

# New Jersey Coalition of Religious Leaders: Racial Justice One-Pager

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Throughout our state, decades of federal and state policy have led to a reality in which our statewide demographics are diverse, but the demographics of individuals communities often do not reflect that statewide diversity. As a result, the majority of our communities – and our approximately 600 school districts – do not reflect our state’s racial diversity. In 2018, a group of 9 individual student plaintiffs plus advocacy and faith organizations including the United Methodist Church, the Latino Action Network, the NAACP New Jersey Statewide Conference, and the Urban League of Essex County set out to change this by filing a lawsuit, *Latino Action Network et al. v. State of New Jersey*, seeking a statewide remedy to the racial segregation of New Jersey’s public-school students.

## Our Moral Moment

### **New Jersey Constitution of 1947, Article I, § 5**

“No person shall be . . . segregated . . . in the public schools, because of religious principles, race, color, ancestry or national origins.”

**VS.**

### **New Jersey’s Reality**

New Jersey has the 6<sup>th</sup> most segregated schools in the country for Black children and the 7<sup>th</sup> most for Latino/a/x children

New Jersey’s constitution is rare in that it contains language expressly prohibiting segregation in our state’s public schools. The trial court’s first major decision was issued on October 6, 2023. At this moment, the parties are engaged in a confidential mediation process seeking to settle the lawsuit.

### What Can the New Jersey Coalition of Religious Leaders Do?

Although most of us are not parties to the case, and as a result we have no direct role in ratifying remedies, there is work to be done to prepare our congregations and broader communities for the idea that our state’s schools may need to implement some major changes in how students are assigned to buildings, especially across districts.

Segregation affects all of us. As faith leaders, we can use our pulpits to bring our people together across lines of race

and faith to share our stories of how integration or segregation have affected our lives so that we see that we have more in common than what divides us. We can call for two-way solutions that do not put the entire burden of integrating schools on communities of color. We can also work to prepare our congregations and communities to be welcoming to all children, and work in coalition with groups like the Statewide Equity Committee to call for public policy that ensures that our state’s teachers, administrators, and boards of education are prepared to provide welcoming and supportive education environments for all children. We can also help lead our congregations to support affordable housing policy, as our state’s racial wealth gap means that affordable housing is also a pathway to diversity.

## Visualization of NJ Public School Racial Demographics

