

PART FOUR
EDUCATION

Desegregation and Resegregation in the Public Schools

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WHEN THE SUPREME COURT declared the end of official (de jure) segregation in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, the public schools became the center stage for the struggle to promote racial integration and equity in America. Most of us born by the beginning of World War II will never forget the graphic images of black children in Little Rock, Arkansas, being escorted into school buildings by soldiers, surrounded by crowds of jeering white adults. About a decade later, we saw similar crowds of white adults shouting epithets, throwing stones, and burning buses when school desegregation moved to the North in such cities as Pontiac, Michigan, and Boston, Massachusetts. Unlike other social policies, vehement public protests did little to deter the school desegregation movement because it was being advanced and enforced by the (almost) politically immune federal courts.

From the mid-1960s to the late 1970s a vast transformation took place in American public schools as federal courts and government agencies demanded race-conscious policies in every facet of school operations. The most controversial aspect of school desegregation during this period involved the rules for assigning students to schools, when racial balance quotas were adopted instead of neighborhood or other geographic rules.

In larger school districts these racial quotas required mandatory busing, whereby students were transported long distances from their former school to different schools across a city or county in order to attain racial balance.

But school desegregation court orders went far beyond student assignment, with requirements for racial quotas in hiring, racial balance in the assignment of faculty and staff, and racial equity in facilities (resources), transportation, and extracurricular activities. These six desegregation plan components—student assignment, faculty, staff, facilities, transportation, and extracurricular activities—became known as the *Green* factors. All school systems under court order had to show they had complied with each of them before they could be declared unitary (nondiscriminating) systems and released from court orders.¹

There has been much debate about whether school desegregation should be judged a success or a failure, not just in the attainment of school racial balance but also with respect to other social and educational goals such as improved race relations and academic performance of minority children. So far as racial balance is concerned, initially the most important objective of desegregation plans, there is general agreement that substantial improvement occurred during the early 1970s. But some critics, especially Gary Orfield and his colleagues on the Harvard Project on School Desegregation, have asserted that resegregation began occurring in the late 1980s and worsened in the early 1990s, particularly as federal courts began declaring school districts unitary and ending court supervision.²

Although early Supreme Court school decisions did not address social and educational outcomes, there is little question that educators and civil rights activists viewed racial balance as merely a means to an end. According to these views, the ultimate goal of school desegregation was to reduce racial prejudice and improve the academic achievement of African American children; schools were to be the pathway to full economic and social parity with whites.

Assessing the extent to which school desegregation has achieved these broader goals, sometimes called extra-*Green* factors by the courts, is much

more complicated than assessing compliance with the six *Green* factors. In particular, we have to assess a myriad of social and educational effects of desegregation, and to be complete we have to compare these effects with the costs of desegregation—monetary expenditures, political controversy, white “flight,” and loss of local control. It is by no means obvious to the average citizen that school integration, and especially the more intrusive practice of mandatory busing, has any benefits at all, much less benefits that justify the costs. Indeed, many Americans believe that mandatory reassignment or “forced busing” has reduced the quality of education in school districts where it has been implemented.³

This essay will summarize the successes and failures of school desegregation with regard to these issues. First, we assess the impact of desegregation policies on actual racial balance in the public schools. The evidence indicates that school desegregation has created substantial racial balance in our public education systems. Second, we address the issue of resegregation to determine whether the racial balance established in the 1970s by school desegregation plans has been reversed by the unitary status findings of the 1980s and 1990s. We shall show that at least as late as 1995 racial balance trends are not reversing and that the changes in racial and ethnic isolation discussed by Orfield are in fact caused by long-term demographic trends of declining white and increasing minority enrollment, not the dismantling of desegregation plans.

Indeed, as James Coleman first found, the mandatory reassignment plans of the 1970s exacerbated these long-term demographic trends by accelerating the decline in white enrollment, thereby limiting the extent of actual integration in the school districts in which they were implemented.⁴ This effect was greatest in our largest school districts. Finally, we evaluate evidence on the social and educational effects of desegregation, and especially academic achievement. We argue that in this area more than any other, school desegregation has failed to deliver on its promises, in spite of the early optimism of many social scientists and civil rights activists.

Racial Balance

Prior to *Brown*, most public schools in the South were one-race schools, either white or black. Ten years after *Brown*, one study estimated that 99 percent of black children in the South were in one-race schools. The first nationwide study of school segregation was ordered by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and carried out by James Coleman and his colleagues during the 1965–66 school year.⁵ The Coleman report estimated that nationally 65 percent of all black students attended schools that were over 90 percent black, while 80 percent of all white students attended schools that were over 90 percent white.

PRE-SWANN PROGRESS

The extent of racial isolation in the South was far greater than in the North, mainly because of de jure segregation in the South. Table 1 shows the percentage of elementary black and white students in schools over 90 percent black or white, respectively, for twenty-two of the largest Southern school districts in 1965 or 1968. Although it is fair to say that some racial integration had taken place in these Southern cities ten years after *Brown*, it was clearly nominal for black students, with the notable exceptions of Kansas City, Nashville, and Dallas. Indeed, it was precisely this token progress that led to the *Green* decision, which called for the elimination of segregated schools “root and branch.”⁶

Racial imbalance also existed in Northern cities during the mid-1960s, but racial isolation was not nearly so extensive. Most Northern school segregation at that time was thought to be de facto, that is, brought about by the private decisions of citizens to live in different geographic areas. The highest levels of racial isolation existed in Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, and Philadelphia where the black population swelled from post-World War II migration of Southern blacks looking for jobs in the large urban centers of the North. This migration overwhelmed the capacity of white neighborhoods to absorb blacks and still remain

integrated, although none but Chicago approached school racial isolation rates of 90 percent. Other large cities with sizable, but in some cases smaller, black enrollments such as Boston, Cincinnati, Columbus (Ohio), Los Angeles, Newark, New York, and San Francisco had no more than half of their black students in predominately black schools.

Table 1 Percentage of Black and White Elementary Students in Schools over 90 Percent Black or White, Southern Cities in 1965–1966 (except as noted)

<i>School district</i>	<i>Blacks in black schools</i>	<i>Whites in white schools</i>
Birmingham, Ala. ^a	99	99
Mobile, Ala.	100	100
Little Rock, Ark.	96	97
Miami-Dade, Fla.	91	95
Jacksonville-Duval, Fla. ^a	92	92
Tampa-Hillsboro, Fla. ^a	91	91
Atlanta, Ga.	97	95
East Baton Rouge Parish, La. ^a	95	95
New Orleans Parish, La.	96	84
Kansas City, Mo.	69	65
St. Louis, Mo.	91	66
Jackson, Miss. ^a	99	100
Charlotte-Mecklenberg, N.C.	96	95
Oklahoma City, Okla.	90	96
Tulsa, Okla.	91	99
Charleston County, S.C. ^a	99	99
Memphis, Tenn.	95	94
Nashville, Tenn.	82	91
Dallas, Tex.	83	90
Houston, Tex.	93	97
Norfolk, Va. ^a	90	90
Richmond, Va.	98	95

SOURCE: U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Racial Isolation in the Public Schools* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1967), pp. 4–5, except as noted.

^a Computed by the authors from the 1968 Office for Civil Rights enrollment data.

POST-SWANN PROGRESS

The situation in the South changed dramatically in the 1970s. In the 1971 *Swann* decision for Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina, the Supreme Court endorsed strict racial balance quotas for all schools in a system and approved cross-district mandatory busing to attain complete racial balance.⁷ In effect, the Supreme Court abandoned geographic school assignment (i.e., being assigned to the closest school) for Southern school systems unless it resulted in racially balanced schools, which was impossible in most larger school districts because of segregated housing patterns.

Court-ordered school desegregation moved to the North only two years later with the Supreme Court's *Keyes* decision for Denver, Colorado.⁸ We shall not go into the complicated legal basis for Northern desegregation orders, almost none of which involved state-enforced segregation. Suffice it to say that despite de facto segregation in the North, systemwide racial balance remedies and mandatory busing plans were ordered for many Northern districts after *Keyes*. In addition, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) was active in pressuring school systems to implement desegregation plans, and several school systems adopted mandatory reassignment plans under this pressure.

As a result of local civil rights pressure, many other school systems adopted voluntary transfer plans that involved M to M (majority to minority) transfers where any student could transfer from a school in which his or her race was in a majority to a school in which his or her race was in a minority. Another common local initiative was to close some predominantly minority schools and reassign the students to predominantly white schools; this was carried out in such cities as Riverside, California, and Evanston, Illinois. Although these local measures did not involve mandatory busing of whites, they nonetheless accomplished some degree of school integration.

The first reliable data for assessing the impact of school desegregation on racial balance was collected in 1968 by the Office for Civil Rights in HEW (OCR).⁹ The survey consisted of enrollment data by individual

schools and by five racial-ethnic categories (white, black, Hispanic, Asian, and American Indian) in a sample of school districts. There was no survey in 1969, but from 1970 through 1974 OCR collected data annually. Beginning in 1974, the survey was conducted every other year and included all districts with court-ordered desegregation plans. The sampling scheme used by OCR varied from year to year, and thus after 1974 the OCR data do not constitute a representative sample of school districts. In fact, in some years important school districts are simply missing.

