

Tulsa World - Opinion Section - Sept. 1, 2014

## Are Tulsa schools re-segregating?

By EDWIN ROSSMAN AND ANN PATTON

This year marks the 60th anniversary of the Brown v. Topeka Board of Education Supreme Court decision to end racial segregation of public schools.

Following that landmark decision and some long social upheaval, remarkable changes occurred in Tulsa and elsewhere to dismantle dual school systems and address inequalities that arose from “separate but unequal” education systems.

Americans were beginning to recognize the importance of doing away with social isolation to ensure social justice for all. Tulsa became a leader with its nationally acclaimed voluntary desegregation program that created Booker T. Washington, Carver, other distinguished magnet schools, and peaceful progress by people of good will.

By 1988, according to the UCLA Civil Rights Project, the percentage of black children in Southern white schools had risen from zero to nearly 44 percent. But by 2011, the percentage of black students in majority-white schools was 23.2 percent — slightly lower than it was in 1968.

In response to recent court rulings and complex societal forces, poor and minority children were increasingly isolated in poverty-pocket neighborhoods and public schools, and more and more families who could afford it were choosing other options to educate their children.

In commemoration of the 1954 Brown ruling on school segregation, local educators and leaders will on Thursday discuss trends toward school re-segregation — now a multi-racial issue and heavily influenced by poverty and housing patterns.

Sponsored by the Dan Allen Center for Social Justice, the forum will discuss current trends that are isolating poor and minority children in severely under-financed public schools, threatening to undermine our national commitment to create a balanced society with equal opportunity for all.

**Speakers will include Keith Ballard, Tulsa Public Schools; David Blatt, Oklahoma Policy Institute; Ed Martinez, Jr., Hispanic Chamber of Commerce; Jocelyn Payne, John Hope Franklin Center for Reconciliation; and Laura Ross White, Community Service Council of Greater Tulsa.**



New graduates celebrate the end of high school with their classmates, families and teachers in May. JACKIE DOBSON/Tulsa World

### RESEGREGATING TULSA SCHOOLS – A Community Discussion Forum

**When:** 6:30-8:30 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 4, 2014

**Where:** Rudisill Regional Library, 1520 N. Hartford Ave.

**Sponsor:** The Dan Allen Center for Social Justice.

#### Key questions

Sixty years after the “Brown” decision, where is Tulsa in meeting the spirit of that landmark ruling?

What is the legacy of the hard-fought battle to address segregation and social isolation in Tulsa and its schools?

Are current economic, demographic, and policy trends leading to Tulsa being re-segregated?

Have Tulsa’s efforts to address de jure segregation under-addressed the factors contributing to de facto segregation?

Are our schools a “canary in the mine” warning of broader social trends?

Is there still merit to actively seeking diversity in our schools and our neighborhoods?

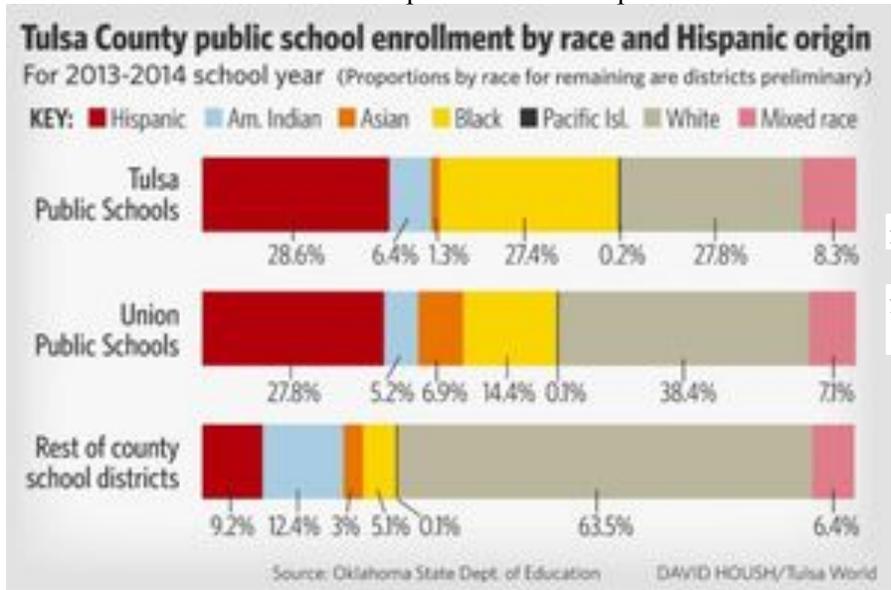
Tulsa Community Service Council data show that racial diversity and poverty are increasingly concentrated in areas served by Tulsa Public Schools. More than 88 percent of TPS students now qualify for free or reduced lunches, while only 27.8 percent of TPS students are classified as non-Hispanic whites. Hispanics are now the leading minority in both TPS and Union Public Schools. By comparison, in the remainder of county, 63.5 percent of public school students are white.

Those trends are well-established. Of future students, those now under 6 years of age, 62.3 percent of the city of Tulsa are classified as poor (with family incomes of around \$36,000 a family of three). In some census tracts, percent of the children live in poverty.

And the city of Tulsa is experiencing little growth among the young, except among Hispanics. Tulsa's non-Hispanic youngsters under age 18 decreased by almost 8,000 (about 6 percent) from 2000 to 2010, while Hispanics increased by 14,200 (116 percent), according to Community Service Council information.

Meanwhile, the legal landscape is changing. According to a Civil Rights Project report, the Supreme Court has fundamentally changed desegregation law, and many major desegregation plans have ended. The Civil Rights Project found that black and Latino students tend to be in schools with a substantial majority of poor children, while white and Asian students typically attend middle-class schools. The report says segregation occurs simultaneously across race and poverty. It reports that since the civil rights era, the nation's school population is being vastly transformed, now showing almost 30 percent fewer white students and nearly quintupling Latino students.

Any celebration of the Brown anniversary should recognize that "there is a deepening polarization and inequality in our schools," said the Civil Rights Project report's co-author Gary Orfield. "It is time to stop celebrating a version of history that ignores our last quarter century of retreat and begin to make new history by finding ways to apply the vision of Brown in a transformed, multiracial society in another century."



in  
for  
100



Ed Rossman



Ann Patton

Edwin Rossman, Ph.D., is president of the Dan Allen Center for Social Justice. He is a sociologist with 30 years' experience in water resources planning.

Ann Patton is a Dan Allen Center for Social Justice board member and author of "Dan's War on Poverty: A Grassroots Crusade for Social Justice," as well as a forthcoming book, "The Tulsa River."