

Study: Teachers choose schools according to student race

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A study forthcoming in the *Journal of Labor Economics* suggests that high-quality teachers tend to leave schools that experience inflows of black students. According to the study's author, C. Kirabo Jackson (Cornell University), this is the first study to show that a school's racial makeup may have a direct impact on the quality of its teachers.

"It's well established that schools with large minority populations tend to have lower quality [teachers](#)," Dr. Jackson said. "But it is unclear whether these schools are merely located in areas with a paucity of quality teachers, whether quality teachers avoid these schools because of the neighborhood or economic factors surrounding a school, or whether there is a direct relationship between student characteristics and teacher quality."

Dr. Jackson's findings suggest that it's not neighborhoods keeping high-quality teachers away; it's the students—and it's directly related to their race.

"This is particularly sobering because it implies that, all else equal, [black students](#) will systematically receive lower quality instruction," Jackson said. "This relationship may be a substantial contributor to the black-white achievement gap in American schools."

The study focused on the Charlotte-Mecklenberg school district in North Carolina. In 2002, the district ended its race-based busing program, which distributed the district's minority population across its schools.

When the policy ended, some schools had a large and sudden inflow of black students. Since the racial makeup of the schools changed suddenly but the neighborhood and economic factors surrounding them stayed the same, Jackson could test the impact the student body itself had on teacher quality.

Using data supplied by the North Carolina Education Research Data Center, Jackson found that schools that had an increase in black enrollment suffered a decrease in their share of high-quality teachers, as measured by years of experience and certification test scores. Teacher effectiveness, as measured by teachers' previous ability to improve student test scores, decreased in the black inflow schools as well. The change in quality for each school generally occurred in the same year that the busing program ended, indicating that teachers moved in anticipation of more black students.

"This study implies teachers may prefer a student body that is more white and less black," Jackson says.

Black teachers were slightly more likely than white teachers to stay in the schools that experienced a black inflow, the study found. However, those black teachers who did leave black schools tended to be the highest qualified black teachers. So the decline in quality was somewhat more pronounced among black teachers than white teachers.

Just what it is about black students that pushes high-quality teachers away is hard to pin down, Dr. Jackson says. It could be that teachers are reacting to notions about black students' achievement or income levels.

More information: C. Kirabo Jackson, "Student Demographics, Teacher Sorting, and Teacher Quality: Evidence from the End of School Desegregation," *Journal of Labor Economics* 27:2.

Source: University of Chicago ([news](#) : [web](#))

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