In 1990 the authors participated in a national survey of school desegregation and magnet schools sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, for which a statistically representative sample of 600 school districts was drawn. The original sample included all 150 largest school districts in the country, those with enrollments over 27,000 students, and smaller percentages of the large, medium, and small districts in the U.S., selected randomly from their size category.¹⁰ In this essay we use this national sample to assess racial balance trends, relying on OCR enrollment data from Fall 1968 through Fall 1987 and Common Core of Data (CCD) enrollments from Fall 1989 through Fall 1995.

The 1990 survey gathered information about whether school districts had adopted formal desegregation plans and what kinds of desegregation techniques were used. Table 2 shows the percentage of school districts that

Table 2 Prevalence of Formal School Desegregation Plans, 1990

<i>Size of district</i>	<i>Percent with past or present desegregation plans</i>	<i>Percentage share of black/Hispanic students</i>	<i>Total districts in sample</i>
Very large (N>27,000)	72	53	145
Large (N=10,000–27,000)	39	22	421
Medium (N=5,000–10,000)	34	13	770
Small (N<5,000)	11	12	4,012

SOURCE: David J. Armor, *Forced Justice: School Desegregation and the Law* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), table 4.1.

had past or current desegregation plans by size of district. The survey estimated from this random sample that nationally nearly 1,000 school districts had some type of formal desegregation plan, and the prevalence of formal plans increased with the size of the school district. Of the 145 “very large” school districts that responded to the survey, 102—more than 70 percent—had a formal desegregation plan at some point in time. We note that the largest districts enroll about half of all black and Hispanic students, while the smallest districts enroll only about one-tenth of these minority groups. Thus, black and Hispanic students are more likely to be found in larger districts, which are also more likely to have school desegregation plans.

Of the 28 percent of very large districts that did not adopt a formal desegregation plan, most were predominately white districts in the early 1970s, and indeed many remained predominately white until at least the early 1990s. Examples include Anoka County, Minnesota; Fairfax County, Virginia; Gwinnett County, Florida; and Spokane, Washington. These districts were over 90 percent white in 1972 and remained over 70 percent white until at least 1991. Obviously, there is less need for a formal desegregation plan when there are few minority students.

How effective have these plans been in achieving racial balance? To answer this question, we shall use an index that summarizes the degree of racial balance in a school system. Racial balance is defined as the degree to which each school’s racial composition matches the districtwide racial composition for a given race. The index of racial imbalance, also called the dissimilarity index, ranges from 0 to 1, where 1 indicates total segregation (all schools are one race), and 0 means perfect racial balance (every school has exactly the same racial composition as the total district).¹¹ Intermediate values represent the proportion of students of one race who would have to be reassigned, if no students of another race were reassigned, in order to attain perfect racial balance.¹² The index can be computed for any two racial or ethnic groups; for example, whites and nonwhites, blacks and whites, or Hispanics and whites.

BLACK TRENDS

Figure 1 shows the trends in black-white racial imbalance from 1968 to 1995, separated by size of school district.¹³ All three size categories show significant declines in black-white imbalance (or increased desegregation), with the sharpest drops from 1968 to 1972 corresponding to the widespread implementation of desegregation plans in the South. For very large districts, racial imbalance continues to decline until 1982 and remains stable thereafter; there is a slight upturn of just 1 point between 1991 and 1995. Medium-sized districts show slight improvements in racial balance until 1991. For the nation as a whole, then, contrary to Orfield's claims, there is no evidence of significant resegregation in terms of increasing racial imbalance as late as 1995.

There was, however, substantial variation by region in the timing and scope of desegregation plans, with Southern districts being the first to desegregate with comprehensive desegregation plans involving white reassignments. After *Swann*, most Southern districts that still had substantial racial imbalance were immediately back in court and typically ordered to adopt busing remedies along the lines of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg plan.

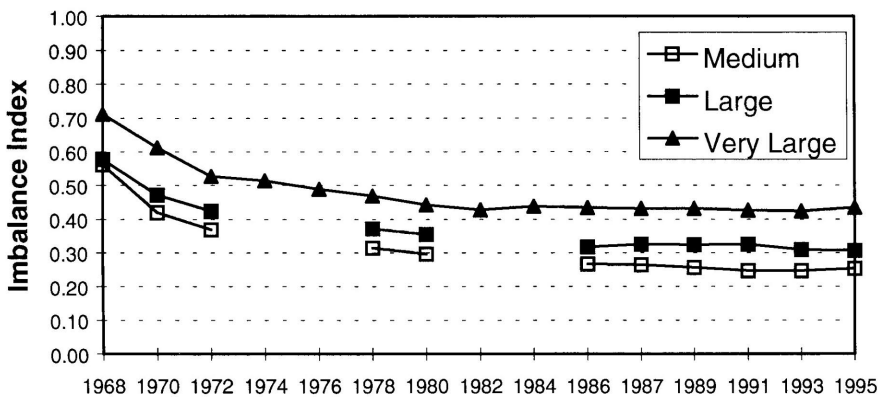


Fig. 1. Trends in black-white school imbalance in medium, large, and very large districts.

As a result, comprehensive mandatory desegregation plans were in place for most Southern districts by 1972.

Northern mandatory busing remedies did not become commonplace until after the 1973 *Keyes* decision in Denver, Colorado. Therefore, implementation of comprehensive desegregation plans in the North tended to be distributed more evenly throughout the 1970s. In addition, while most Southern districts had to adopt formal desegregation plans, there were fewer formal plans in Northern districts primarily because there was no history of de jure segregation and ongoing litigation associated with dismantling it. Thus, fewer lawsuits were filed in the North, and occasionally a lawsuit was dismissed because the courts found only de facto segregation (e.g., Cincinnati). These different histories, not surprisingly, produced different patterns of racial balance trends.

Figure 2 shows the trends in black-white racial balance for very large districts—those that have received most of the attention by the courts and by school desegregation analysts—separated according to region and formal plan status. We do not show the small number of Southern districts that said they did not have formal plans.¹⁴ The trends confirm the differences in desegregation timing in the North and South. As expected, the most dramatic improvements in racial balance occurred for Southern dis-

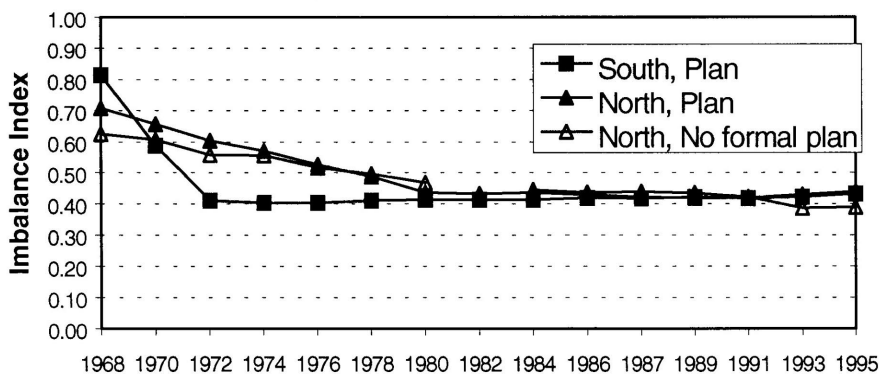


Fig. 2. Trends in black-white imbalance by plan status, very large districts.

districts as they rapidly implemented mandatory reassignment plans in the early 1970s. For Southern districts with plans, the index of racial imbalance dropped by 40 points in the four years 1968–1972, from an average of 0.81 to an average of 0.41.

The fact that the average index for Southern school districts was 0.81 in 1968 means that the dismantling of the de jure system of segregation had started before 1968; had it not, the index would have been 1.0. Freedom-of-choice plans became popular following enactment of the U.S. Civil Rights Act of 1964, and they were the primary means of desegregation for many Southern school systems until the policy was ruled insufficient by the U.S. Supreme Court in the *Green* decision. Freedom-of-choice plans increased the number of black students attending former white schools, but not vice versa, and they are the major reason that the index was 0.80 in 1968 rather than 1.0.

The pattern for Northern school systems with plans is quite different from that of Southern systems with plans, in that the decline in imbalance is less rapid and is spread evenly throughout the 1970s. The index dropped 36 points during the decade, from 0.70 in 1968 to 0.44 in 1980, making them nearly as balanced as Southern districts. Interestingly, Northern districts without formal plans also experienced desegregation during this period, with the imbalance index declining from 0.62 to 0.47. This trend is explained by the fact that many school systems adopted desegregation practices during this time, such as closing older imbalanced schools, building new schools in easier-to-integrate locations, and paying closer attention to attendance zone changes, but did not adopt a formal plan.

