Spring 2018

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The Segregation of Black Students and White Students in Cuyahoga and Summit County Public Schools

Alexandra Bednarz

Department of Education

Honors Research Project

Submitted to

The Honors College
Abstract

Although segregation has been ruled illegal and unethical in several landmark court cases, the segregation of Black and White students is still prominent in many of the public schools of Cuyahoga County and Summit County. In this paper, I analyze enrollment data from the Ohio Department of Education to determine the percentage of African American students attending intensely segregated school buildings in Cuyahoga County and Summit County. I find evidence that high percentages of students attend such schools, but these percentages have gone down slightly over the last 11 years in both counties. These counties have seen many changes in public-school enrollment in the last 11 years. Namely, both counties have seen an overall decrease in both the White and Black enrollment in public school buildings, and the percentage of African Americans in most public school buildings has declined while the percentage of Whites in most public schools has increased. I found that White populations increased most dramatically in schools that had reported higher Performance Index Scores in 2006 (during the 11 years that ensued), and Black populations also decreased most dramatically in such schools. This could imply a wide variety of reasons for the change in public-school enrollment in these counties.
Background

As a public-school student from Kindergarten to 12\textsuperscript{th} grade, and then as a student teacher in an inner city public school about to launch my career in education, I noticed several things that sparked me to do the research in this article.

For example, I grew up attending Garfield Heights City Schools. I began attending Elmwood Elementary in 2001 and graduated from Garfield Heights High School in 2014. During my thirteen years attending this district, I noticed massive changes in the school system’s demographics. For example, I only remember having two students of color in my Kindergarten class of maybe 25 children, whereas many of my high school classes were only 30\%–40\% White. In particular, I noticed the enrollment of Black students increase dramatically. This lead me to wonder what could be causing such a noticeable change in racial demographics in only thirteen years, and if this pattern could be seen in other schools.

For my student teaching placement, I was teaching high school mathematics at Buchtel CLC. Knowing that Akron is a very racially diverse community, I was struck by the fact that Buchtel’s student body was almost all African American students. I knew from observations that other schools in the Akron Public School district are not so highly concentrated of one ethnicity, so this arose my curiosity even more. Buchtel High School’s school zone correlates precisely with the “West Akron” neighborhood region. According to statisticalatles.com, which gets its data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the West Akron neighborhood is roughly 82.0\% black and 13.9\% and white. However, according to the ODE report card data for 2018, black students make up 93.3\% of the student body at Buchtel High School, and white students only account for 1.4\%. This led me to wonder why student enrollment at Buchtel High School is so disproportionate to the demographics of its neighborhood.
These observations led me to wonder the following questions:

- How do the racial trends that I noticed at Garfield Heights High School and Buchtel CLC relate to general trends in the United States?
- What racial shifts can be observed in Cuyahoga County (home of GHHS) and Summit County (home of Buchtel CLC)?
- Does a school’s performance (such as its report card grade on the ODE) affect its demographics/enrollment in upcoming years?
- Are schools becoming more or less segregated?

To answer these questions, I first reviewed several pieces of literature explaining the history behind school segregation in the United States. In finer detail, I analyzed the two court cases, *Reed v. Rhodes* and *Bell v. Board of Education Akron Public Schools*, which brought the issue of desegregation to the forefront in Cleveland and Akron. I then read researched the enrollment and changing enrollment of several school districts across the United States by reading other researchers’ recent studies regarding segregation. The summary of these findings is composed in the review of literature below.

I next downloaded archived data from the Ohio Department of Education for both the 2005-2006 school year and the 2016-2017 school year. I collected this data to determine what percentage of the public-school attending population is attending intensely segregated schools. I looked at the relationship between a school’s Performance Index Score published by the ODE (in 2005-2006) and the change in that school’s enrollment that followed in the next 11 years. I examined the overall change in public school population for Black Students and White students over those 11 years. Lastly, I discuss the implications of these findings.
Review of Literature: Racial Segregation and Inequality in the United States Schools

The desegregation of schools has been a long battle in the history of the United States. It was in 1896 that the morality of segregation was finally questioned in the infamous *Plessy v. Ferguson* case. It was also in 1896 that the Supreme Court announced its decision to continue allowing segregation in school buildings throughout the country, so long as the facilities remained “equal.” Although the “separate” part of the court’s ruling was well upheld, the “equal” part was not (Wells, Holme, Revilla, Atanda, 2004). *Plessy v. Ferguson* merely paved the path for decades of continued segregation by race in addition to unequal distribution of educational resources and opportunities.

