

Reinforced by policies, charters segregate schools

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The expansion of charter schools in the 2000s led to an increase in school segregation and a slight decline in residential segregation, according to new research from Cornell University providing the first

national estimates of the diverging trends.

According to the study, the average district to expand charter school enrollment between 2000 and 2010 experienced a 12% increase in white-Black [school segregation](#) and a 2% decrease in white-Black residential segregation.

The patterns moved in [opposite directions](#), the research found, because [charter schools](#)—which receive [public funds](#) but operate independently—weaken the traditional link between neighborhood and school assignment, allowing families to choose more racially homogenous schools regardless of where they live.

The findings highlight education policy's influence beyond schools and offer a "cautionary lesson" about continued charter expansion without efforts to limit racial sorting by families, according to lead author Peter Rich.

Understanding charter schools' effects on segregation is critical, because they represent an increasingly popular educational reform, the researchers said. Charter school enrollment has quadrupled since 2000, serving nearly 6% of students in 2015-2016, and is expected to continue growing and gaining influence.

The researchers analyzed more than 1,500 metropolitan school districts to examine what happened when school choice decoupled neighborhood and school options, using data from the census and the National Center for Education Statistics' Common Core of Data.

The researchers said their findings reveal school and residential segregation as "more like eddies in a stream, circling and reinforcing each other via policies and preferences."

The analysis did not find that charter school affected white-Hispanic segregation in schools, because Hispanic students on average attend more diverse charter schools. White-Hispanic segregation did fall as charter enrollment grew.

Though the reductions in [residential segregation](#) were "nontrivial," the researchers said, policy makers should not see [school choice](#) as a tool for achieving resident diversity, given how it exacerbated school segregation.

Provided by Cornell University

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