alana Andrews and Jennifer Watters-Delahunt separated Governance into two subtopics impacting Long Island. School Consolidation and Long Island Segregation and the Impact on Education.

**Key Framework: Critical Race Theory** - Critical race theory (CRT) points out that in the United States, the problems of racial bias and an emphasis on property rights rather than human rights are integral to understanding inequity broadly speaking as well as in education. CRT is an approach that offers various ways to challenge distorted ideas many White people have regarding people of color. Looking through the lens of CRT means challenging the ideas that: a) students of color do not have culturally appropriate knowledge according to the hierarchies of the dominant elements in society when entering school, 2) families of color are not as invested in education as White families, or 3) people of color are not as intellectually capable as Whites (Yosso, 2005). To this point, analyzing the interchange of race and property is imperative to understanding the gaps in education between Black and Brown students and their White counterparts (Ladson Billings & Tate, 1995). Acknowledging that race plays a very important part in where people live and where they send their children to school would mean the acknowledgment of individual bias and prejudice and overgeneralized assumptions of others based on their racial makeup.

**Theme 1: Why Boundaries Matter for schools** – According to the Long Island Community Foundation (2014), “The Fiscal Policy Institute indicated that nine of the eleven New York State school districts with the largest proportion of Black and Hispanic students are on Long Island: all nine are high poverty, high need districts, have the highest percentage of English Language Learners, and are among the lowest performing districts in the region” (p.1). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argued the cause of poverty in conjunction with the conditions of their schools and schooling is institutional and structural racism. There is massive systemic inequality of outcomes based on racially biased decisions. Darling-Hammond (2009) stated, funding systems allocate fewer resources to poor urban districts than to their suburban neighbors, but studies consistently show that, *within* these districts, schools

with high concentrations of low-income and “minority” students receive fewer instructional resources than others in the same district. In addition to policies associated with school funding, resource distribution and tracking leave students from diverse cultural backgrounds with fewer and lower-quality books, curriculum materials, laboratories, and computers; larger class sizes; less qualified and experienced teachers; and less access to high-quality curriculum.

**Theme 2: Long Island Segregation** – On Long Island, the site of this study, school segregation has intensified over the past two decades, even as the public-school student population has diversified. Kuscera & Orfield (2014) found that the percentage of intensely segregated schools with less than 10% White students has increased from 4% in the 1989-1990 school year to 11% in the 2010-2011 school year. Additionally, the percentage of schools with mostly students of color – those that are 50-100% Black and Latino students has doubled over the same period of time (Kuscera & Orfield, 2014). A Long Island organization that studies school segregation on Long Island, called ERASE Racism (2015), found the following:

With the release of the 2010 Census data although Long Island has become more racially diverse it continues to be one of the most segregated regions in the country, ranking tenth in terms of the highest levels of segregation between blacks and whites. (p. 2)

According to the Long Island Community Foundation (2014) “The Fiscal Policy Institute indicated that nine of the eleven New York State school districts with the largest proportion of black and Hispanic students are on Long Island: all nine are high poverty, high need districts, have the highest percentage of English Language Learners, and are among the lowest performing districts in the region” (p.1). “Not only do the 10 neediest school districts on Long Island educate 93 percent of Latino and African American students and 70 percent of students living in poverty; additionally, they are owed 485 million in aid won in a lawsuit brought by the Campaign for Fiscal Equity” (Martinez, 2017, p. 2).

**Theme 3: School Consolidation** – The Long Island region of New York is divided into two counties, Nassau County and Suffolk County. Governmental boundaries such as villages, towns, cities, and hamlets within Long Island contributes to it being a fragmented region that keep structures and boundaries in place. The impact of these boundaries is visible in the number of small school districts on Long Island. According to an ERASE Racism (2010) report, Long Island has 124 school districts, Nassau County has 56, and Suffolk County has 68. Thompson (2014) found that school consolidation will offers many benefits to Long Island in finances, instruction, demographics, and enrollment. According to the ERASE Racism (2010) report, alternatives to 124 school districts include reducing the number of school districts, which will lead to more ethnically diverse and economically equitable schools. The creation of magnet schools, school choice, and family preferences are possible alternatives to district consolidation (ERASE Racism, 2010; Torres & Weissbourd, 2020). In the context of increasing diversity, equity and inclusion on Long Island, school district consolidation serves to improve diversity as described in research of the Morris School model district integration plan (Roda, 2017).

**Theme 4: School Funding and Property Taxes** – Intellectual property is an additional example of property according to CRT. Ladson- Billings and Tate (1995) demonstrated that curriculum represents a form of intellectual property. The tying of property values and taxes to

how much funding a school receives results in students in higher priced and higher taxed neighborhoods being exposed to better curriculum offerings, including a wider array of electives and AP courses (Faryon & Crowe, 2011).