After 1980, racial balance trends level off for Southern districts but continue to improve slightly for Northern districts, and in 1991 all three groups show the same degree of racial imbalance (0.42). Most important, none of the categories of school districts shows any dramatic worsening of racial balance between 1991 and 1995, with gains of only 1 or 2 points in the imbalance index for Southern and Northern districts with plans, respectively. Once again, these data from the largest 145 school systems in

the nation contradict Orfield's argument that school districts are resegregating as a result of the dismantling of desegregation plans.

HISPANIC TRENDS

In recent years the Orfield reports have expressed concern about the increasing segregation and isolation of Hispanic students. This problem did not exist in the era of de jure segregation because most early court decisions in the South did not identify Hispanic students as a minority group that was a victim of discrimination. Indeed, most Southern school districts classified students as black and nonblack, and Hispanic students were included in the nonblack category along with white students.

After the 1973 *Keyes* decision in Denver, however, where both black and Hispanic students were found to be victims of discrimination, it became commonplace to treat all minority (nonwhite) students as a group in student assignments to achieve racial balance. Interestingly, in a few school districts, such as Yonkers, New York, the federal court found that only black and Hispanic students were victims of discrimination, thereby combining Asian students with white students for the purposes of desegregation. The court agreed with plaintiffs' argument that Asian students were not a disadvantaged minority group, and therefore the Asian minority could be used to desegregate either black or Hispanic minority students! This same definition is being used in a recent desegregation plan in Rockford, Illinois. In the vast majority of school districts, however, Asians are classified as racial minorities and assigned accordingly.

Figure 3 shows the racial balance trends for Hispanic enrollment in relation to white enrollment.¹⁵ Before 1970, Hispanics were clearly much less segregated than black students in all size categories, which may explain in part why Hispanics were not treated as victims of discrimination in early court decisions. In 1968 the index is only 0.55 for Hispanics in very large districts, compared with a value of 0.71 for black students. In large school districts the Hispanic-white imbalance is 10 points less than the black-white imbalance. The lower imbalance rates are explained by the greater

residential integration of Hispanics and whites during the 1960s, which is due in part to their smaller population size.

After 1972, Hispanic-white imbalance declined steadily until trends begin to level off in 1987, although there are still small declines as late as 1995. In very large districts, where most black and Hispanic students are found, Hispanic imbalance is less than black imbalance during the entire time period, and by 1995 Hispanic imbalance had fallen to 0.39, compared with 0.43 for blacks. In large districts Hispanic students were more imbalanced than blacks between 1972 and 1980 but caught up with them by 1995. Hispanic imbalance has remained somewhat higher in medium-sized districts during the 1990s, but we note that index levels of about 0.30 reflect a relatively high degree of balance overall. That is, an index of 0.30 means that in a district with half Hispanic and half white students only 15 percent of Hispanics and 15 percent of whites would have to be reassigned to attain perfect balance.

These data show quite clearly that Hispanic-white imbalance has not been increasing from the mid-1980s to the present time; in fact, it has continued to decrease slightly during the 1990s and remains lower than black imbalance in very large districts. Thus, contrary to the claims of Orfield, in our national representative sample of school systems there is no evidence of increasing segregation of Hispanic students in terms of racial

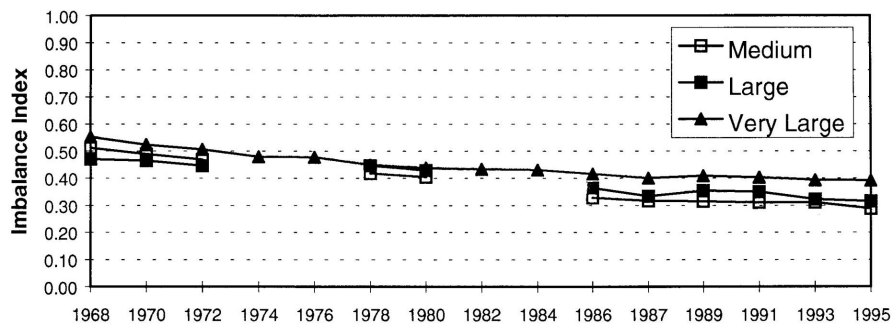


Fig. 3. Trends in Hispanic-white school imbalance.

imbalance, the primary yardstick over the last four and a half decades for measuring the success of desegregation plans.

Segregation, Desegregation, and Resegregation

Having said that there is no evidence of resegregation in terms of racial balance, we must acknowledge that there are different ways of looking at this issue and different ways of defining these terms. The original legal meaning of segregation, as defined by the Supreme Court in 1954 in *Brown*, was the separation of the races by official state action (de jure segregation). At that time, *desegregation* was simply the abolition of state laws and government practices that enforced these laws. But the elimination of state laws requiring the separation of the races did not change segregated residential patterns, nor did it prevent a variety of other strategies adopted by some Southern states and school districts for avoiding meaningful integration.

The Supreme Court decision in *Green* (1968) put Southern school districts on notice that they must not merely stop discriminating but also must actually achieve desegregated schools. It was not until the *Swann* decision (1971), however, that a desegregated school was defined as one whose racial composition is roughly the same as the racial composition of the entire school system; that is, desegregation equals racial balance. This definition quickly became the standard throughout the nation for a desegregated school system, although the amount that a school could deviate from perfect balance varied from case to case.

Using this racial balance definition, there is no evidence of significant resegregation in our nationally representative sample of American public school systems. But the problem with a racial balance standard is that it ignores the total number or proportion of white students in a school system. A racial balance standard cares only that each school mirrors the school district's racial composition, not what the actual racial composition might be. A school system that is 90 percent black and 10 percent white would

be perfectly balanced if every school had 10 percent white enrollment. Yet such a school system would not be considered desegregated by most interested parties. Many courts have defined a 90 percent black school as racially isolated, regardless of the systemwide composition.

Moreover, a desegregation plan can cause white flight and thus be the cause of a school system's being only 10 percent white. If a district starts out with a student enrollment that is half black and half white but becomes only 10 percent white several years later, most observers would not call the plan successful even if each school was highly balanced at or near 10 percent. Thus, a racial balance standard by itself gives us only a partial view of the amount of school desegregation that exists in a school system.

In order to overcome the limitation of racial balance definitions, James S. Coleman created a second definition of desegregation that takes into account the absolute proportion of white students in schools attended by black students (or any other minority group).¹⁶ This definition is measured by a second summary statistic called the index of interracial exposure—that is, the percentage of white in the average black (or minority) child's school.¹⁷ In this case a value of 0 means total black-white segregation, or no whites in schools attended by black students. The maximum value of this index is the proportion of students who are white in the school system. If every school's percentage of white exactly matches the school system's percentage of white, the index will be the same as the proportion (or percentage) of white in the school system.

For example, if a system is 30 percent white, then an index of 0.30 would mean that every school was 30 percent white (and therefore perfectly balanced), and an index of 0.25 would indicate substantial degree of desegregation relative to the available whites. But in absolute terms an index of 0.25 means that the average school is 75 percent black, which indicates a relatively low level of desegregation in absolute terms. Thus, the interracial exposure index reflects both the extent of racial balance in the school system and the absolute level of contact, that is, the percentage of white in the average black (or minority) child's school. When the exposure index is examined over time and is compared with the percentage of white in a

system, one can obtain a more comprehensive picture of both the relative and absolute levels of desegregation.

Orfield's studies have used recent declines in the exposure index, rather than the imbalance index, to argue that resegregation is occurring, a phenomenon he attributes to the dismantling of desegregation plans. But there are two major causes for a declining exposure index, one of which is simply a decrease in the percentage of white in a school system. The decline in the percentage of white enrollment can be due to nondesegregation-related demographic changes that have nothing to do with racial balance, such as high black or Hispanic in-migration, declining white birthrates, or normal middle-class white suburbanization. It can also be caused by "white flight," where whites leave a school system to avoid mandatory busing. The other major cause of a declining exposure index, the one that concerns Orfield, is a reduction in the number of racially balanced schools, as might occur when a school district dismantles a desegregation plan and returns to neighborhood schools.

If the exposure index has been changing, is it due to declines in the percentage of white or is it due to the dismantling of desegregation plans? This question can only be answered by comparing the exposure index to trends in racial imbalance and also to trends in the percentage of white. We have already demonstrated in Figures 1–3 that racial imbalance has not changed significantly; it remains to examine trends in the exposure index and in the percentage of white.

Figure 4 shows the national trends in racial composition for very large school systems, including the average percentage of white that is the maximum for the exposure index. In 1968 very large public school districts averaged 71 percent white, 22 percent black, 6 percent Hispanic, and 1 percent Asian. For the next twenty-five years the percentage of white declined steadily, while the percentage of black, Hispanic, and Asian rose correspondingly, and by 1995 the percentage of white enrollment had fallen to only 48 percent—less than half for the first time. The decline in the percentage of white was somewhat steeper during the mid-1970s, undoubtedly influenced by white flight from desegregation. In the meantime, the

percentage of black, Hispanic, and Asian in the public schools increased to 31, 16, and 5, respectively, as a result of demographic forces, including both in-migration and birthrates. Any interpretation of trends in school desegregation indexes, in particular trends in interracial exposure, must take into account these basic demographic patterns because they limit the amount of interracial exposure that can be achieved.

