

# **Resegregation in American Public Schools? Not in the 1990s**

**John Logan**

**Lewis Mumford Center for Comparative Urban and Regional Research  
University at Albany**

**April 26, 2004**

<p>Mumford Center assistants Jacob Stowell and Deirdre Oakley contributed toward the preparation and analysis of the data reported here.</p>
--

As the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision approaches, numerous media reports have stated that our schools are in the midst of a massive resegregation movement, compromising the achievement of the 1960s and 1970s. This is the conclusion reached by Gary Orfield, Co-Director of the Harvard Civil Rights Project and author of many books, articles, and reports on school segregation. “We are losing many of the gains of desegregation,” he is quoted as saying (*The Washington Post*, January 18, 2004). “We are not back to where we were before *Brown*, but we are back to when King was assassinated” [in 1968].

The chief evidence in favor of this thesis is the declining share of black and Hispanic students in majority white schools since 1990. But is this trend caused by resegregation or by broader changes in the American population? Our analysis points to the latter, demonstrating that whites did not move toward increasingly white schools as minorities increasingly attended minority schools. Instead national demographic shifts involving all racial and ethnic groups have resulted in schools with lower shares of whites and higher shares of black, Hispanic, and Asian enrollment. It is misleading to label these trends as resegregation.

Specifically, we find:

- White students make up a declining share of public elementary enrollment due to rapid growth in the number of Hispanic and Asian students.
- There has been an overall shift in the composition of elementary schools, with declining numbers of students of all races in schools that are predominantly (more than 90%) white and growth especially in majority minority schools.
- White students have shifted from schools that are predominantly white, increasing their representation in schools that are moderately (50-89%) white or moderately (50-89%) minority. Black, Hispanic and Asian students have shifted from schools that are moderately white toward those that are moderately or predominantly minority.

- During the same period, both majority white schools and majority minority schools experienced a change in their average racial composition: they became less white and more Hispanic.
- Few schools became majority white during this period. In schools for which we have data in both 1990 and 2000, total white enrollment dropped sharply in those that remained majority white in each year, as well as in those that remained or became majority minority. Black, Hispanic, and Asian numbers grew about the same in schools that remained majority white as in those that remained or became majority minority.

## The Resegregation Thesis: What's the Evidence?

Two previous reports by the Lewis Mumford Center documenting segregation trends suggest that there was very little change in the 1990s – neither continued progress nor significant reversal of desegregation.

The first report (*Choosing Segregation: Racial Imbalance in American Public Schools, 1990-2000*, revised March 29, 2002) studied segregation across schools in metropolitan regions. It showed a small increase (from 63 to 65) in the Index of Dissimilarity between whites and blacks. This Index measures the degree to which the two groups are distributed unevenly among schools, and a higher value represents more segregation. The report stressed, though, that much larger increases had taken place in some specific central-city school districts that had been released from desegregation orders in the 1990s – such as Cleveland, Columbus, and Denver. Similarly there were small increases in segregation between whites and both Hispanics and Asians. These groups, however, had been little affected by desegregation efforts prior to 1990, and there were few examples of large increases in segregation affecting them.

The second report (*The Continuing Legacy of the Brown Decision: Court Action and School Segregation, 1960-2000*, January 28, 2004) focused on black-white segregation, including data from 1968, 1990 and 2000. It also distinguished between districts that had been ordered to desegregate (about 1100 districts, based on our inventory) and those that had not. For school districts with at least 5% black enrollment, it documented very large declines in the Index of Dissimilarity within school districts between 1968 and 1990 (from over 80 to below 50 as a national average – see Table 1 below). This index value increased by just 1 point between 1990 and 2000. Because desegregation efforts in response to the Brown decision rarely extended beyond the boundaries of a single district, segregation at the metropolitan level – where differences between school districts are also counted – declined less between 1968 and 1990 (from 82 to 62). After 1990 segregation increased by 1 point at the metropolitan level.

	<b>Segregation plan</b>	<b>1968</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>
<b>South</b>	<b>No</b>	72.2	26.5	29.8
	<b>Yes</b>	86.9	47.6	47.3
	<b>All districts</b>	83.8	43.5	43.7
<b>Non-South</b>	<b>No</b>	59.3	36.2	33.1
	<b>Yes</b>	80.0	58.5	62.6
	<b>All districts</b>	76.2	53.8	56.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>No</b>	67.0	30.6	31.1
	<b>Yes</b>	83.9	51.9	53.3
	<b>All districts</b>	80.5	47.6	48.6

This report also examined indices of exposure between white and black students (these are reproduced as Table 2). The average white student attended a school that was 86% white in 1968, dropping to 83% in 1990 and 79% in 2000. At the same time average white exposure to black classmates increased from 4% in 1968 to 9% in 1990, remaining at 9% in 2000. The average black student attended a school that was 19% white in 1968, increasing to 34% white in 1990, then declining to 29% in 2000. Decreasing exposure to whites was not due to growing black isolation, however. The average black student was in a 56% black school in 1990 (a comparable figure is not available for 1968), and this increased by less than half a percentage point in 2000. Instead, blacks were in schools with a higher Hispanic and Asian presence in 2000.

