

**NO. 1121
(SENSE-OF-THE-ASSEMBLY)**

JUSTICE IN EDUCATION REFORM

WHEREAS, most of our nation's children depend on public schools for their education¹; and

WHEREAS, previous General Assemblies have affirmed the value of public education²; and

WHEREAS, many in the ecumenical community are recently and currently concerned about the performance and reform of public schools³; and

WHEREAS, there is currently much discussion by policymakers and others about achievement gaps in public schools and how to close those gaps⁴; and

WHEREAS, there is a move today among policymakers (especially federal policymakers) to deal with these achievement gaps by closing struggling schools and substituting publicly funded charter schools that are managed by private boards⁵; and

WHEREAS, this approach leaves traditional neighborhood public schools to serve the majority of students with special needs, English language learners, children who are homeless, and children who do not fit the specific profiles of many charter schools and thus will not be accepted by them⁶; and

WHEREAS, a just system of public education is our best hope for addressing the needs of *all* our children⁷; and

WHEREAS, a just system of public education addresses the resource opportunity gaps underneath achievement gaps in our public schools,⁸ as well as the issues of race, class and geographical/residential location that affect these resource opportunity gaps⁹;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the General Assembly of the Christian Church meeting in Nashville, TN, July 9 – 13, 2011, affirms that education reform must be approached in a way that deals with the justice issues of race, class, special needs, and geographical/residential location in relation to the more equitable distribution of resource opportunities; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Assembly urges all Disciples to engage actively in prayerful reflection, study, and public conversation about public education, including charter schools, through the lens of these justice concerns; and

FINALLY, BE IT RESOLVED that the Assembly urges all Disciples to contact policy-makers and advocate for an approach to public education reform that is just and equitable, and that will continue to provide a quality education to all our children, regardless of race, class, special needs or geographical/residential location.

Family and Children's Ministries of Disciples Home Missions

The General Board recommends that the General Assembly
ADOPT Business Item No. 1121. (Discussion time 12 minutes)

¹ Participation in Education: Elementary/Secondary Education, Public School Enrollment, National Center for Education Statistics, <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2010/section1/indicator02.asp>.

² See, for example, resolutions 7155 and 8347.

³ See, for example, National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, *An Alternative Vision for Public Education: A Pastoral Letter on Federal Policy in Public Education: An Ecumenical Call for Justice* (May 18, 2010): <http://www.nccusa.org/elmc/pastorletter.pdf>; The United Church of Christ, *2011 Justice & Witness Ministries Message on Public Education*: <http://www.ucc.org/justice/public-education/2011-justice-witness.html>; *The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy Readies Papers for General Assembly* (2010): <http://www.pcusa.org/news/2010/2/1/acswp-readies-papers-general-assembly>. See also <http://www.ucc.org/justice/public-education/federal-policy-to-reauthorize.html> and <http://www.trinitydc.edu/president/2010/07/race-to-the-top-who-wins>.

⁴ Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, NAACP, NAACP LDF, National Council for Educating Black Children, National Urban League, Rainbow PUSH Coalition, and Schott Foundation for Public Education, "Civil Rights Framework for Providing All Students an Opportunity to Learn through Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act," July 26, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, *A Blueprint for Reform: The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, March 2010; Gail Sunderman and Heinrich Mintrop, "Why High Stakes Accountability Sounds Good but Doesn't Work—And Why We Keep Doing It Anyway," *The Civil Rights Project Proyecto Derechos Civiles*, April 2009; The Education Trust, "Closing the Gaps," <http://www.edtrust.org/issues/pre-k-12/closing-the-gaps>.

⁵ U.S. Department of Education, *A Blueprint for Reform: The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, March 2010, "School Turnaround Grants," p 12.

⁶ Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, NAACP, NAACP LDF, National Council for Educating Black Children, National Urban League, Rainbow PUSH Coalition, and Schott Foundation for Public Education, "Civil Rights Framework for Providing All Students an Opportunity to Learn through Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act," July 26, 2010, pp. 9-10; also Diane Ravitch, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), p. 145.

⁷ Schott Foundation for Public Education, "Why We Can't Wait for Superman," (2010) http://www.otlcampaign.org/sites/default/files/resources/OTL_TalkingPoints_Superman_0.pdf,

⁸ Resource opportunities include such things as pre-school, experienced stable teaching staff, well equipped science labs, broadband connectivity, computers that work, up to date textbooks, clean buildings in good repair, etc.

⁹ Schott Foundation for Public Education, "Lost Opportunity: A 50 State Report on the Opportunity to Learn In America," 2009, http://www.otlstatereport.org/50_state_report_national_summary.pdf.