Racial segregation was worst in the southern part of the United States. Fifty years after *Plessy v. Ferguson*, racial segregation was still required by law in seventeen states and permitted in four others. In the south, Black schools were unequivocally disadvantaged; the average southern state paid 50% more for each White child than for each Black child (Hall, 2005).

Legal segregation continued thusly until the supreme court finally made its pivotal decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954. We owe this ruling mostly to the efforts and struggles of the NAACP, as well as the courageous protests of many passionate parents, students, and community members at the time. (Hall, 2005). Five cases in encompassed one, the ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education* declared segregating schools by race to be unconstitutional.

However, the end of the “separate but equal” in the United States was not the end of segregation in the United States. Racial integration was a dangerous undertaking, as evidenced by everything the heroic Little Rock Nine had to go through to attend the previously all-white
Little Rock Central High School. Across the nation, school districts were sluggish to integrate their schools.

Even in the northern United States, integration was slow to come. In Cleveland, for example, 83% of students still attended racially segregated (all Black or all White) schools in 1963, nearly ten years after the Brown v. Board of Education ruling. (Patterson, 2002). Eventually the city began busing across neighborhood lines to integrate certain school buildings. Even so, these buildings were still segregated within the school walls. Black students and White students had separate classes, ate lunch at separate times, and Black students were denied admittance to many extracurricular activities.

The battle against segregation in Cleveland culminated when an African American mother sued the Cleveland Board of Education. This case is known is Reed v. Rhodes. On August 31, 1976, the court ruled that Cleveland public schools were indeed segregated and that the schools must implement ways to desegregate classrooms and extracurricular activities.

The Akron Board of Education faced a similar dispute in 1980. In the case of Bell v. Board of Education Akron Public Schools, the plaintiffs argued that the Akron Public Schools were reinforcing segregation in the school system. They had three basic claims. The first was that the restructuring of school zones between 1954 and 1965 resulted in intentional segregation by neighborhood. The second was that the post-1965 school board perpetuated the segregation in its schools rather than dismantle it. The third was that if the segregation of schools was due to government policies that resulted in segregated housing, then the segregation in Akron’s schools ought to have been subject to redress. Most of the first and second claims were dismissed, but in the third claim, “The District Judge who heard this school segregation complaint found that the Board of Education, Akron Public Schools, had formulated and put into effect a school
decommissioning plan which amounted to intentional segregation in a portion of the city schools” (Bell v. Board of Education Akron Public Schools, 1980). The new decommissioning plan was promptly submitted.

Segregation in United States Schools, unfortunately, did not terminate with the abundance of court cases following Brown v. Board of Education. Separate and unequal schools have continued right into the 21st century, and desegregation is a present and trying battle in many neighborhoods across the nation. Take the Chicago Public Schools (CPS), for example. Pavlyn Jankov and Carol Caref analyze the segregation of CPS in the decades following the Brown v. Board of Education decision in their article “Segregation and Inequality in Chicago Public Schools,Transformed and Intensified under Corporate Education Reform.” They define an intensely segregated school as one where at least 90% of the students are Black, and report that in 1971, 85% of Black students at CPS were attending an intensely segregated school. That percentage dropped only slightly over the coming decades. Even in 2012, they report that 70% of Black students in Chicago Public Schools are still attending an intensely segregated school.

Other cases of recent segregation are countless. In “School Segregation and Resegregation in Charlotte and Raleigh, 1989-2010” it is reported that recent policy changes have resulted in extreme segregation in schools in the Raleigh and Charlotte areas of North Carolina (Ayscue, Siegel-Hawley, Kucsera, & Woodward, 2018). A similar study done by John Kuscera, part of the UCLA Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles, suggests that the abandonment of desegregation policies has resulted in continued or increased segregation in schools across the state of New York between 1989 and 2010 (Kuscera, Orfield, 2014). It also shows that New York city has some of the most intensely segregated schools of the United States. Another publication by the UCLA Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles finds
that students of color have experienced intensifying school segregation in Massachusetts over the last two decades (Ayscue, Greenberg, Kucsera, Siegel-Hawley, Orfield, 2013). Research done by Meredith Richards in 2014 shows that gerrymandering still increases segregation in school districts studied across 17 different states (Richards, 2017).

