

Impacts of school choice on segregation

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Diversity in schools is important for students' experiences and outcomes in schools and beyond, reducing prejudices and ensuring the likelihood of living and working in integrated environments as adults. Penn State researchers are exploring how school choice is affecting racial composition and segregation in Pennsylvania schools.

According to lead researcher Erica Frankenberg, associate professor of education and Population Research Institute associate at Penn State, this is one of the first studies to explore how [charter schools](#) could be affecting the [racial composition](#) of public schools.

"It is critical to assess how student movement from [charter](#) schools affects school segregation during this time of persisting neighborhood segregation, and to see what choices students and parents make when or if more integrative options exist," said Frankenberg.

Using student data from Pennsylvania, the researchers focused on approximately 8,000 students transferring from public schools to charter schools in ten [metropolitan areas](#) where there was more than one potential brick-and-mortar charter school option, to see how access to more racially diverse schools affected [school choice](#).

"Although other studies have used individual data to examine charter school racial composition and segregation," Frankenberg explained, "this project considered [student](#) enrollment decisions when presented with schools of differing racial composition,"

They also assessed the racial composition of charter schools that students enrolled in and compared them to the racial composition of public schools from which the students transferred. "We found that black and Latino students tended to move into charter schools that were more racially isolated than the public schools they left," said Frankenberg.

The researchers found that factors such as distance to the chosen school was a factor but was not the determining factor of school [choice](#). In fact, they found that the average distance to a chosen charter school was at least twice as far as the nearest charter school for black and Latino students, regardless of their age group.

While Frankenberg and her team weren't surprised by this discovery, as previous research points to higher segregation in charter schools than traditional public schools, especially among black students, they were surprised by other findings.

"We found that white students in Philadelphia metropolitan areas more often transferred to charter schools that had a higher percentage of white students, while white students in non-Philadelphia metropolitan areas moved to slightly more diverse charter schools than the [public schools](#) they left," said Frankenberg.

The findings raise critical questions regarding educational equity, and the effects of educational reform and school-choice policy on fostering racially diverse schools. It is important, said Frankenberg, because research confirms the importance of attending diverse schools for students of all racial groups.

"Minority students in more diverse school settings have higher short-term and long-term academic outcomes than those who attend racially isolated minority schools," she said. "Meanwhile, benefits to [white students](#) as well as students of color include reduced prejudice and a

higher likelihood of living and working in diverse environments as adults."

This research illuminates the rapidly growing number of students transferring to charters in Pennsylvania who are making choices that are more segregative. "In the future, I would like to research the factors that influence school choice, as well as the impacts of other types of school choice, such as cyber schools, on traditional public [school](#) racial composition, and look at other states to see how they differ from Pennsylvania."

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Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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