Figure 5 shows why the declining percentage of white cannot be ignored

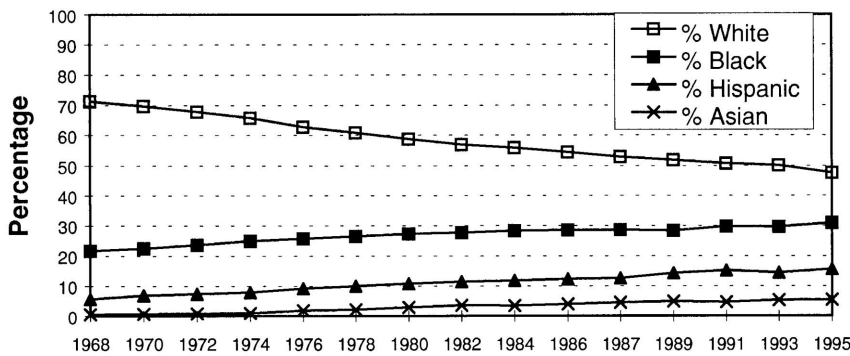


Fig. 4. Trends in racial composition, very large districts.

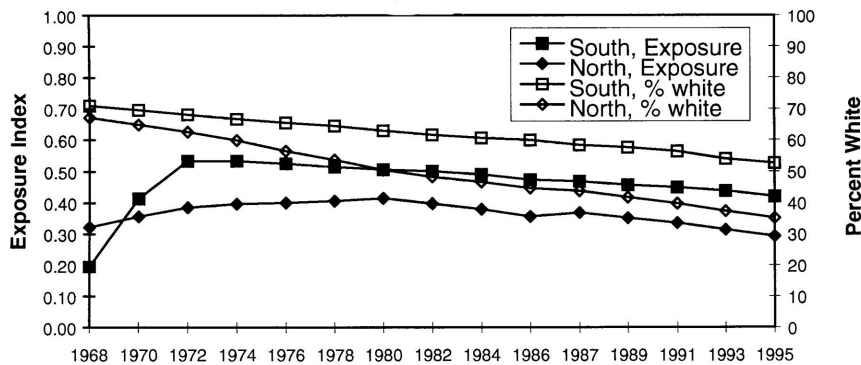


Fig. 5. Black-white exposure in very large districts with formal desegregation plans.

in an analysis of interracial exposure. It shows the trends in black-white exposure by region for very large districts with formal desegregation plans, juxtaposed with the trend for percent of white enrollment. For Southern districts, the largest changes in interracial exposure (solid squares) occurred between 1968 and 1972, when the index rose from 0.20 to 0.53, an improvement of 33 points in the average percentage of white students in schools attended by blacks. After 1972, however, the index began a long, steady decline, falling to 0.42 by 1995. This reduction in the absolute exposure index is not caused by increases in racial imbalance, which remained nearly flat for the next twenty years (see Fig. 2), but rather the steady decline in the percentage of white enrollment (open squares), which dropped from 68 percent in 1972 to 53 percent in 1995. In fact, the exposure index for Southern districts fell at a slower rate than the percentage of white, indicating that interracial exposure was actually increasing slightly relative to the available white enrollment. The exposure index is 15 points from its maximum in 1972 (68 minus 53), and it is only 11 points from its maximum in 1995 (53 minus 42).

A similar pattern exists for very large Northern districts with plans. As was the case with racial balance, the exposure index (solid diamonds) increased over a longer period, improving from 0.32 in 1968 to 0.41 in 1980, a gain of 9 points in the average percentage of white in schools attended by blacks. The index does not even reach 0.50, however, before it begins a long, inexorable decline over the next fifteen years, falling to only 0.29 by 1995. As in the South, this decline is the result not of increasing racial imbalance, which is nearly flat during this time, but rather of a steeply falling percentage of white enrollment: this fell from 50 in 1980 to only 35 in 1995. Again, relative to the available whites, interracial exposure actually improves slightly; it is 9 percentage points from its maximum in 1980 and is only 6 points from its maximum in 1995.

Finally, Figure 6 shows the trends in the exposure index and the percentage of white for Hispanic students in very large districts with Hispanic enrollment greater than 1 percent.¹⁸ As Orfield has noted, the exposure of Hispanics to white students has declined substantially from its high in 1972

(0.59) to its low in 1995 (0.45). But the decline is not due to increasing imbalance, because Figure 3 shows that Hispanic-white imbalance declined during this time for very large districts. Again, the decline is caused by the declining percent of white enrollment in these districts, which has fallen from 64 in 1972 to only 47 in 1995. Relative to the available whites, then, Hispanic-white exposure has actually increased, and in 1995 it is only 2 points from its maximum value. In other words, Hispanic students in very large districts are actually more desegregated than black students, both in absolute terms and relative to the available white enrollment.

By comparing the trends in racial composition with the trends in racial balance and interracial exposure, a much clearer picture emerges about how and why desegregation levels have changed in recent years. For the fifteen-year period between 1980 and 1995 (1972–1995 for Hispanics), three patterns emerge: the percentage of white has declined, racial balance has remained relatively constant, and interracial exposure has declined. Thus, the cause of declining interracial exposure is the overall decline in the percentage of white, rather than the dismantling of desegregation plans.

It may be appropriate to say that resegregation is occurring for both black and Hispanic students, in that they find themselves attending schools with a dwindling number of white students, particularly in larger Northern

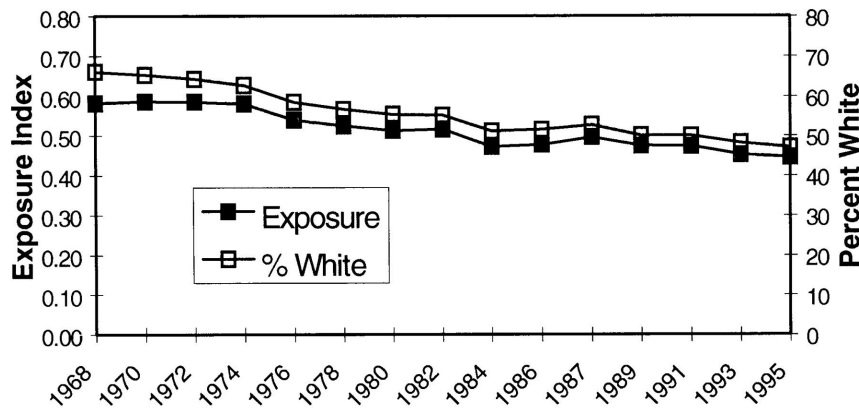


Fig. 6. Hispanic-white exposure for very large districts.

districts. But we must be clear about the cause of that resegregation: if ending desegregation plans were a significant factor, we would see significant increases in racial imbalance. Because this is not happening, and because the percentage of white enrollment is decreasing, we must conclude that the resegregation is due primarily to demographic change in the form of falling white enrollments and increasing minority enrollments.

Social and Educational Results

The existence of long-term national school enrollment data by race makes it a good deal easier to determine the effect of school desegregation plans on school racial balance and interracial exposure than to determine their effect on social and academic outcomes. Although there is a great amount of data on academic achievement, either from national efforts like the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) or from local school districts that administer standardized achievement tests, it is very difficult to sort out the impact of desegregation from the effects of many other factors that influence academic achievement, especially family socioeconomic characteristics, because there are so few data on these other factors. This has led to substantial disagreement among researchers about the academic effects of desegregation.

It is even more difficult to assess the effect of school desegregation on social and psychological outcomes such as race relations, racial prejudice, and self-esteem because we lack standardized measures for these variables. Consequently, with the exception of opinion polls on racial issues, there are few national data on social outcomes, and there is no way to relate that data to desegregated schools. Accordingly, we must rely on case studies carried out in individual school districts to assess the effect of desegregation on such outcomes as student interracial attitudes and behaviors. Fortunately, there are reviews of this research literature that are helpful.

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

The debate over desegregation and achievement has continued unabated since the early 1970s, when the first evidence appeared that desegregation was not improving black achievement.¹⁹ In spite of the claims and expectations of many supporters of desegregation during the 1960s, and in spite of the existence of comprehensive and well-funded desegregation plans in many school districts throughout the nation, there is not a single example in the published literature of a comprehensive racial balance plan that has improved black achievement or that has reduced the black-white achievement gap significantly.

Significantly, the most recent social science study of school desegregation—Orfield and Eaton’s attack on the courts for “dismantling desegregation”—cited only a single comprehensive desegregation plan that has led to significant minority achievement gains or a reduction of the achievement gap.²⁰ Indeed, out of seven major desegregation plans analyzed as case studies in this book, the authors did not even discuss minority achievement in three widely discussed cases—Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Detroit, and Little Rock.