The causes differ from region to region, but the list goes on for reports school districts that show evidence of continued and even worsening segregation. Instances of intensifying segregation are especially common in urban areas. One thing is clear: the fight to desegregate our schools in the United States is ongoing and critically important in many places. An abundance of research has shown that when schools are racially segregated, this has a negative impact on student learning. Racially segregated schools tend to receive different resources, different quality teachers (Richards, 2014). Segregation hurts students.
Methodology

Methods

Most of the enrollment data that I used for this study was collected from the enrollment data disaggregated by race/ethnicity available on the Ohio Department of Education’s (ODE) report card website. Unless otherwise stated, all data was collected from the ODE. First, I studied the percentage of students enrolled in intensely segregated school buildings. Secondly, I studied the relationship between a school building’s Performance Index Score in 2005-2006 to that school’s change in enrollment in the coming decade.

First, I performed a similar study to the one done in the Chicago Public Schools by Pavlyn Jankov and Carol Caref. That is, I defined an intensely segregated school building as one in which one race/ethnicity composes 90% or more of the student body. Specifically, I identified intensely segregated schools where 90% of the student body is African American or where 90% of the student body is White in Cuyahoga County and Summit County. This was done for the 2005-2006 school year, the first year for which the ODE has such data published, and the 2016-2017 school year, the most recent year for which the ODE has such data published. A total of 470 school buildings were analyzed for 2005-2006, and 477 school buildings were analyzed for 2016-2017.

I then determined the percent of Black students and White students attending intensely segregated school buildings in the 2005-2006 school year and the 2016-2017 school year. These percentages are reported for Cuyahoga County and Summit County, as well as for the two biggest school districts in each: the Cleveland Metropolitan School District and Akron Public Schools.
The ODE school data that was used for this study is only published for public schools. Because of this, this analysis may not reflect the complete percentage of students attending intensely segregated schools for the entire counties of Cuyahoga or Summit.

Another limitation of this study is caused by the fact that the ODE protects the anonymity of students if fewer than 5% of the school is of a certain race/ethnicity by withholding the exact percentage. For this reason, any enrollment percentage of <5% was changed to .01% for the purpose of my calculations, and any enrollment percentage of >95% was changed to 99.9% for the purpose of my calculations. For such schools, some groups may have been misrepresented by up to 5% as a result.

Secondly, I paired each school’s enrollment data for the 2005-2006 school year with its enrollment data for the 2016-2017 school year to determine the change in each racial group’s percent enrollment. For example, if a school’s student body was 30% White in 2005 and 40% White, then the school’s change in White enrollment was +10%. Similarly, if a school’s student body was 55% Black in 2005 and 45% Black in 2006, then that school’s change in Black enrollment was -10%.

Next, each school building’s Performance Index Score for the 2005-2006 school year was determined. The Performance Index Score is a summary of a schools’ students’ performance on standardized tests and is one of the ten graded measures of the report card published every year.

Each school was then plotted on an x-y plane, where the x-axis showed a school’s Performance Index Score, and the y-axis showed the change in a school’s percentage of either Black students or White students.
One major limitation of this study was that only school buildings that existed in both school years studied were used. Schools which had closed since 2006 or which had opened since 2006 could not be studied because my aim was to find the school’s change in enrollment in the last 11 years. Only 348 schools met these criteria and could be studied.

**Results**

For both the 2005-2006 school year and the 2016-2017 school year, there were 0 schools such that 90% or more of the student body was White. The results below show the data observed for intensely segregated schools such that 90% or more of the student body was Black.

For the 2005-2006 school year, it was determined that there were 72 intensely segregated schools in Cuyahoga County. There were 37,261 Black students enrolled in such schools. In total, there were 72,186 Black students enrolled in all schools reported by the ODE in Cuyahoga County. The percentage of Black students enrolled in an intensely segregated school was 51.6%. 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2005-2006 School Year</th>
<th>2016-2017 School Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cuyahoga County</td>
<td>51.60%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleveland Metropolitan School District</td>
<td>49.90%</td>
<td>57.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summit County</td>
<td>15.20%</td>
<td>18.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akron Public Schools</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For the 2005-2006 school year, it was determined that there were 7 intensely segregated schools in Summit County. There were 2,450 Black students enrolled in such schools. In total, there were 16,107 Black students enrolled in all schools reported by the ODE in Cuyahoga County. The percentage of Black students enrolled in an intensely segregated school was 15.2%.

For the 2005-2006 school year, it was determined that there were 52 intensely segregated schools in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD). There were 27,685 Black students enrolled in intensely segregated schools in the CMSD. A total of 40,122 Black students attended any school in the CMSD. The percentage of Black students enrolled in an intensely segregated school within the CMSD was 69.0%.

