

AM New York

By LIZA FEATHERSTONE November 5, 2015

## **Fariña fails test to desegregate city schools**

In response to concerns about segregation in many city public schools, Chancellor Carmen Fariña has suggested that students in poor schools (mostly minority) could be "pen pals" with kids in rich schools (mostly white).

Digging herself in deeper, she then suggested that real school integration wasn't important to her administration. "You don't need to have diversity within one building," she told parents at a town hall meeting near Union Square last month. She touted the pen pal idea on the Upper West Side last week, when she again dismissed the idea of school diversity.

Imagine the deafening uproar from New York if a schools chief in the South touted pen pals as a way to curb segregation.

Now imagine that the mayor of that city defended the pen pal idea, saying that segregation is just "the reality of our city." In fact, that's what Mayor Bill de Blasio said last week -- suggesting that a pen pal program would be "more achievable" than structural change at this time.

NYC is not part of the former Confederacy, but we do have some of the most segregated schools in the country, according to a 2014 report by UCLA's Civil Rights Project. School integration produces better educational outcomes for everyone, an extensive body of education research has shown.

Studies show that school choice worsens segregation; parents choose to send their kids to school with others of the same race and class. So the solutions have to include either less choice or more controlled choice in which schools are required to achieve a demographic balance.

System wide change is possible but will take time.

But here's one way the chancellor can help now: The city could at least let individual schools adopt such policies. The administration at my son's school, which admits children by lottery, last year asked for the Department of Education's permission to set aside seats for lower-income students, and it has heard nothing back. Other Brooklyn schools attempting the same reform have met with similar frustrations.

Of course, no one can solve school segregation overnight. But there are solutions within the city's control. That's why the chancellor's pen pal suggestion is insulting.

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