Further, they were largely skeptical of local school staff reports claiming significant achievement gains in three other case studies—Kansas City, Missouri, and two Maryland counties, Montgomery and Prince Georges—but they did not conduct any original analyses to support their argument. Finally, the only case they cite where desegregation allegedly improved black achievement was Norfolk, Virginia, where the data they used were from a study by David Armor that concluded just the opposite!²¹ We shall remedy these omissions by presenting new and independent analysis of achievement results for Charlotte, Kansas City, and Prince Georges County.

There are a number of major reviews of the research literature on this question, and though they do not agree precisely on what the research says, a general picture does emerge. If there is any effect of desegregation on academic achievement, it is highly variable (sometimes it occurs and sometimes it does not), the effects are modest at best, and positive effects occur

for reading but not for math. These are the conclusions of three major reviews of research, including one by Nancy St. John in 1975, one by Thomas Cook et al. in 1984, and one by Janet Schofield in 1994.²²

The Cook review, synthesizing the separate reviews of a panel of six experts convened by the National Institute of Education, captured the essence of this equivocal state of affairs: "On the average, desegregation did not cause an increase in achievement in mathematics. Desegregation increased [black] mean reading levels . . . between two and six weeks. . . . Little confidence should be placed in any of the mean results presented earlier . . . [because] I find the variability in effect sizes more striking and less well understood than any measure of central tendency."²³

Moreover, we now have massive amounts of national achievement data from the NAEP project, which also includes information on student background and school characteristics. How do the NAEP data inform us about the performance of minority students in desegregated versus segregated schools? What have we learned about the academic achievement of minority students who have spent most of their education in desegregated schools? Interestingly, official NAEP reports do not address these important questions. Indeed, it is remarkable, given all the national data, the controversy, and local experience, that there are few published studies that have tried to answer these questions using NAEP or case study data.

At the outset of this discussion, it is important to distinguish two different types of processes that would cause desegregation plans to have an effect on achievement. The first, and the one assumed by most studies of desegregation and achievement, is that the major causal mechanism is the change in the racial composition of schools; that is, by the improved racial balance that occurs with desegregation. Under this causal assumption, racial isolation is harmful because it deprives minority students of contact with more middle-class and (usually) higher-achieving white students, who help set the pace of study and the standards of achievement. Racial isolation might also lead to a concentration of less effective teachers in minority schools, if more effective teachers gravitate to more integrated or predominately white schools.

The second possible causal mechanism by which school desegregation might have an effect on achievement is when a school board makes significant changes in the types and distribution of programs and resources among schools as part of the desegregation plan. These effects might be most pronounced during the early years of desegregation, if a district maintained inferior programs and resources in predominantly black schools at the time of desegregation (a circumstance not generally found by the 1965 Coleman study of equal opportunity).²⁴ In this case improvement in minority achievement should take place regardless of racial balance. A corollary to this second effect is a condition where desegregation improves programs and resources for all schools, in which case we might see improvement for all students regardless of race or racial balance.

If the first effect is true, minority achievement should be higher or the gap narrower whenever racial composition improves, regardless of programs and resources, and there should be no achievement gains for segregated minority students or for white students. If the second effect is true, minority achievement could improve in desegregated or segregated schools, and white achievement might also improve. Of course, factors other than desegregation and program changes can improve academic achievement; the leading nonschool factor would be improved socioeconomic status. The impact of socioeconomic status on academic achievement is well documented in social science research, and therefore this possibility must be considered whenever achievement differences or achievement gains are studied.

NAEP STUDIES

The NAEP program has documented a significant improvement in black achievement (but not white achievement) and therefore a closing of the achievement gap between 1970 and 1990. In 1970 the gap in reading was just over one standard deviation for three different age groups, and by 1990 it had declined to between 0.7 and 0.8 standard deviations.²⁵ Similar patterns were observed for math achievement. Because this improvement

corresponds to a period of extensive desegregation, some have suggested that desegregation was the primary cause.

In 1998 a Rand team carried out one of the few studies to use NAEP data to examine the possible effect of desegregation on black achievement gains. They concluded that desegregation might explain part of the improvement.²⁶ Unfortunately, their complicated methodology utilized aggregate data on several regions of the country, and they did not analyze achievement trends for black students who actually attended segregated or desegregated schools. Therefore, from their methodology it is impossible to determine whether potential effects are due to improved racial balance or to changes in programs that affected all minority students, regardless of their racial balance status.

The only published study to date that compares NAEP achievement trends for black students according to school racial composition found that black achievement gains were approximately the same in majority nonwhite and majority white schools.²⁷ Although this finding could reflect program improvements due to desegregation and implemented in all schools, the study suggested that improvement in parents' education (as documented in the NAEP data) was a major contributor.

A more direct way to determine the relationship between academic achievement and desegregation is to show how students are performing on NAEP tests according to their school racial composition. Because students who attend predominately white schools are more likely to have higher socioeconomic (SES) levels than those who attend predominately minority schools, such as higher parent education, more two-parent families, and more educational materials at home, we have to adjust the test scores of students to take these SES characteristics into account. This is done using a statistical technique (multiple regression) that removes the effect of SES on student achievement.²⁸ This statistical analysis enables us to adjust students' test scores for SES and in that way to make clear comparisons of students of the same social class in schools of varying racial composition.

Figure 7 shows the results of an original analysis of the national reading scores for thirteen-year-olds in 1992, adjusted for individual SES charac-

teristics. Across the first four categories of racial composition, ranging from predominately black to 80 percent white, there are no significant differences or trends in black achievement or in the black-white gap. These schools enroll more than 97 percent of the national black sample. There is a significant improvement for a small group of black students in predominately white schools (only 45 out of 1,329 in the black sample), most of whom are in 90 percent–plus white schools. Even assuming this is a reliable result, it is not likely due to racial composition itself, given the lack of a trend in the other categories; more likely, it is a self-selection effect or an effect of unmeasured family characteristics that cannot be evaluated.

Figure 8 shows an analysis of math achievement for the same group of students. The pattern here is quite different; both black and white students score higher in schools that are over 40 percent white, and therefore the achievement gap remains relatively constant across the first four categories of school (it narrows significantly only for the small group of black students who are in highly white schools). Because the improvement occurs for both groups, it is probably not due to racial balance; rather, it is more likely to be due to programmatic differences among the schools or unmeasured SES factors. Whatever the cause, attending a racially integrated school does not

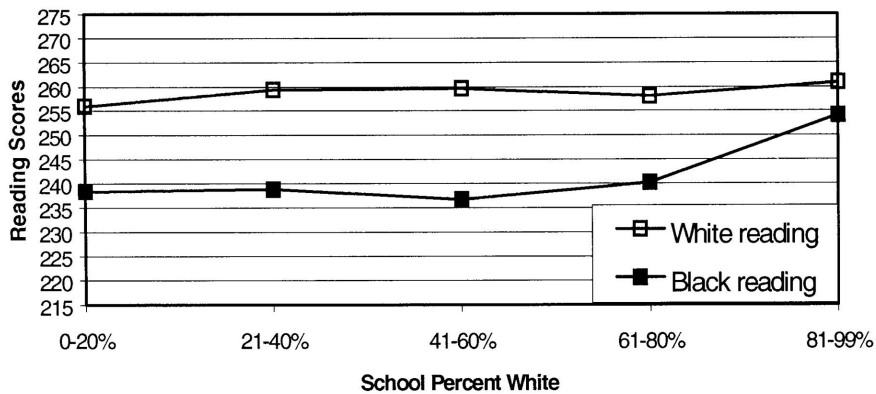


Fig. 7. School percent white and reading achievement, 1992 NAEP, age 13, adjusted for individual SES.

reduce the math achievement gap between black and white students in this national sample.

Similar results were obtained for the seventeen-year-old age groups as well as for Hispanic students. Therefore, the NAEP data do not support the thesis that desegregated schools significantly benefit black or Hispanic reading achievement, nor do they reduce the black-white or Hispanic-white achievement gap in mathematics.

CASE STUDIES

The NAEP data have the advantage of being national in scope, but they have some serious drawbacks as well. For example, the NAEP data do not include information on the existence, scope, or duration of desegregation plans within a district. Although the data include the racial composition of the student's school, they do not explain why the racial composition exists or how long it has been that way. For this reason it is useful to look at a number of case studies of the effects of comprehensive desegregation plans on achievement.

