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New Agenda Brief from The Century Foundation:

**TO TURN AROUND LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOLS, “SEPARATE BUT EQUAL”
DOESN’T MAKE THE GRADE**

Nov. 12, 2009, Washington, DC — Education Secretary Arne Duncan’s far-reaching efforts to transform the country’s lowest-performing schools into successful ones don’t reach far enough, according to a new report from The Century Foundation. In [“Turnaround Schools That Work: Moving Beyond Separate but Equal.”](#) TCF Senior Fellow Richard Kahlenberg details why “turnaround” approaches that focus on changing principals and teachers but fail to address issues related to parents and students have fallen short of expectations. In the report, he also looks at charter schools, such as Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) schools and the Harlem Children’s Zone (HCZ) Promise Academies. He finds that, while these schools have been highly successful with low income students, the models would not likely be successfully employed to improve student achievement in the nation’s five thousand lowest-performing public schools, which are the focus of Duncan’s current efforts.

In the brief, Kahlenberg reviews the differences between high- and low-poverty schools in terms of student aspirations, preparedness, mobility, and behavior; parental involvement and political power to push for more resources for their child’s school; and teachers’ quality, experience, attrition, and likelihood to be teaching out of their fields in core academic subjects. He quotes several researchers who believe that, in order to attract and retain highly qualified teachers in high poverty schools, their salaries would need to be increased by 25 to 43 percent. He also reports that there is no evidence that teachers unions—a common scapegoat for school failures—adversely affect student achievement.

He finds that the successful charter schools in high-poverty areas are not “scalable” because they rely on self-selected motivated students and parents, who apply to the schools, and are willing to participate in programs that include longer school days, parent contracts, and required weekend activities. In addition, teachers are often required to work longer days and be available to students and parents during the evening hours. Statistics show high attrition rates for students and teachers in many of these models.

Kahlenberg recommends using magnet schools that integrate students by socioeconomic status as a better approach to turning around schools. While acknowledging that there are both

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successful and unsuccessful magnet schools, he reports that there is evidence of school districts around the country that have successfully used this approach to raise student achievement. He notes that turning around failing schools through magnet programs relies on positive incentives rather than compulsory busing, which overcomes a political obstacle that previous integration plans faced.

According to the report, the number of districts using socioeconomic status in student assignment has increased dramatically over the past decade, and includes jurisdictions from Omaha, Nebraska, to San Francisco, California; from La Crosse, Wisconsin, to McKinney, Texas. He writes that 3.5 million students live in roughly 70 school districts with some form of socioeconomic integration plan in place. The most recent addition to that list came this week when Chicago, Illinois, proposed a socioeconomic integration plan in its school districts. [“Turnaround Schools that Work: Moving Beyond Separate but Equal”](#) is part of [The Agenda](#), a series of briefs from The Century Foundation that puts forward specific ideas for making progress in addressing crucial challenges facing the United States. The proposals in the series are built on innovations that have already proven to be effective. [“Turnaround Schools that Work: Moving Beyond Separate but Equal”](#) can be downloaded from The Century Foundation Web site at www.tcf.org. More information on socioeconomic school integration is also available on TCF’s education site, www.equaleducation.org. For more information or to request an interview with Richard Kahlenberg, please contact Christy Hicks at hicks@tcf.org or (212) 452-7723.

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