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NEW UCLA-CRP STUDY DOCUMENTS WIDESPREAD, HARMFUL SEGREGATION IN CALIFORNIA SCHOOLS

Los Angeles – The UCLA Civil Rights Project (CRP) today is publishing [*Extreme Segregation and Policy Inaction in California Schools*](#), a new study that calls attention to the persistent and deepening segregation in the state’s public schools. The CRP, a leading source of school segregation statistics for nearly 30 years, concludes that California has had an exceptionally segregated and unequal educational system since 1980: desegregation plans have been shut down, the state constitution was changed to block integration efforts, and there has been no serious state leadership for even voluntary integration efforts since the 1970s.

The [*new report*](#), by Ryan Pflieger and Gary Orfield, shows that white and Asian students are far more likely to attend high achieving schools, while Black, Latino and Native students are concentrated in low achieving schools.

CRP Co-director Orfield notes, “This extensive segregation means students of color are far less prepared for an increasingly competitive higher education system in a state where affirmative

action has been illegal since 1996.”¹

California is under an illusion that it’s a progressive place where racial diversity is a strength, yet it operates the nation’s most segregated schools, according to the report’s analysis. Schools are segregated not just by race – there is double segregation by race *and* poverty, which means systematically unequal educational opportunity for students of color.

Segregation varies across school type and location in California, which has made a major commitment to school choice. The authors find higher segregation in charter schools than in magnet schools, and in cities and suburbs more than in rural areas and towns. Using various measures of segregation, the study shows some differences among California’s largest districts, but most have become more intensely segregated over the last 30 years. For example, the percent of intensely segregated schools (with greater than 90% non-white enrollment) quadrupled from 1988 to 2022 and the proportion of these schools is double the national average. Black, Latino, and white students, on average, attend schools that have higher concentrations of students in poverty than when data began to be systematically collected more than 20 years ago.

The report also describes the long history of segregation as being not just separate, but unequal, and that history continues to repeat. The authors examine whether segregation is associated with inferior high school course enrollment, and a lower likelihood of graduating high school or completing the requirements for admission to the University of California and California State University. The report shows that segregated schools offer fewer opportunities for Black and Latino children to engage with advanced course content and lowers their chances of succeeding in higher education.

Other CRP studies further detail unequal aspects of segregation, including a 2024 [analysis](#) of the unequal distribution of experienced teachers across California’s segregated schools. [Social](#)

¹The central importance of unequal secondary education to life outcomes is a major theme of Orfield’s book, [The Walls Around Opportunity: The Failure of Color Blind Policy for Higher Education](#) (Princeton University Press, 2023).

[science evidence](#) has credibly shown that disparities in curriculum, funding, resources, and disciplinary practices tend to lead to lower test scores, graduation rates, college attendance, income earnings, and adult health. Segregation of educational opportunities tends to perpetuate inequality overall.

The new report's key findings, based on an analysis of over 30 years of data, highlight the severity of California's school segregation and government-sponsored inequality, including:

- California is the state with the highest proportion of intensely segregated schools (with greater than 90% non-white enrollment) in the continental U.S. The **proportion of these schools quadrupled over the last three decades**, rising from 11.4% (1988) to 44.5% (2022).
- Racial isolation has been a persistent feature of California schools since the earliest data analyzed, with **students disproportionately exposed to peers of their own racial group**. Currently, the typical white and Asian student attends a school where 52.3% of students were also white or Asian, while the typical Black and Latinx student attends a school where only 21.6% of students were white or Asian.
- Double segregation by race and class, a key predictor of school resources and academic achievement, remains unabated at high levels. **The poverty rate in overwhelmingly underrepresented minority schools was more than 3 times higher than in overwhelmingly white and Asian schools.**
- Among similarly situated charter and magnet schools, **segregation is more pronounced in charters**. In 2019, 59% of charter schools in our sample of districts were intensely segregated, compared to 36% of magnet schools in the same districts.

"Systemic segregation imposes disparate paths through childhood and leads to unequal educational opportunities and outcomes," says CRP Senior Researcher and Co-author Ryan Pflieger. "The unnecessary segregation in California schools deprives children of cross-group interactions – a powerful tool for reducing prejudice and shoring up a splintering democracy."

The authors describe a retreat from the legal and policy strategies that were temporarily ascendant in California before the 1980s and that could have reduced segregation. For example, after Proposition 1 was adopted in 1979, Los Angeles became the first major U.S. city to abandon its desegregation plan. Significant changes since then in the demographic

composition of California's children present new opportunities for school integration, the report says, such as increasing diversity in the suburbs and gentrification in many central cities.

"There are possibilities for change that are being ignored," states Co-author Gary Orfield.

"California has fallen far behind Southern states, which we document in other studies."

The report concludes with 10 policy recommendations that affirm the goal of integration and could substantially change the trajectory of unequal education, including: improving voluntary school transfer options, tying charter and magnet school funding to integration, providing aid to promote and enforce fair housing, co-locating subsidized housing and successful schools, and funding regional collaboration that spurs inter-district integration.

Based on the study's findings and a large body of research demonstrating that segregated schools lead to unequal outcomes, CRP calls on California policymakers to act on these recommendations to foster a fairer educational landscape.

[Extreme Segregation and Policy Inaction in California Schools](#) is published by the UCLA Civil Rights Project/*Proyecto Derechos Civiles* as part of its research series, [A Civil Rights Agenda for California's Next Quarter Century](#). The full report is available [here](#).

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About the UCLA Civil Rights Project/*Proyecto Derechos Civiles*:

The [Civil Rights Project/*Proyecto Derechos Civiles*](#) is co-directed by UCLA Research Professors Gary Orfield and Patricia Gándara. Founded in 1996 at Harvard University, CRP's mission is to create a new generation of research in social science and law on the critical issues of civil rights and equal opportunity for racial and ethnic groups in the U.S. CRP is a trusted source of segregation statistics, has commissioned more than [400 studies](#), published more than 25 books and issued numerous reports monitoring the success of American schools in equalizing opportunity. The U.S. Supreme Court, in its 2003 [Grutter v. Bollinger](#) decision upholding affirmative action, and in Justice Breyer's dissent (joined by three other Justices) to its 2007 [Parents Involved](#) decision, cited the Civil Rights Project's research. In June 2023 Justice Sotomayor cited CRP's research in her dissent to the court's decision banning affirmative action in *SFFA v Harvard College*.