Several recently published case studies include Pasadena, California; Norfolk, Virginia; and Charleston, South Carolina.²⁹ In 1970, three years before the *Keyes* decision, Pasadena became one of the first Northern school

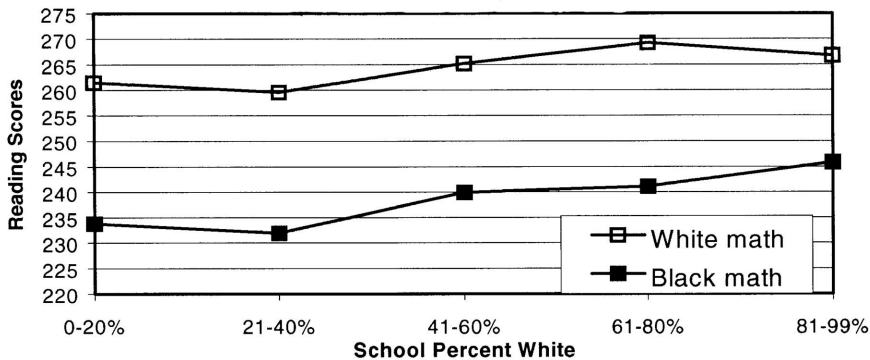


Fig. 8. School percent white and math achievement, 1992 NAEP, age 13, adjusted for individual SES.

districts to implement a districtwide racial balance plan, having been ordered to do so by a federal district court. From 1970 to 1973 there was no improvement in the reading scores of a first-grade cohort of black students in fully desegregated schools.

Norfolk, Virginia, was fully desegregated and racially balanced by 1970. Fourth-grade test scores were available from 1965 to 1982. Both black and white test scores actually fell dramatically after desegregation. The black-white gap narrowed somewhat between 1970 and 1973 but only because white achievement fell more than black achievement. Between 1973 and 1980 achievement scores improved for both races, but they did not reach their predesegregation levels until 1978; the gap remained constant during this time. A special compensatory program that was initiated in 1978 may have produced the gains in 1979 and 1980. But in 1981, when a new test form was introduced, scores fell again. There was also some evidence that improper coaching and teaching before the test may have accounted for some of these increases. Even so, one can certainly conclude that racial balance had no positive impact on black or white fourth-grade achievement between 1970 and 1978.

Similar results were found in Charleston, South Carolina, where the court-approved desegregation plan did not produce racial balance in every school. Charleston was a countywide district with subdistricts that governed student and teacher assignment, hence racial balance was required only within subdistricts. The case study compared reading achievement for black third- and fourth-graders in schools with varying degrees of racial composition across subdistricts and found no significant difference in test scores, or change in test scores, among predominately black schools, predominately white schools, and racially balanced schools.

Some additional case studies (unpublished to date) are of special interest because of the nature of their desegregation plans. Three of these case studies present original data analyses from school districts discussed by Orfield and Eaton: Kansas City, Missouri; Prince Georges County, Maryland; and Charlotte-Mecklenburg County, North Carolina. Another is from

the Wilmington–New Castle County district, which had a unique court-ordered desegregation plan.

In 1978 a federal court ordered the merger of predominately black Wilmington, Delaware, with ten predominately white New Castle County districts to form a single metropolitan school district, and a countywide desegregation plan was implemented. It is one of the few metropolitan consolidation and busing plans to be ordered by a court and ultimately adopted. The case is of special interest because, unlike many central city plans, black students attend most of their school years in majority white suburban schools whose student bodies have remained relatively middle class (in some cases, affluent) since the start of the plan. As late as 1993 the New Castle County districts (the single district was divided into four districts in 1981) were among the most racially balanced districts in the country. Not only did the vast majority of schools range from 65 to 75 percent white, but also every school was at least majority white.

Figure 9 shows trends in sixth-grade reading scores for students in all four New Castle County districts.³⁰ In 1985, when sixth-graders would have attended racially balanced schools since kindergarten, we see a black-white gap of 15 points, or about three-fourths of a national standard deviation. Moreover, there is no improvement in black sixth-grade test scores, nor is there a reduction in the achievement gap over the nine years shown. In 1993 the black-white gap is 17 points (on a different test), or about eight-tenths of a standard deviation, similar to the 1992 achievement gaps for

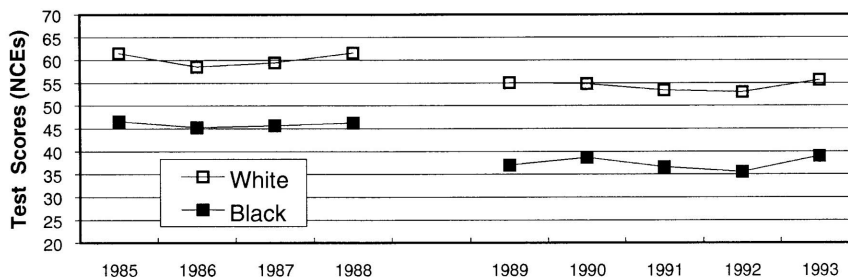


Fig. 9. Trends in New Castle County, Delaware, 6th-grade reading.

the NAEP reading tests. In spite of these stable, desegregated, and majority white schools located in middle-class neighborhoods, the presumed ideal environments for raising black achievement, there are neither significant black gains nor reductions in the black-white gap. Clearly, the Wilmington case does not support the thesis that racial balance will reduce the achievement gap.

Nor is it a question of money. In 1986 a federal court ordered Kansas City, Missouri, to implement what may well be the most expensive remedial plan in history. Kansas City had been operating a desegregation plan since the late 1970s. But in 1986 the court ordered an expanded plan involving extensive construction, renovation, and the addition of magnet programs to most of the elementary and all the secondary schools, whose purpose was to attract suburban whites into this 70 percent minority school system. With a unique court-ordered tax levy and court-ordered funding from the state, total school expenditures reached \$10,000 per pupil by 1990, with total funding exceeding \$1.5 billion over approximately an eight-year period. Unfortunately, not enough white students came to the city from the suburbs to lower the minority percentage significantly.

As the achievement trends in Figure 10 reveal, this extraordinary degree

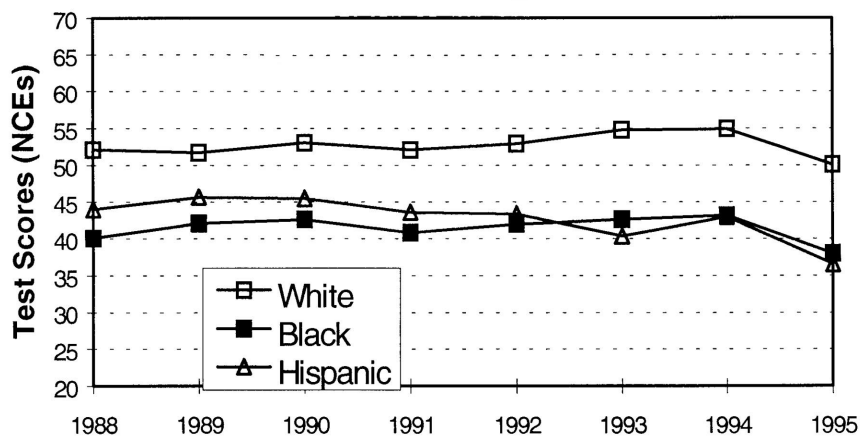


Fig. 10. Trends in Kansas City, Missouri, 5th-grade achievement, ITBS composite scores.

of expenditures for one of the largest magnet programs in the nation apparently did nothing to raise the achievement levels of black students, which remained substantially below white achievement from 1988 to 1995. In fact, when a new test form was implemented in 1995, scores of all students fell significantly, raising the possibility that some coaching or teaching of test content may have taken place during preceding years. Although the black-white achievement gap is somewhat narrower than in Wilmington or in the NAEP, this appears to be due to low white scores rather than to high black scores (Kansas City has a relatively high proportion of white students in the free lunch program). Thus, spending an extraordinary amount of money on a school desegregation plan and on magnet schools does not seem to improve minority achievement significantly or decrease the minority-white achievement gap.

The Prince Georges County case is noteworthy because of a different approach taken in its second school desegregation plan. A predominantly white suburban county outside Washington, D.C., Prince Georges adopted a comprehensive pairing and busing plan in 1973. This was followed by extensive white flight and black in-migration from the District of Columbia, and the county schools became majority black in the early 1980s. Recognizing that not all schools could achieve meaningful racial balance, a modified desegregation plan was adopted in 1985 that provided for several types of schools: desegregated magnet schools, desegregated regular schools, and "Milliken II" schools, which were predominantly black and received additional resources and funding. Later, as white enrollment losses continued, some of the magnet schools and some of the regular schools became predominately black; they also added a category of "Model" schools, which were predominately black and received extra resources but not as much as Milliken schools.

These different types of programs and desegregation levels offer a unique opportunity to sort out the potential effects of racial balance from the effects of special compensatory programs and extra funding. Figure 11 shows third-grade test scores (from a Maryland statewide test) for black students in six types of schools, after adjusting scores for student back-

ground characteristics. Though the scores vary somewhat across the different types of schools, there is no apparent benefit from attending a desegregated school, most of which are approximately half black and half white. After controlling for SES and initial ability, black students attending desegregated magnet and desegregated regular schools score no higher than black students at predominately black regular schools (which average around 90 percent black), and they score somewhat lower than black students in the enriched but predominately black Milliken and Model schools (which exceed 90 percent black). It is not clear why black students score lowest at the predominately black magnet schools and highest at the predominately black Model schools, but whatever the reason it is not because of their racial composition, which is identical.

