



For Immediate Release:
12:01 a.m. (Eastern), Wednesday, May 1, 2024,

Contact:
Laurie Russman – russman@gseis.ucla.edu
Jennifer Ayscue – jayscue@ncsu.edu

New UCLA Report Shows North Carolina Schools Losing Hard-Earned Progress on Integration, Suggests Ways to Move Forward

Los Angeles – According to a new study, published today by the Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles at UCLA in collaboration with researchers at North Carolina State University, North Carolina’s public school enrollment has become increasingly racially diverse, with White students now accounting for less than half of the state’s enrollment, yet schools across the state have become more segregated. The state was once a trailblazer in school desegregation, but 1 in 4 Black students and nearly 1 in 5 Hispanic students now attend an intensely segregated school of color in North Carolina.

“As we reflect on the 70th anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*, it’s essential that we understand where our state has been and where we are today,” says Jennifer B. Ayscue, assistant professor at North Carolina State University and report co-author. “In many ways, North Carolina was a leader in desegregation efforts, and in some places of the state, that work continues. However, as a whole, our state has allowed resegregation to take hold, similar to the rest of the nation.”

Despite enrolling an increasingly multiracial student body, the new report, [*Can Our Schools Capture the Educational Gains of Diversity? North Carolina School Segregation, Alternatives and Possible Gains*](#), shows that students of all races are isolated in schools with disproportionately high shares of same-race peers. Of all racial groups, Black students, who account for one-fourth of the state’s enrollment, had the least exposure to White students. Students of color also experience a double segregation by race and poverty.

“What we see in this report is the unrealized potential to desegregate North Carolina’s schools,” says Victor Cadilla, doctoral candidate at North Carolina State University and report co-author. “Recent policies emphasize unregulated school choice that pose significant hurdles to creating diverse schools and promoting equitable educational opportunities for North Carolina’s students.”

Among the key findings*:

1. From 1989 to 2021, North Carolina’s public school enrollment increased by more than 41% and became increasingly diverse. In 2021, enrollment was 45% White, 25% Black, 20% Hispanic, 5% Multiracial, 4% Asian, and 1% American Indian.
2. Despite an increasingly diverse student body, patterns of segregation intensified as students of all racial groups were enrolled in schools with disproportionately high shares of same-race peers.
3. In 2021, Black students had the least exposure to White students; the typical Black student attended a school with 28.3% White schoolmates.
4. Despite accounting for less than half of the state’s enrollment in 2021, 68.6% of White students attended majority White schools.

5. In the past three decades, the share of intensely segregated schools of color (schools that enroll 90-100% students of color) increased such that in 2021, 13.5% of the state's public schools were intensely segregated schools of color.
6. In 2021, 1 in 4 Black students and almost 1 in 5 Hispanic students across the state attended an intensely segregated school of color.
7. In 2021, within intensely segregated schools of color, 82.6% of the students were recipients of free and reduced-priced lunch, indicating a double segregation of students by race and poverty.
8. In 2021, cities had the largest share of intensely segregated schools of color (30.6%), while rural areas had the largest share of intensely segregated White schools (4.0%).

“Since the late 1990s, North Carolina steadily lost much of the gains made in desegregation,” says Cassandra Rubinstein, doctoral student at North Carolina State University and report co-author. “With an increasingly diverse student population, North Carolina has a critical opportunity to renew its commitment to *Brown’s* promise instead of re-isolating students in segregated schools.”

The report identifies efforts in several districts, including Wake County Public School System, Cumberland County Schools, and Winston Salem/Forsyth County Schools, which were all recently awarded federal funding to support their desegregation and equity efforts. Other districts, including Durham Public Schools and Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, have also taken encouraging steps to address segregation.

“The demographic shifts and sociopolitical trends impacting school segregation in North Carolina are not unique to the state,” says Mary Kathryn Oyaga, a doctoral student at North Carolina State University and report co-author. “The forces that contribute to segregation, on the one hand, and those that support desegregation, on the other, must be understood if we are to move towards equity and justice in public education.”

The report provides recommendations for school districts, the state, and the federal government to support desegregation. Acknowledging that desegregation efforts must be tailored to the local context, district desegregation efforts could include controlled-choice plans or multi-factor student attendance policies with diversity goals, redrawing attendance boundary lines with diversity as a priority, developing magnet schools, pairing elementary schools, and consolidating multiple school districts within the same county. Increased federal funding for the Magnet Schools Assistance Program and the Fostering Diverse Schools Demonstration Grant Program could expand access to critical support needed to facilitate desegregation.

“North Carolina made major gains during the civil rights era, and its countywide school districts offer possibilities for lasting diversity that many states lack,” says Gary Orfield, co-director of the Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles at UCLA. “As research shows, including studies by important North Carolina scholars, there are lifelong benefits of attending integrated schools both for students and for the state’s future – it’s time for strong leadership from Tar Heel educators.”

Can Our Schools Capture the Educational Gains of Diversity? North Carolina School Segregation, Alternatives and Possible Gains [is available here](#).

*A complete list of key findings is included in the report.

####

[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*.