For the 2005-2006 school year, it was determined that there were 7 intensely segregated schools in the Akron Public Schools. There were 2,450 Black students enrolled in intensely segregated schools in the APS. A total of 13,007 Black students attended any school in the APS. The percentage of Black students enrolled in an intensely segregated school within the APS was 18.8%.

For the 2016-2017 school year, it was determined that there were 87 intensely segregated schools in Cuyahoga County. There were 29,828 Black students enrolled in such schools. In total, there were 66,460 Black students enrolled in all schools reported by the ODE in Cuyahoga County. The percentage of Black students enrolled in an intensely segregated school was 44.9%.

For the 2016-2017 school year, it was determined that there were 3 intensely segregated schools in Summit County. There were 1,407 Black students enrolled in such schools. In total, there were 14,428 Black students enrolled in all schools reported by the ODE in Cuyahoga County. The percentage of Black students enrolled in an intensely segregated school was 9.8%.
For the 2016-2017 school year, it was determined that there were 50 intensely segregated schools in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. There were 16,792 Black students enrolled in intensely segregated schools in the CMSD. A total of 29,120 Black students attended any school in the CMSD. The percentage of Black students enrolled in an intensely segregated school within the CMSD was 57.7%.

For the 2016-2017 school year, it was determined that there were 2 intensely segregated schools in the Akron Public Schools (though, 2 were within half a percent of the threshold). There were 1,206 Black students enrolled in intensely segregated schools in the APS. A total of 9,639 Black students attended any school in the APS. The percentage of Black students enrolled in an intensely segregated school within the APS was 12.5%.
The results of the second study are shown in the two graphs above. Each plotted point represents one of the 348 schools in Cuyahoga County or Summit County that was open in both the 2005-2006 and the 2016-2017 school year and for which data was reported by the ODE. The x-axis shows the school’s School Performance Index as reported by the ODE for the 2005-2006 school year. The y-axis shows the particular racial group’s change in percent enrollment in the 11 years that follow. For example, if a school’s student body went from 50% Black in 2006 to 75% Black in 2017, then that school’s change in Black percentage was +25%.

I also analyzed the total number Black and White students attending schools in Cuyahoga County and in Summit County for both of the focus school years.

The total enrollment numbers were found by adding up the reported enrollment numbers for all schools in Cuyahoga County and Summit County from the disaggregated data sheet released by the ODE. Any schools for which the enrollment number was not reported (due to
privacy protection) were given a “0” for that number. For example, there were 64 such schools in Cuyahoga County that had <10 White students enrolled in 2005-2006, meaning the total enrollment number may be underreported by up to 576 students. There were 6 such schools in Summit County in 2005-2006. There were 81 such schools in Cuyahoga County in 2016-2017 and there were 3 such schools in Summit County in 2016-2017.

Total Number of White Students Enrolled in Public Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2005-2006 School Year</th>
<th>2016-2017 School Year</th>
<th>Increase/Decrease:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cuyahoga County</td>
<td>89,512</td>
<td>71,368</td>
<td>-20.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMSD</td>
<td>9,320</td>
<td>6,336</td>
<td>-32.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summit County</td>
<td>58,418</td>
<td>46,933</td>
<td>-19.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APS</td>
<td>11,726</td>
<td>7,064</td>
<td>-39.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Number of Black Students Enrolled in Public Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2005-2006 School Year</th>
<th>2016-2017 School Year</th>
<th>Increase/Decrease:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cuyahoga County</td>
<td>72,186</td>
<td>66,460</td>
<td>-7.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMSD</td>
<td>40,122</td>
<td>29,120</td>
<td>-27.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summit County</td>
<td>16,107</td>
<td>14,428</td>
<td>-10.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APS</td>
<td>13,007</td>
<td>9,639</td>
<td>-25.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Implications

The percentage of students enrolled in intensely segregated school buildings went down in both counties over the course of 11 years, but not by much. This mirrors the findings of Pavlyn Jankov and Carol Caref regarding the Chicago Public Schools. The percentages are still fairly high, especially in Cuyahoga County. It is also noteworthy that the urban districts, CMSD and APS, each have a higher percentage of students attending intensely segregated schools than in their corresponding counties. This is a pattern that was commonly reported in many of the literature sources that were reviewed.