Region	Segregation plan	White to whites			White to blacks		
		1968	1990	2000	1968	1990	2000
South	No	85.5	82.3	78.8	6.3	10.5	11.0
	Yes	91.4	70.7	67.8	6.1	23.0	22.7
	All districts	88.7	76.9	73.8	6.2	16.3	16.3
Non-South	No	85.1	88.8	85.2	1.9	3.1	3.8
	Yes	83.0	64.9	59.9	8.6	18.7	18.3
	All districts	84.6	85.6	82.2	3.3	5.2	5.5
Total	No	85.2	87.1	83.6	2.8	4.9	5.6
	Yes	87.4	68.7	65.2	7.3	21.5	21.2
	All districts	85.9	82.5	79.3	4.2	9.1	9.3

Region	Segregation plan	Black to whites			Black to blacks		
		1968	1990	2000	1968	1990	2000
South	No	29.7	55.0	47.8	NA	34.6	32.9
	Yes	10.5	31.2	26.3	NA	63.7	65.7
	All districts	14.9	36.7	31.5	NA	54.6	54.0
Non-South	No	48.4	48.5	44.3	NA	37.0	38.6
	Yes	17.4	20.8	15.6	NA	63.8	65.6
	All districts	24.5	29.4	25.8	NA	57.6	59.0
Total	No	37.7	51.8	45.9	NA	35.8	35.6
	Yes	13.5	27.1	22.1	NA	63.8	65.6
	All districts	19.1	33.6	29.1	NA	56.4	56.8

What evidence, then, has been presented for the thesis of resegregation in the 1990s?

One of the clearest statements of this position is found in a report prepared by the Harvard Civil Rights Project, *A Multiracial Society with Segregated Schools: Are We Losing the Dream?* (Erica Frankenberg, Chungmei Lee, and Gary Orfield, January 2003). This report emphasizes two kinds of measures: exposure indices (the racial composition of schools attended by the

average group member, the same indicator used in Table 2) and the percentage of students in majority white or majority minority schools. The authors acknowledge (p. 16) that these measures could be affected by demographic shifts: “If everything else stayed the same and the country had more African Americans and Latinos, and, at the same time, fewer whites, there would tend to be fewer whites in the average African American or Latino student’s school.” But they insist that the figures represent resegregation.

With respect to the first measure, the report finds that “The percentage of white students in schools of the average black has declined since 1988, and is lower in 2000 than in 1970, before busing for racial balance began. From 1988 to 2000, there was a 5.3 percentage point decline in the share of white students in schools of the average black student to the current low of 30.9%.” **Table 2 shows a similar trend between 1990 and 2000, though the current exposure of black students to white classmates is considerably higher than it was in 1968, the year of Dr. Martin Luther King’s assassination (45.9% vs. 37.7%).**

Regarding the second measure, the report states “If one of the aims of desegregation was to cut segregation in public schools and to create interracial schools, then another measure of school segregation is the number of minority students remaining in predominantly and intensely segregated minority schools. ... The percentage of black students in intensely segregated schools [those over 90% minority] is now larger than it has been since the early 1970s.” The report finds that 64.3% of blacks attended such schools in 1968-69, dropping to 38.7% in 1972-73 and 33.2% in 1980-81, and rising to 37.4% in 2000-01. The report also finds that “More Latinos than ever before are also now in intensely segregated schools (90-100% minority), rising from ... a low of 23% in the late 1960s, the percentage of Latinos attending these schools has consistently increased to reach an unprecedented 37% in 2000.” Conversely, it finds a declining share of black and Latino students attending majority white schools in 2000 compared to 1988.

While recognizing that population growth could account for increasing isolation of Hispanic children, the report argues that this could not be the case for African Americans. For them, “particularly in the South ... the resegregation seems clearly related to the change in the federal court’s position on desegregation law” (p. 17). “The basic trend is toward the dissolution of desegregation orders and return to patterns of more intense segregation” (p. 20).

This particular argument about court action is contradicted by Tables 1 and 2, based on comparison of school districts that came under desegregation orders versus those that did not. In the South in particular, average levels of segregation within districts that ever experienced court-ordered desegregation actually dropped slightly between 1990 and 2000, while segregation increased by three points in districts that were never under a court order (Table 1). Black exposure to whites as a national average declined by 6 points in districts that had not faced desegregation orders, but by only 5 points in those that did (Table 2).