### Summary Points from Previous Interviews

Long Island is an area with racially segregated neighborhoods. Community members of color are treated unfairly when it comes to resources, access to transportation hubs, and education opportunities. Many communities of color see increases in cancer clusters due to dangerous environmental dumping. Race is a topic that is ignored by many communities on Long Island and many communities are okay with neighborhood and school racial segregation. Equality on various levels is increasingly discussed at numerous societal levels; however, no clear solutions are foreseen. Long Island was developed with discriminatory principles, and this continues to have a very significant impact on our economic development and on our sustainability, regionally.

Long Island is not only segregated by race and socioeconomic difference but it also politically divided. Being a Long Islander carries with it a sense of pride, from the town you purchase your home and your child's school district. Schools and housing are interconnected, property taxes are drivers of this relationship. De-facto segregation has historically impacted Long Island communities and schools. While few school districts on Long Island have begun efforts to de-track by removing honors class, students that live in poverty generally perform poorer in school and have less access to quality education. Decisions such as de-tracking must be approved by school boards since school districts are local on Long Island. The board must support superintendents and their vision, at times this can be an issue because boards tend to be political. As for politics, legislators and superintendents need to be real leaders and stand up for what they feel is right for the students of Long Island and not be stronghold by NYS Education Department.

II. Historical Events and Turning Points:	
Time	Event
1947	<b>Levitt &amp; Sons</b> (development of Levittown) - The developers of Levittown prohibited people of color from moving in through contract clauses, a common practice at the time. Restrictive racial covenants were recommended by the Federal Housing Administration to create homogenous communities. The U.S. Supreme Court struck them down in 1948, but William Levitt kept them.
1948	<b>Shelley v Kraemer</b> (a landmark United States Supreme Court case that struck down racially restrictive housing covenants).
1948	<b>Princeton Plan</b> (eliminates the use of geographic district lines to assign students to schools and instead puts all same-age kids together).

<b>1954</b>	<b>Brown vs. Board of Education</b> (a landmark 1954 Supreme Court case in which the justices ruled unanimously that racial segregation of children in public schools was unconstitutional).
<b>1961</b>	<b>NYS Education Commission James Allen Jr.</b> ordered superintendents of school districts across the state to complete a “racial census of elementary schools.”
<b>1963</b>	Princeton Plan proposed in Malverne, NY by James Allen Jr: School rezoning for integration barred by court in 1964. Decision was overturned 6 months later by the appellate court.
<b>1965</b>	NYS School District Reorganization stopped; litigation forced to balance Malverne public schools based on race – some White parents opted to send their kids to private school.
<b>1968</b>	<b>Fair Housing Act</b> (prohibited discrimination concerning the sale, rental and financing of <b>housing</b> based on race, religion, national origin, or sex).
<b>1968</b>	<b>Jones v Mayer Co.</b> (a landmark United States Supreme Court case, which held that Congress could regulate the sale of private property to prevent racial discrimination.)
<b>1950s, 1960s, 1970s</b>	The Great Migration of blacks from the South to the North seeking greater opportunity brought an influx of Black people to Long Island.
<b>1970s</b>	Nassau County social service agencies began steering families receiving welfare and housing subsidies toward Roosevelt, LI
<b>1974</b>	<b>Milliken vs. Bradley</b> (In a 5-to-4 decision, the Court held that "[w]ith no showing of significant violation by the 53 outlying school districts and no evidence of any interdistrict violation or effect," the district court's remedy was "wholly impermissible" and not justified by <i>Brown v Board of Education</i> . The Court noted that desegregation, "in the sense of dismantling a dual school system," did not require "any particular racial balance in each school, grade or classroom." The Court also emphasized the importance of local control over the operation of schools.)
<b>1976</b>	Wheatley Heights Neighborhood Coalition filed the first Long Island-based federal court suit alleging steering by real estate companies and agents.
<b>1997</b>	Mattituck-Cutchogue district annexed Laurel
<b>2004</b>	Eastport and South Manor formed a new centralized district

Proposed Data Collection Methods	
Interviews, Historical Society Document Review and Analysis, Court Case Analysis, School District Consolidation History Analysis, Long Island Segregation Analysis	
Potential Participants	
Executive of nonprofit advocacy organization addressing racism	
Nassau County school district superintendent	
Mr. Andrew Tobin Suffolk County assistant superintendent for finance and operations	
Social justice activist in Nassau County	
Tax attorney on Long Island	
Civil rights attorney on Long Island	
NYS Assemblywoman	
Village historian in Nassau County	
NY Community for Chance (CBO) - LI Chapter	
Nassau County school district superintendent	
NYS Regent	
Town supervisor	
Town receiver of taxes	
Real estate professional and water commissioner	
Interview Protocol	
<p><b>For all respondents:</b> The study will be explained to the subject by the interviewer(s), the consent will be read, and the subject's questions answered. The subject will sign the consent form and indicate whether his/her real name can be used or whether they prefer confidentiality. A dated and signed copy will be given to the subject.</p> <p><b>Brief Project Description:</b> The purpose of the study is to examine the history of Governance on Long Island to understand how the past informs the present. <i>Gardiner Fellows</i> will be engaged in an ongoing process of researching and compiling the historical context of laws and policies to provide insight into forces/interests that shape and continue to shape factors such as school district consolidation, taxes, and zoning policies.</p>	

## **I. Introduction:**

Please state your name.

