

Education News & Notes

50 Years Later, *Brown v. Board of Education* Tells Us to 'Get in the Way'

by Kurt Landgraf, President and CEO, Educational Testing Service (ETS)

(NAPSA)—Fifty years ago, a group of parents changed America, winning a court case that overturned racial segregation in the public schools. The U.S. Supreme Court's May 17, 1954, decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* held that "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal."

But as history students know, we study the past to learn about the present and build a better future. *Brown's* lesson for today is that, for all the progress it reflected and encouraged, America's schools remain menaced by segregation. The division now is not just between Black and White, but between White and non-White; urban, suburban and rural; native and immigrant; affluent and poor. These divisions are reflected in the achievement gap.

Research by Harvard University's Civil Rights Project, for example, says minority students have no better than a 50-50 chance of graduating high school. Perhaps saddest of all, the Harvard research found that outside the South and Southwest, most White students have little contact with minority students.

The conclusion for today, then, is much the same as it was 50 years ago: "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal."

U.S. Rep. John Lewis of Georgia, one of America's leading civil rights figures, recently spoke with one of my ETS colleagues. Lewis



said he became involved in sit-ins to be an obstacle to inequality. As he put it, "That was my way of saying, 'We must get in the way.'"

If we're to close the achievement gap and fulfill the mandate of *Brown*, we, too, must "get in the way" of the status quo.

Raising standards and strengthening accountability in every public school are part of that effort. So, too, are assessments, which tell us whether students know what they are required to know, and so help us improve teaching and learning.

The *Brown* decision demonstrates that individuals fired by a passion for justice can change the world. It is the challenge of our time to finish what *Brown* began. As John Lewis says, "We should teach our young people that we all live in this country together, that we all live in the same house. I call it the American house."

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