The final case study to be presented is Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina, which is especially important historically because of the famous U.S. Supreme Court decision in this case. The *Swann* decision upheld a lower court order to adopt a comprehensive, countywide mandatory busing program to attain racial balance in all schools, thereby creating a standard for desegregation that was applied throughout the nation for many years. Because Charlotte was a large county district with a relatively low black enrollment in 1970, it was able to sustain very extensive racial balance for

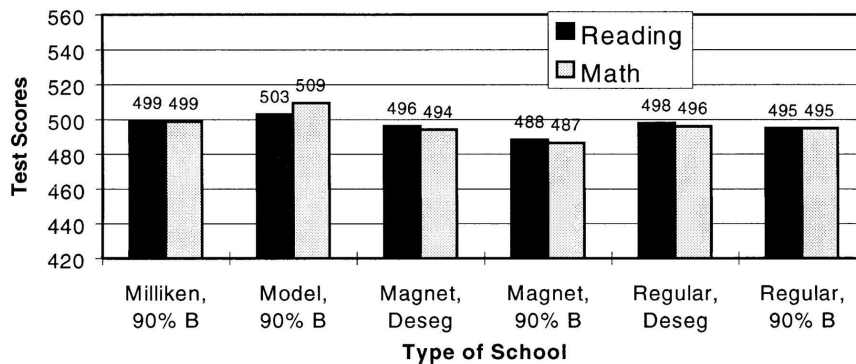


Fig. 11. Prince Georges County, Maryland, black test scores by school type, 1996, grade 3.

the next twenty years while at the same time preserving a majority white school system. It has been described in the Orfield and Eaton book as one of the most successful desegregation plans in the country, with unprecedented local support from educators, civil rights leaders, and the business community.

Figure 12 shows the long-term achievement trends for third and sixth graders from 1978 to 1997. In 1978 black elementary students had been in well-desegregated schools from kindergarten on, yet they scored only at the 20th percentile in both reading and math compared with national norms. Test scores began increasing dramatically for both black and white students, reaching maximums in about 1983, when black students scored at the national norm of 50. The reason for the increase is not clear, but it is not likely due to desegregation, which had been in place for eight years before 1978. Some of the increases may have been due to coaching or teaching test content because scores for both races dropped significantly when a new test form was adopted in 1986. Though the black-white gap had diminished somewhat by 1983, it returned to its original magnitude in 1986 (about one standard deviation) and remained relatively constant until the last CAT test was administered in 1992. A sizable test score gap

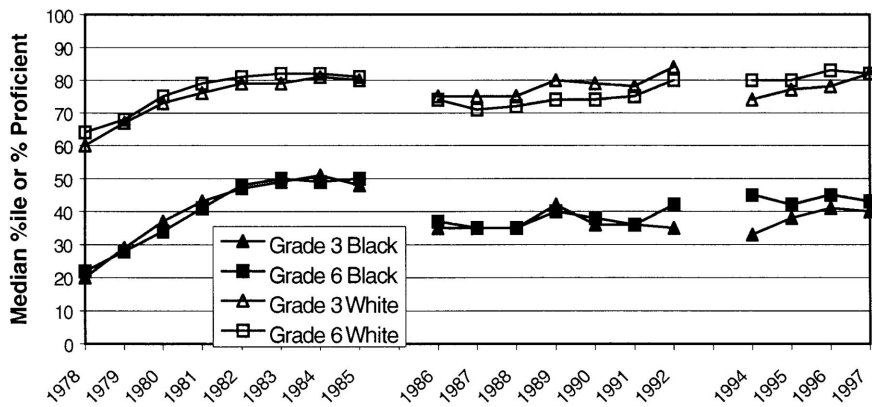


Fig. 12. Achievement trends in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina, grades 3 and 6.

also existed between 1994 and 1997, but it cannot be compared directly with the CAT gap because it comes from a different statewide test that uses a different metric. Thus, one of the most successful desegregation plans in the country did not reduce the black-white achievement gap significantly.

These case studies bolster the NAEP results shown in Figures 7 and 8, that racial composition by itself has little effect on raising the achievement of minority students or on reducing the minority-white achievement gap. Some studies show that there is no relationship at all between black achievement and racial composition (controlling for student SES), and other studies show that there is no relationship between the black-white achievement gap and racial composition. In either case, though there is some evidence here that achievement can be affected by programmatic changes, there is no evidence that it responds to improved racial balance by itself.

RACE RELATIONS AND ATTITUDES

Studies of the effect of desegregation on racial attitudes and race relations were fairly common during the 1970s, when the desegregation movement was at its peak. There seems to be less interest in these issues now, perhaps because the early studies offered little support for the notion that desegregation would bolster self-esteem, lower racial prejudice, and improve race relations.

The first major review of the effect of desegregation on race relations and attitudes was by St. John, whose study was published in 1975.³¹ She evaluated 35 studies conducted between 1966 and 1973 of changes in white attitudes or behaviors after desegregation. She found 11 studies in which white prejudice worsened, 11 where it improved, and 13 where there was no change or mixed results. She also evaluated 28 studies of changes in black prejudice after desegregation, finding 10 where black prejudice worsened, 6 where it improved, and 12 where there was no change or results were mixed. Her review also evaluated the effect of desegregation on the self-esteem of black children, one of the key concerns of the Supreme Court in *Brown*. Out of 35 studies, she found 14 where black self-esteem was

higher in segregated than desegregated schools, 5 where it was higher in desegregated schools, and 16 where there was no significant difference.

Walter G. Stephan conducted a similar type of review about ten years later.³² Although he reviewed a smaller number of studies, his 28 studies covered a longer time span (1963–1981) and included only those with a reasonably sound methodology. His findings were remarkably similar to those of St. John. Out of 24 studies of change in white attitudes or behavior, he found 11 where desegregation increased white prejudice, 4 where it decreased, and 9 where there was no change. Of the 17 studies of black attitudes and behaviors, he found 5 showing that desegregation worsened black prejudice, 4 where it improved, and 8 where there was no difference. In his review of black self-esteem in 28 studies, he found 7 where desegregation lowered black self-esteem, 1 where it was improved, and 19 where there was no change. It is interesting that the majority of studies during this period found that black self-esteem was generally higher than white self-esteem, thus calling into question the Supreme Court's psychological harm thesis.³³

The evidence on the benefit of school desegregation for race relations is probably the weakest of all. Indeed, there are more studies showing harmful effects than studies showing positive effects. This led to another and more recent reviewer of the race relations literature to conclude, somewhat generously: "In general, the reviews of desegregation and intergroup relations were unable to come to any conclusion about what the probable effects of desegregation were. . . . Virtually all of the reviewers determined that few, if any, firm conclusions about the impact of desegregation on intergroup relations could be drawn."³⁴

The reluctance of reviewers to draw conclusions about the benefits of school desegregation for race relations or self-esteem only reinforces our conclusion that the psychological harm theory of de facto segregation and the social benefit theory of desegregation are clearly wrong, at least when applied to desegregation as a racial balance policy. Of course, the original psychological harm theory presumed official segregation sanctioned by laws, which was pretty much gone by the mid-1960s and before the time

when most of the studies above were conducted. But supporters of the harm and benefit thesis have applied it far more broadly, to cover any type of racial imbalance or racial disparity arising from any cause, and even today it forms the ideological basis for desegregation and affirmative action policies. It is this broader formulation that fails under scrutiny of the research evidence.

Conclusions

What can we say about the success and failures of the school desegregation movement? If we evaluate school desegregation policy within the constitutional framework established by the Supreme Court on the matter of race in *Brown*, which is much narrower than the goals of many civil rights advocates, there are indeed successes. The failures come, for the most part, from attempts to extend this original framework to see school desegregation as a means of resolving a whole host of racial issues never contemplated by *Brown*.

First, we must not diminish the fact that *Brown* forever changed the fundamental way in which America deals with race, not only in schools but also throughout society. In particular, it forbade all official actions that segregated students or staff by race, or that sanctioned discriminatory distribution of resources, facilities, and activities. Second, after the Court allowed consideration of race in fashioning desegregation plans, what followed was an unprecedented change in the way students and staff were assigned to schools, eventually creating extensive racial balance in schools to an extent never attained in any other sector of society.

That racial balance has largely continued to the present time, with or without court orders. Although the Supreme Court has returned to its original conception of race, permitting school systems to be declared “unitary,” after which race cannot be used for student assignment (whether for racial balance or imbalance), there has been no rush to dismantle desegregation plans and return to strict neighborhood school policies. The reason is that racial balance and racial diversity have become desired goals,

especially within the educational establishment. True, a number of unitary school systems, like Norfolk, Oklahoma City, Cleveland, and Prince Georges County, now have some neighborhood schools, but most of these districts have retained such politically palatable desegregation policies as magnet programs, voluntary transfers, and minimal integrative geographic zoning. Indeed, that is why the racial balance indexes have remained so stable for the past fifteen years.

