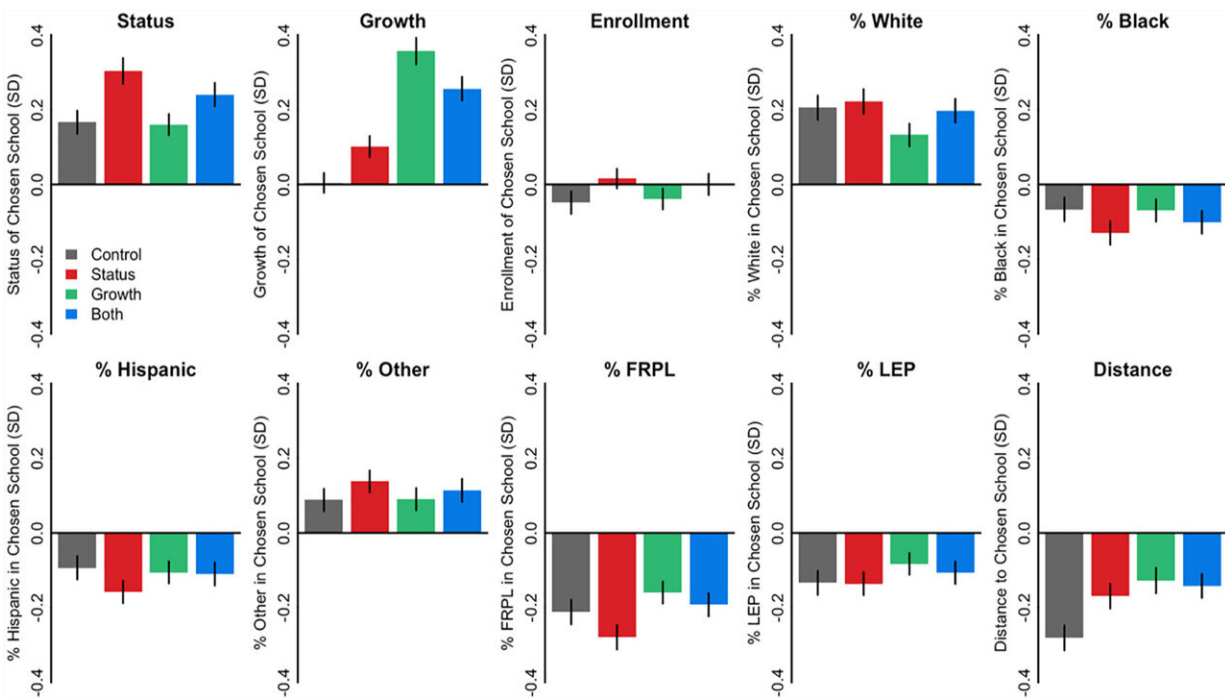


# Giving parents better school quality data encourages them to consider less affluent, less white schools—to a point

June 8 2023



Average characteristics of chosen schools. Note. Bars represent the average characteristics of the schools chosen by participants in each experimental group; vertical lines represent 95% confidence intervals. Outcomes are standardized within each choice set and averaged over all non-home-district choices; n = 2,784. Credit: *AERA Open* (2023). DOI: 10.1177/23328584231177666

For years, parents looking for data to compare the academic quality of

schools for their children had one primary measure to turn to: average student scores on standardized tests. However, these scores are often related to factors that have nothing to do with instructional quality—such as family income or racial and ethnic background—and push parents toward schools that are Whiter and more affluent, exacerbating school segregation in the U.S.

As a result, many education experts advocate using the rate of growth in student test scores, rather than the current status of scores, as a more meaningful measure of how well schools educate children.

In a study published in *AERA Open*, researchers David M. Houston of George Mason University and Jeffrey R. Henig of Teachers College, Columbia University, found that providing parents with achievement growth data encourages them to consider schools with greater economic and racial diversity, but only up to a point.

For their study, Houston and Henig partnered with research firm YouGov to recruit a nationally representative sample of 2,800 parents and other caretakers of children 12 or younger for an [online survey](#), which took place March 16–31, 2021.

Along with some [demographic information](#) about students, respondents were given achievement status data, achievement growth data, both [data points](#), or no achievement data for grades 3 to 8 for three schools in a randomly selected school district. With this information in hand, respondents were then asked to choose their preferred school.

Parents who received only achievement growth data unsurprisingly tended to choose higher-growth schools than parents who received just achievement status information. For example, when given just achievement growth data, survey respondents choosing between schools in the Madison County School District north of Jackson, Mississippi,

preferred a school that was 2.6 percentage points less White and 2.1 percentage points more economically disadvantaged, on average, than their counterparts without any academic performance data.

However, when parents received both status and growth data, which is what many states' school report cards and school rating websites provide, they were more likely to choose higher-growth schools—but only those schools that happened to be as affluent or as White as those chosen by parents without any performance data.

"Adding growth information to the array of data available to parents and the public is a good thing to do, but our results indicate that it's unlikely to change parental behavior in a way that helps to diversify schools," said Houston, an assistant professor of education policy at George Mason.

"As a community, we need to replace our status-based conceptions of school quality with growth-based ones so that we can identify our most and least effective schools, regardless of the kinds of students they serve," Houston said. "School leaders, policymakers, and [parents](#) should continue to push for and focus on measures of [school](#) quality based on academic growth over time. At the same time, making real progress may mean also working through the political process to build consensus for broader changes."

**More information:** David M. Houston et al, The "Good" Schools: Academic Performance Data, School Choice, and Segregation, *AERA Open* (2023). [DOI: 10.1177/23328584231177666](https://doi.org/10.1177/23328584231177666)

Provided by American Educational Research Association

Citation: Giving parents better school quality data encourages them to consider less affluent, less

white schools—to a point (2023, June 8) retrieved 18 June 2024 from  
<https://phys.org/news/2023-06-parents-school-quality-affluent-white.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.