There are many reasons that the percentage of students attending intensely segregated schools may have decreased in the last 11 years. It is possible that district policies might be reinforcing integration and still battling the once-mandatory segregation of the neighborhoods. However, since the ruling that the segregation in CMSD and APS is “de facto,” not much has been done to combat segregation of school buildings (such as busing across neighborhoods). It is also possible that families are naturally desegregating themselves by moving to mixed neighborhoods and enrolling their children in schools that were previously “intensely segregated.” Because every intensely segregated school was >90% Black, this would need to mean that non-Black families have moved to neighborhoods that were predominantly Black approximately moved decade ago. This could mean that White families are moving to the area, or that families of other races (which were not studied in this case) are moving to the area, lowering the overall percentage of Black students attending those schools.

Another possible explanation for the decrease in students attending intensely segregated schools is the that Black families may be moving out of the most highly segregated school zones. This is supported most highly by the decrease in overall enrollment of Black students in both
counties and both urban districts. However, since the decline in overall White enrollment is more drastic in every case, this would still need to be combined with increased enrollment of some other racial group.

The overall decrease in enrollment for both counties and both urban districts is a curious result. It is possible that families need not be relocating their residence at all. The change in school enrollment may reflect that more and more families are opting for private school options for their children, (and the statistics suggest that this would be a more common choice for White families than for Black families). Alternatively, it may reflect that there are simply fewer school-age children living in these counties now than there were 11 years ago.

The scatter plots that show the change in a school’s White percentage or Black percentage could be attributed to several different factors as well. Notice that the schools that reported the lowest School Performance Index in 2006 (scores of 50-60) did not see much change in their enrollment over the next 11 years. This probably shows that very few families moved into or out of the neighborhoods that attended these schools, and that few families changed their choice of school (i.e. from public to private) in those years. Notice also that schools that scored 60-110 in 2006 generally saw increases in White percentage and decreases in Black percentage over the next 11 years. Very few schools have seen an increase in Black percentage.

The data shown in these scatter plots suggests a connection between the School Performance Index published by the ODE for a particular school building and the change in that school’s enrollment that ensues. If the ODE reports a low rating for a school building (below 60), it is reasonable to predict that the school will not see much change in enrollment in the coming years. If the ODE reports a mid-level rating for a school building (60-80), it is reasonable to
predict that the school’s White enrollment percentage will increase slightly and that the school’s Black enrollment percentage will decrease slightly. If the ODE reports a high rating for a school building (above 80), it is reasonable to predict that the school’s White enrollment percentage will increase more drastically and that its Black enrollment percentage will decrease more dramatically.

This supports the findings that the percentage of Black students in intensely segregated schools is decreasing (recall that all intensely segregated schools were more than 90% Black). This means that these schools must be decreasing in their percentage of Black students, and that the ratio of students of other races, like White students, must be increasing.

Although the percentage of students enrolled in intensely segregated schools has decreased, these percentages are still very high, especially in the case of Cuyahoga County and CMSD. Even the lowest percentage of 9.8% means that nearly one in every 10 African American children attends a school where more than 90% of the school’s population is African American as well. They are still attending highly segregated school buildings.

My supposition is that the existence of so many intensely segregated schools is residual from the intense segregation of neighborhoods, whether it was mandated by law or whether it was the results of something like “white flight,” when masses of White families leave an area because of the introduction of things like school integration. It is easy to see the segregation of neighborhoods in Akron that remains today. Take, for example, these maps (Figures 4 and 5) from StatisticalAtlas.com, a website that compiles data from the 2010 U.S. census, of White and Black population in Akron:
Figure 4: Whites as a percentage of the population in Akron (by block group)

Map from www.statisticalatlas.com
Evidently, racial segregation is still prominent in the neighborhoods and schools of many parts of Cuyahoga County and Summit County. Defining an intensely segregated school as one with 90% or more of the student body being African American, large percentages of African American students are attending intensely segregated schools. These percentages have gone down over the last 11 years in both counties, but not by much. These counties have seen many changes in public-school enrollment in the last 11 years. Namely, both counties have seen an overall decrease in both the White and Black enrollment in public schools, and the percentage of African Americans in most public schools has declined while the percentage of Whites in most public schools has increased. Regardless of slight decreases in the percentage of these counties’
students attending intensely schools, and regardless of the cause of the current segregation situation, it is evident that the battle to desegregate our public schools is far from over, and this is an issue that needs special attention.
References


https://statisticalatlas.com/place/Ohio/Akron/Race-and-Ethnicity