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Contact: Laurie Russman – russman@gseis.ucla.edu

New UCLA Civil Rights Project research reveals U.S. charter schools exhibit higher racial segregation compared to magnet schools in same districts

Los Angeles—New research from the UCLA Civil Rights Project finds that the fast-growing charter sector is associated with more segregation than the magnet sector. The report, [*Segregated Choices: Magnet and Charter Schools*](#), by Ryan Pflieger and Gary Orfield, examines schools in a sample of more than 100 districts that hosted at least five charter schools and five magnet schools in any year since 2000. This sample is key for evaluating choice policies and for enabling comparisons of locations where policymakers decided to implement both school choice models.

“Some claim that charters are naturally more segregated because they operate in urban districts with high shares of students of color,” says report co-author Ryan Pflieger. “However, our research finds magnets in these same districts are less segregated. Given the many harms associated with segregation, we should be concerned and looking to improve the choice sector.”

Some key findings include:

- **Intense Segregation in Charter Schools:** 59% of charter schools in 2021 exhibited intense segregation, defined as having a student body that was over 90% Black, Latino, American Indian or Multiracial. In contrast, only 36% of magnet schools showed similar levels of segregation.
- **Racial Exposure Differences:** Black and Latino students in magnet schools have more exposure to white students compared to those in charter schools. In 2021, the average black student in magnet schools attended a school that was 14.5% white, while in charter schools, the figure stood at 8.3%. Over the last 20 years, Latino to white exposure increased in magnets and decreased in charter schools.
- **Racial Compositions Changed Over Time:** From 2000 to 2021, the proportion of black students decreased in both charter and magnet schools. However, the decline was more pronounced in charter schools. The Latino student population nearly doubled in charter schools during this period but remained stable in magnet schools.

The report discusses how magnet schools were often founded with a mission and resources to combat segregation by offering a unique educational program with funds from a desegregation plan.

Co-author Gary Orfield noted, “Charter schools typically had no diversity goals or policies when established. The higher segregation in charter schools studied here, together with other research, including our studies of New York and Washington, DC, shows that choice without integration strategies can intensify segregation and its well-documented harms.”

See the full report, ***Segregated Choices: Magnet and Charter Schools***, [here](#).

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*.

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