The biggest threat to desegregation is not the dismantling of plans but rather the inexorable demographic changes that have left the majority of larger school systems predominately minority. No type of permissible plan will result in substantial desegregation in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Atlanta, Dallas, and dozens of other large cities.³⁵ The declining measures of interracial exposure for both black and Hispanic students are caused not by dismantling desegregation plans but rather by the falling percentage of white students in all but the smallest public school districts. Though these demographic trends do effect the success of desegregation plans, they do not reflect failures of the courts or of public policy in general.

It is only when we turn to educational and social benefits that we find the most significant failures of desegregation policy. Of course, these are not failures of Supreme Court doctrines or federal law, which never contemplated such benefits; rather, they are a failing of the benefit theory as embraced by many civil rights advocates, some lower courts, and even a few Supreme Court Justices. Desegregation and racial balance have not brought the gains in minority achievement and a closing of the achievement gap envisioned by so many believers in this thesis because the thesis is invalid.

There is some evidence that special programs have benefited achievement slightly—even when not accompanied by racial balance—but the benefit has not been sufficient to close the black-white or the Hispanic-white gaps. In all the case studies discussed here, and in many others not discussed, the achievement gaps in well-desegregated school systems remain very close to the national achievement gap, and this gap is only slightly

smaller than the gap that existed when major desegregation plans began in 1970. If desegregation is responsible for this modest reduction in the gap, it is most likely due to programmatic and resource changes, not racial balance policies.

There is even less evidence that school desegregation has reduced racial prejudice, improved race relations, or benefited self-esteem. Here the expectations of benefits were based either on inadequate social theory or on misinterpretations of the widely accepted contact theory of Gordon Allport.³⁶ Given the very large differences in academic achievement between black and white students, and the fact that desegregation did not eliminate these differences, it may have been naïve to expect that integrated schools would improve black self-esteem, when blacks were plunged into an academic environment where the competition was far more rigorous than in segregated schools. The unequal achievement and resulting unequal grades in desegregated schools also violated one of the contact theory's requirements for positive race relations—that there would be equal status contact.

This is not to say there are no social benefits of school desegregation. First, school desegregation has brought each race greater personal knowledge about other races living in their community, albeit without guaranteeing positive race relations in all cases. Second, knowledge, proper instruction, and tolerant staff can help schools become places where children learn how to treat and respect persons of other races, which helps prepare them for the later realities of living in a multiracial society. Finally, many individual students do find meaningful interracial experiences and friendships, which they value and want to have, even though this outcome may not apply to the majority of students. This is one of the reasons we have always supported voluntary desegregation plans, which let individual students and families decide whether or not to attend an integrated school, for whatever reasons are important to them.

It is this last set of social benefits that leads us to support desegregation policies for unitary school systems, though these are more restricted than the original types of plans. Desegregation should be strictly voluntary, as with magnet schools or open enrollment options, and it should be available

across district lines as part of choice programs that include private schools. Race cannot be used explicitly as a criteria for school assignment in a unitary system, even in the case of voluntary options. Poverty (i.e., free lunch status) is, however, a permissible criteria for government decisions. By offering voluntary transfer options to all students, with some financial incentive (such as transportation) for free lunch students, we can expand the opportunities for desegregation for those families that desire it most, across district lines and between public and private sectors, and without the unintended negative consequences that have plagued the massive mandatory busing schemes of the past.

Notes

1. The criteria for a unitary or nondiscriminatory school system were first formulated in a brief footnote in a Supreme Court decision, *Green v. New Kent County (Va.)*, 430 U.S. 391 (1968). There was no discussion or explanation of the meaning of these factors or the level of compliance that would be required.

2. Gary Orfield and Susan E. Eaton, *Dismantling Desegregation* (New York: New Press, 1996), p. 53.

3. Alexander M. Bickel, "Untangling the Busing Snarl," *New Republic*, September 23 and 30, 1972.

4. James S. Coleman, Sara D. Kelly, and John A. Moore, *Trends in School Integration* (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute, 1975).

5. James S. Coleman et al., *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966).

6. *Green v. New Kent County* at 437.

7. *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*, 402 U.S. 1 (1971).

8. *Keyes v. School District No. 1, Denver*, 413 U.S. 189 (1973).

9. HEW, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, did a school census in 1967 and published a book with enrollment by school and three ethnic groups, white, black, and other, in several thousand school districts. The data was not kept in machine-readable format.

10. For a more detailed description of the original national study, see Christine H. Rossell and David J. Armor, "The Effectiveness of School Desegregation Plans," *American Politics Quarterly* 24 (1996): 267–302.

11. The formula is $D = 1/2 \sum | (W_i/W) - (B_i/B) |$ where W_i is the white enrollment in each school, W is the white enrollment in the school system, B_i is the black enrollment

in each school, and B is the black enrollment in the whole school system. The absolute sum of the difference between whites and blacks is calculated for each school, then summed down the schools, and the total divided by two.

12. It also equals the sum of the proportion of students of one race and the proportion of students of the other race that would have to be reassigned to attain perfect balance. In a school system exactly half white and half black, the percentage of each group to be assigned could be derived by dividing the index by two.

13. The number of cases for small districts was insufficient to provide stable estimates.

14. All Southern districts with both black and white students had to have some type of plan if they had practiced segregation in 1954; some districts may have eliminated segregation by geographic zoning, which they did not view as being a formal plan. Only ten districts fell into this category.

15. The index of dissimilarity measures the imbalance of only two groups at a time. In calculating Hispanic-white imbalance, black and other enrollment is ignored. Similarly, in the calculation of black-white imbalance, Hispanic and other minority enrollment is ignored.

16. See Coleman, Kelly, and Moore, 1975.

17. The formula is $E = (\sum_i nb_i pw_i) \div \sum nb_i$, where nb_i is the number of black students in school i , and pw_i is the proportion of white in the same school. The number of black students is multiplied by the proportion of white in each school, and this is then summed across schools. That total is divided by the number of blacks in the school system.

18. It is necessary to exclude districts with very small numbers of Hispanic students, because they tend to inflate the exposure index with very high values.

19. David J. Armor, "The Evidence on Busing," *Public Interest* 28 (1972): 90–126.

20. Orfield and Eaton, *Dismantling Desegregation*.

21. See Armor, *Forced Justice: School Desegregation and the Law* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 79–81. Black and white scores in Norfolk actually fell after desegregation in 1970, and neither group returned to its predesegregation achievement levels until 1978. The black-white gap narrowed somewhat between 1970 and 1973, but only because white achievement fell more than black achievement. Achievement improved for both groups between 1973 and 1980, but the gap remained constant during this time; scores fell again in 1981 when a new test form was introduced.

22. Nancy St. John, *School Desegregation* (New York: Wiley & Sons, 1975); Thomas Cook et al., *School Desegregation and Black Achievement* (Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Education, U.S. Department of Education, 1984); Janet Ward Schofield, in Banks and Banks, *Handbook of Research in Multicultural Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1994).

23. Cook et al., pp. 40–41.

24. Coleman et al., *Equality of Educational Opportunity*.

25. It fell to 0.5 sd's for thirteen-year-olds in 1988 and 1990, but by 1992 this age group was back to 0.71.

26. David Grissmer, Ann Flanagan, and Stephanie Williamson, "Why Did the Black-White Score Gap Narrow in the 1970s and 1980s?" in Christopher Jencks and Meredith Phillips, eds., *The Black-White Test Score Gap* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1998).

27. Armor, *Forced Justice*, p. 95.

28. The adjustment uses multiple regression analysis to predict student scores solely according to their parents' education, family structure, household reading items, and gender.

29. Armor, *Forced Justice*, pp. 77–83.

30. The break in the trend line denotes the change in 1989 from the California Achievement Test (CAT) to the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT).

31. St. John, *School Desegregation*.

32. Walter G. Stephan, "The Effects of School Desegregation: An Evaluation 30 Years After *Brown*," in M. Saks and L. Saxe, eds., *Advances in Applied Social Psychology* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum, 1986).

33. In fairness to the Supreme Court, they were simply referring to the testimony of social scientists at that time, who may have misinterpreted the famous doll studies of Kenneth and Mamie Clark. See Armor, *Forced Justice*, pp. 99–101.

34. Janet Ward Schofield, "School Desegregation and Intergroup Relations: A Review of the Literature," in *Review of Research in Education* 17: 335–412, ed. Gerald Grant (Washington, D.C.: American Educational Research Association, 1991), p. 356.

35. The Supreme Court established in 1974 in *Milliken v. Bradley* that there can be no cross-district remedy without a cross-district violation (i.e., collusion between city and suburban government officials to segregate the city and suburban school districts). Proving a cross-district violation is almost impossible, and there have been only a handful of cross-district remedies since 1974.

36. Gordon Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979).