

Study shows suburban schools have worked to 'hoard' advantages

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As suburban school districts have gained advantages over their urban counterparts, they have tenaciously clung to them, often at the expense of urban districts, a new study by University of Kansas researchers shows.

While urban schools' not keeping pace with suburban schools is an acknowledged problem, few have studied the causes of the discrepancies. John Rury and Argun Saatcioglu, professor and assistant professor of educational leadership and policy studies, recently published an article in the [American Journal of Education](#) showing how some suburban school districts gained advantages, thereby excluding them from some others. "Opportunity hoarding," a term coined by sociologist Charles Tilley, claims that a group that gains advantages tends to work to maintain them.

"Basically, it's rules of exclusion," Rury said of the term. "Many suburbs are almost a textbook case of people doing that. They are often marketed as 'exclusive neighborhoods.'"

Suburban schools have not always had advantages over their urban counterparts. Rury and Saatcioglu studied [census data](#) from 1940, 1960 and 1980.

"In the '40s, urban schools were it. They were the best schools," Rury said. "Forty years later, it was just the opposite."

The researchers studied samples of 17-year-old students in grade 11 or higher in each census year in the northeast United States. That data linked the students to their parents and gave indications of their family status such as income, place of residence, whether they lived in a single family home and other social indicators.

Research has studied the [suburbanization](#) of America, citing factors such as "white flight," declines of urban tax base and loss of jobs as factors that led people to move to suburban neighborhoods. Competitive neighborhoods by nature, suburbs started using schools to market themselves to potential residents in the decades after [World War II](#). Such neighborhoods were able to exclude certain populations from moving in through exclusionary tactics such as higher home prices.

"The historical organization of suburban school districts, distinct from their urban counterparts, permitted exclusion of children without requisite social and economic resources, creating the conditions for educational inequality across community lines," Rury and Saatcioglu wrote.

Social factors played heavily into improvement of suburban schools as well. The researchers found that largely affluent neighborhoods saw positive benefits to their school multiply, while city center schools, often more burdened by poverty and single parent homes showed just the opposite. Such factors also prevent the ability to move to the suburbs and their associated better schools, perpetuating the cycle.

Surprisingly, *Brown v. Board of Education*, the landmark Supreme Court case outlawing racial segregation of schools, and following cases did not make an immediate impact in the north and west United States. *Milliken v. Bradley*, a 1974 Supreme Court case dealing with school integration, stated suburban schools did not have to be integrated unless it could be proven that they contributed to the segregation of urban schools.

Southern schools were primarily organized in countywide school districts, which resulted in earlier integration.

Rury and Saatcioglu argue that a change in federal education policy is necessary to combat the education disparities. Title 1, a program established in the 1960s to fight school inequality, has done little to bridge the educational gap, they claim. The researchers suggest federal policy similar to Title 1 that instead focuses on cities at the core of the nation's metropolitan areas.

Rury and Saatcioglu plan to expand their research to study all regions of the United States to see if similar opportunity hoarding occurred in suburban neighborhoods throughout the country. Both are well versed in research of urban [school districts](#), having published studies of Chicago and Cleveland school systems, respectively.

Provided by University of Kansas

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