

# Understanding the Language of School Integration

When discussing racial equity in schools, there are several important and unique terms, such as integration and resegregation, that may be unfamiliar or mean different things to different people. Because these terms are frequently used in such discussions, it is important to work from shared definitions. The following list includes these commonly used terms and their definitions, as defined by ADL.

## ***Desegregation***

Desegregation describes the efforts to eliminate *segregation* by removing laws or practices that require or encourage separation. *Desegregation* aims to reduce racial imbalances, usually by moving and mixing racial populations to end racial isolation. As it has played out in most U.S. educational settings, *desegregation* requires students of the non-dominant group (most often students of color) to assimilate into the school and culture of the dominant group (most often white) without changes in school structures to meet the needs of the new students. **NOTE:** It is important not to use the words *desegregation* and *integration* interchangeably, as the spirit of each term is markedly different.

## ***Equality***

Equality is the quality, fact, or state of being equal (not varying from one person or part to another).

## ***Equity***

Equity is the fairness or justice in dealings between persons.

## ***Integration***

Integration is the incorporation of individuals from different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups as equals into a school. *Integration* moves beyond removing legal barriers and simply placing students of different backgrounds together. It addresses the racial hierarchies and prejudices that exist in school communities by reforming structures to be more inclusive and transforming the culture of the school. **NOTE:** It is important not to use the words *desegregation* and *integration* interchangeably, as the spirit of each term is markedly different.

## ***Segregation***

Segregation is the policy or practice of separating people of different race, class or ethnic group, as in separate educational facilities. *De facto* segregation occurs by fact, rather than by law; usually on the basis of socioeconomic factors, while *de jure* segregation occurs by law. **NOTE:** The term *segregation* should not be used to refer solely to the experiences of “minority” communities, as majority or dominant groups also bear the consequences of racial separation in U.S. society.

## ***Resegregation***

Resegregation traditionally refers to the growth of *segregation*, where schools have once experienced periods of *desegregation*. *Resegregation* can occur because of school districts abandoning or altering race conscious *desegregation* plans, either by choice or court order, as well as the result of segregated racial housing patterns or school district practices that reinforce *segregation*.