

Magnet Schools

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SEF Position

SEF supports the advancement of high-quality magnet schools that promote racial and socio-economic diversity.

Background

Since being founded in the early 1970s at Houston's School of Visual and Performing Arts, magnet schools have evolved to become one of the most popular methods of school choice for students with specialized or focused interests beyond the scope of a conventional public school. Today, over 2.6 million students attend 3,400 magnet schools in 600 school districts spread across 34 states. In the South, the most magnet schools can be found in Florida, North Carolina, and Texas, where in the majority of cases, school districts designate and establish the magnet schools.¹

Due to the significant role magnet schools played and continue to play in desegregating American schools, the U.S. Department of Education began providing federal funding to magnet schools in 1976 under the Magnet Schools Assistance Program (MSAP). Currently, MSAP funds magnet schools at \$92M annually, a steady reduction from \$105M in 2009.² Throughout their existence, magnet schools have created greater opportunities for students of color and low-income students by promoting desegregated learning in a high-quality, challenging environment.



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Benefits of High-Quality Magnet Schools

- Research studies on magnet schools have generally found positive effects on achievement, graduation rates, student motivation and satisfaction with school, teacher motivation and morale, parent satisfaction, intergroup relationships, and integration.
- High-quality, inclusive magnet schools provide ample opportunities for students to explore their academic and professional interests while still receiving an accountability-driven public education.

SEF Recommendations



- Increase funding for the Magnet Schools Assistance Program (MSAP), a federal grant program geared toward providing magnet schools with the funding required to fulfill their students' specialized interests.



- Establish and fund federal programs that support state and local efforts to create greater inter- and intra-district and school diversity, and that support the success of students from underrepresented groups.



- Encourage a college-preparatory, STEM-focused magnet curriculum for all by securing well-prepared STEM teachers and professionalized teaching staffs.

End Notes

1. Cookson, P. W., Jr., Darling-Hammond, L., Rothman, R., & Shields, P. M. (2018). The Tapestry of American Public Education: How we can Create a System of Schools Worth Choosing for All? Learning Policy Institute. Retrieved from <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/tapestry-american-public-education-report>.
2. U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.) Magnet school assistance. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/magnet/funding.html>.