Probe: Can you tell us about yourself and your background.

How did you come to live or work on Long Island?

How would you describe what it means to be a 'Long Islander'?

Probe: Do you feel that Long Island is a racially cohesive community?

How does that definition differ by county, regional location, or town/village/hamlet?

What are your experiences with the education system on Long Island?

Did you and/or your children attend a pre-K – 12 school on Long Island?

Probe: Public or private school? What was the basis of your decision?

## **II. Historical Factors and Influences:**

Now we would like to ask you questions about how Long Island got to this point in time...

1. What are the biggest challenges facing housing/neighborhoods on Long Island today?

2. What are the biggest challenges facing schools on Long Island today?

3. Based on your knowledge, what do you consider to be the major historical events on Long Island that got us to where we are today with housing and schools?

Probe: Related to zoning laws, governmental boundaries such as villages, towns, cities, hamlets, etc.

Probe: How does it impact school district zoning and funding?

Probe (Historian) – What are the primary historical events that impacted school district boundary lines on Long Island?

4. The number of predominantly White districts between 1998 and 2008 dropped substantially, meaning that many districts that used to be predominantly White are now demographically changing which is putting pressure on local municipalities to create more affordable/low-income housing. In these demographically shifting SDs, have there been any battles between fair housing advocates and local zoning boards to create more affordable/low-income housing? Explain.

5. Has there been any progressive policies or recent reforms for equity enacted to address the current school district boundaries in place? What was the community response?

Probe: Roosevelt plan for consolidation that they fought against

6. What Long Island communities would be in favor of school consolidation? Why?

Probe: Do you think race and racism would factor into a community's decision to consolidate? NIMBYISM, socio-economic reasons, resource distribution, housing values?

7. In your opinion, what are the main barriers that stand in the way of school district consolidation?

Probe: Political opposition would be tough in some areas, strong localism, SD identity, and property tax changes are barriers to overcome.

8. What are the main incentives for consolidation?

Probe: More targeted resources, no concentration of poverty, racial integration, etc.?

9. How would district consolidation impact various groups (e.g., high-income residents, low-income residents, residents in specific districts, white or nonwhite residents, students, teachers, administrators, elected officials)?

### ***III. Influential actors that influenced Long Island's history***

1. Who are the people you consider to be key players as it relates to school district governance on Long Island?

What have they done or tried, and why was it successful or not?

Probe: Are there any past or current reforms that have helped with district segregation, e.g., consolidation, desegregation plans in Malverne, high school district consolidation, others?

Probe: What is the relationship between who is in power and what decisions get made? Do you think that if policymakers represented the racial diversity on Long Island, we would have more progressive and/or equitable policies enacted?

2. Suburban school districts in the north and Midwest are highly fragmented or broken up into tiny jurisdictions. Nassau County is highly diverse, but it is also one of the most segregated areas in the U.S. because it contains multiple boundary lines that keep certain people in and certain people out. Are there any ongoing initiatives to make school districts more equitable and inclusive by race, social class, language ability, immigrant status, etc?

Probe: In terms of affordable housing, equitable school funding, student diversity efforts, teacher representation, non-punitive discipline policies?

Probe: Name initiative and organization affiliated

3. There are 56 school districts in Nassau and 68 in Suffolk County. Most other NY counties only have 15 districts. This makes Long Island an outlier. Would you support a school district or regional district consolidation plan? Why or why not?

Probe: If consolidation was approved, what steps do you think would have to be taken on Long Island to act on or create a school or regional district consolidation plan?

Probe: What do you think of ERASE Racism's idea to consolidate by town or city boundaries, which would make the number of districts drop from 56 in Nassau down to 5, and 68 in Suffolk down to 10?

4. Would you support changing school district boundary lines for racial diversity purposes? Why or why not?

5. Would you support creating county-wide magnet schools or vocational schools with diversity as a main goal? Why or why not?

6. Do you think current and past government policies on Long Island impact the perpetuation of the racial divide on Long Island?

Probe - Can you give some examples?

#### ***IV. Successes and challenges of Long Island's historical legacy and contemporary story***

1. Do you envision any changes to the way county taxes are accumulated and assessed on Long Island for greater equity?

Probe: What if school districts were to be consolidated?

2. Do you think that the lack of true long-term tax/monetary benefits to taxpayers' incentives for all districts involved in consolidation is intentional?

3. How can fair and affordable housing practices mitigate the need for school district consolidation?

4. What ideas do you have to counter systemic racist practices perpetuated on Long Island to support resource- starved districts?

5. Per pupil spending is \$26,000 for high-income districts compared to \$18K for low-income districts. How do you feel about the relationship between property taxes and school funding on Long Island?

Probe: Would you support a proportional tax funded school system on Long Island? Why or why not?

Probe: Do you think there is a more equitable way to distribute funds?

6. What housing and school remedies do you feel would create a more racially cohesive Long Island?



Are there certain communities that would be more open to these policy changes than others? Why?

Is there anything else you would like to add to anything you said? Are there questions that I should have asked that I didn't?

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