

Black History Month's sobering news: MLK dream alive for few, says researcher

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In the past 20 years, Martin Luther King's dream of the day when "little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls" through school desegregation has not been realized for most, according to research by an Iowa State University economist.

David Frankel, associate professor of economics, looked at public school enrollments from every school district in the country and found that school segregation between blacks and whites has improved only slightly from 1987 to 2007.

Frankel studied the numbers of Asians, [Hispanics](#), blacks and whites attending public schools.

Findings showed that while all other group pairings have become significantly more integrated, this doesn't hold true for blacks and whites.

"School segregation is going down for all the groups except blacks and whites," said Frankel.

"Whites are getting more integrated with Hispanics and Asians. Blacks are getting more integrated with Hispanics and Asians. Hispanics and Asians are getting more integrated with each other. But blacks and whites are not getting more integrated with each other. This is the one exception," he said.

Segregation in schools is important because it may have an impact on educational outcomes, said Frankel.

"There is (previous) evidence that kids who go to segregated schools don't do as well, and it's not clear why," said Frankel.

While black and white interaction is important, Frankel believes including all [racial groups](#) in his study is important to get a complete picture of segregation.

"We are a much more multi-racial society than we were before," said Frankel. "We have more Asians and many more Hispanics. It is important to study all the racial groups at once, rather than one at a time."

The study is published in the current issue of the *Journal of Economic Theory* and was co-authored by Oscar Volij, formerly of Iowa State and currently professor of economics at Ben Gurion University in Israel.

The study also examined current, nationwide segregation between and within cities, districts, metropolitan areas and states.

Frankel also found that looking at a current snapshot of segregation shows that suburban area schools have a different race composition when compared to schools in urban areas.

Another new significant finding shows that schools in the border states of California, New Mexico and Texas also see many more Hispanic kids than non-border states.

"One of the reasons why you have lots of Hispanic kids in some schools and not in others is, lo and behold, lots more Hispanics live in border states," said Frankel. "It may seem obvious, but before this study, people

had not looked at segregation across states."

Frankel attributes segregation present in schools to urban and suburban segregation within metropolitan areas as well as segregation across states.

Frankel says there was also segregation across cities within the state, and segregation within urban districts, but those are quantitatively less important, according to Frankel.

Frankel used the Atkinson and the Mutual Information indices and applied them to school enrollment figures from the U.S. government to obtain his results.

The complete study can be found [here](#).

Provided by Iowa State University

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