

Report shows schools in nation's capital remain intensely segregated

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Credit: University of California, Los Angeles

The UCLA Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles today released a new research report on segregation and its alternatives in Washington D.C. showing that despite the sharply increasing diversity of

the nation's capital, generation after generation of African American students in Washington D.C. have attended intensely segregated schools and still do in a city with a wider racial achievement gap than any state.

"In 1957, Dr. Martin Luther King stood before the Washington Monument in his first national speech and called upon the country to implement the vision of equality in the Brown v. Board of Education, calling the ruling a 'great beacon light of hope', says Professor Gary Orfield, Co-Director of The UCLA Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles. "Unfortunately, that vision remains unfulfilled. This report makes clear that substantial school desegregation was never achieved for [black students](#) through the U.S. Supreme Court-ordered desegregation of the D.C. schools 63 years ago."

The report, "[Our Segregated Capital: An Increasingly Diverse City with Racially Polarized Schools](#)," finds that while the city has become far more diverse, and there has been some modest progress in reducing [segregation](#) in the D.C. public schools, segregation remains intense. The report also makes clear that schools in Washington D.C. are doubly segregated by both race and poverty.

"The District of Columbia's population became substantially diverse over the past several decades, but schools in D.C. do not reflect this racial diversity," notes report co-author Jongyeon Ee, Research Associate at the Civil Rights Project. "Students in the city face intense segregation by race and poverty – which creates serious barriers to equal educational opportunity."

The overall share of African American and Latino students in DC who attended intensely segregated public schools (90-100% minority) decreased between 1992 and 2013 but remained very high. The combined share of African American and Latino students was 88% in 2013, but 93% of their classmates came from these same groups. Nearly

90% of black public school students went to "apartheid schools" (either completely nonwhite or within one percent of absolute segregation) in 1992, and the percentage was still high (71%) in 2013. Washington, D.C. never experienced substantial school diversity that was created in other cities during the civil rights era desegregation plans.

Schools in Washington are doubly segregated by both race and income. In 2011, about two-in-three students in D.C. were from low-income families, and students of color and poverty, in particular, tended to have more low-income classmates. A typical black student attended a school with over two thirds students of poverty, and more than half of the classmates of a typical Latino student were poor students. This double segregation is the basic mechanism for the perpetuation of inequality in D.C., which has extreme racial gaps in educational achievement, gaps larger than those in any state that have not changed significantly for many years. Whites in the city and suburbs usually attend schools with a substantial share of whites and a large majority of middle class schoolmates, whereas black students are segregated by both race and poverty.

Importantly, the report also analyzes segregation patterns among [charter schools](#) in D.C., which have expanded greatly. In spite of being developed during a period of rapidly increasing diversity among city residents, charter schools have the most extreme segregation in the city. In SY 2013-2014, charter schools enrolled over 80% blacks and 12% Latinos, and the combined share of white and Asian students was less than 5%. About 80% of students enrolled in charter schools in SY 2013-2014 were designated as low income.

The report also shows major limitations with vouchers, which Congress has supported in DC, in reducing segregation, since few private schools are located in black areas and the cost of tuition often exceeds the vouchers value. The overall enrollment in private schools in D.C. has

dramatically shrunk, especially for black and Latino students, though the numbers for white students have remained more constant.

"It's clear that charters and vouchers have done little to reduce segregation in the D.C. schools," says Orfield. "Given the proclamations of the Trump campaign and pending nomination of Betsy DeVos, a strong proponent of charter schools and vouchers as Secretary of Education, educators and policy leaders in the region may want to closely consider the effectiveness of those strategies."

"The report describes how the city's population transformed since 1980. As "black flight" to the suburbs mushroomed, young, mostly white, professionals redeveloped and gentrified a growing list of neighborhoods, but these changes usually did not significantly diversify the schools. From 1980 to 2010 the city's black population fell 31 percent, the white population grew 35 percent, and the Latino population soared 210% from a small base. In DC those changes offer a new possibility of lasting diversity in substantial parts of the city.

A half-century of research, summarized in the report, shows that segregation limits achievement and attainment; conversely integration is a key factor in high school graduation, college completion, better life outcomes, and benefits students of all races.

Whether or not these demographic changes produce diverse schools and neighborhoods, the report concludes, depends on whether the city decides to use new forms of voluntary school choice to foster school integration and its housing and land use policies to enable substantial numbers of long term residents of color to remain in neighborhoods that are becoming upscale.

The report recommends that the school district and the city develop a plan with a basic goal of lasting diversity in order to provide better

options for African American students, and increase the number of schools operating at a level of excellence all students deserve. In particular, magnet schools with diversity plans are shown to be very effective. School choice, with appropriate [civil rights](#) policies, could give D.C. families a choice that has never been present in most of the city—strong schools, well integrated by race and income, where students of all backgrounds learn skills essential to living and working successfully in an exceptionally multiracial city of their future. These efforts could be enhanced by supportive housing policy.

"Dr. King would be stunned to learn that, since Brown, five more generations of African American children in our national capital have been largely limited to intensely segregated and inferior schools, and this is simply accepted as normal," says co-author Orfield. "This report declares that there is a path, using voluntary means, to come together to seek an integrated future, in the city where King spoke 60 years ago."

"Our Segregated Capital: An Increasingly Diverse City with Racially Polarized Schools," analyzes the magnitude and trend of racial segregation and its education consequence among schools in the District of Columbia. The analyses included both the metropolitan area and the immediate metro regions comprising DC and the Montgomery, Prince George's County, Alexandria, Arlington, and Fairfax districts. This report shows that the District's schools enroll only an eighth of the metro students. The entire metro [school](#) enrollment is about 25% black [students](#), 20% Latino, a tenth Asian and white, and growing numbers of mixed race children. Substantial parts of the suburban ring are experiencing serious resegregation. Prince Georges County is even more segregated than the DC schools.

Provided by University of California, Los Angeles

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