Still, the Civil Rights Project report shows that there has been a recent decline in the percentage of white students in the school attended by the average black student, and a decline in the share of black and Hispanic students who attend majority white schools. Does this mean that schools are resegregating?

## What is resegregation?

Let us be clear from the outset about how we understand the term “resegregation.” If a larger share of minority students were enrolled in majority-minority or predominantly minority school in 2000 than in 1990, and if at the same time white students shifted more heavily toward majority-white or predominantly white schools, that would represent a trend toward polarization between races. It would mean that minority and white students were separating from one another. This phenomenon would be captured by an increase in the Index of Dissimilarity, and the term resegregation would legitimately apply to that case.

On the other hand, if schools attended by both white and minority students were changing their composition in the same direction, in a way that left white and minority children neither more nor less separated from one another, we should use other language to describe the change. We might say, for example, that there has been a growth of majority minority schools, and that this means that whites are increasingly in schools with greater racial diversity at the same time as black, Hispanic, and Asian children are more likely to be in schools where whites are in the minority. Even if **desegregation** had not been supplanted by **resegregation**, such trends could have significant effects on public education. But they would not indicate that “we are losing many of the gains of desegregation.”

To illustrate this point, Table 3 lists several large school districts with substantial black student populations where there was no increase in racial imbalance across schools in the 1990s (as measured by the Index of Dissimilarity). In each of these districts, the average black student had a much lower share of white classmates in 2000 than in 1990. Based on the Civil Rights Project criteria, these districts were “resegregating.” In fact, the table shows that the source of the change was simply the declining share of white enrollment in these districts, and that white students were distributed across schools no differently in 2000 than they had been in 1990.

School District	Index of Dissimilarity		Black exposure to whites		District % white	
	1990	2000	1990	2000	1990	2000
St. Paul, MN	32.8	32.3	55.6	29.9	58.9%	32.7%
Adams-Arapahoe, CO	28.8	28.8	63.3	38.6	69.9%	41.5%
Southfield, MI	38.2	34.4	40.4	16.5	50.0%	18.3%
Richardson, TX	46.8	45.6	54.5	32.7	68.9%	43.3%
Mesquite, TX	23.5	21.0	79.5	57.9	81.3%	60.3%
Clayton County, GA	36.7	34.1	41.3	22.2	53.1%	25.7%
Gwinnett County, GA	50.0	46.4	67.2	48.8	84.0%	65.9%
Madison, WI	32.8	29.5	74.2	57.0	80.3%	62.6%
Waterbury, CT	28.4	28.4	46.6	32.3	48.6%	34.9%
Decatur, IL	16.1	16.0	64.2	51.4	66.0%	53.1%

Source: [www.albany.edu/mumford/brown](http://www.albany.edu/mumford/brown). This website provides enrollment, segregation, and exposure measures for all districts in the nation. See “Cases and Data” on the site.

Gwinnett County, GA, is an excellent example of this phenomenon. These schools experienced a 4-point drop in segregation, but black exposure to white declined from 67.2% in 1990 (when the average black child was in a majority white school) to 48.8% in 2000. This occurred because Gwinnett County schools' white enrollment barely changed in the 1990s while the number of black, Hispanic, and Asian students all more than doubled.

Are the districts in Table 3 exceptional or do they represent what happened generally across the country in the 1990s? To answer this question we reanalyze the data underlying Table 1-3, replicating the Civil Rights Project's method of asking whether children are in majority white or majority minority schools, and looking more closely at the patterns of change.

Data are available for a nearly complete universe of public schools as far back as the late 1980s through the National Center for Education Statistics. Because most observers place the shift in direction of school segregation very early in the 1990s, we start with data from the 1989-1990 school year (hereafter referred to as 1990), and compare it to patterns ten years later, 1999-2000 (hereafter referred to as 2000). Our analyses include students in grades K-6, the grades most commonly found in elementary schools around the country. We focus on elementary grades partly because of the importance of the early school experiences of children, but mainly because it is at this level that we find the most schools and the most fine-grained information about segregation. (Additional details on data sources are provided in the Appendix.)

Following the Civil Rights Project's approach, we distinguish between schools that are "majority white" (over 50% non-Hispanic white) and "majority minority" (over 50% in all other races combined). We further distinguish schools that we call "predominantly" white or minority (using a cutting point of 90% of either category) and those that are "moderately" white or minority (50-89% of either group, representing a majority white or majority minority school but with a less extreme composition). Our findings are for the nation as a whole, and they are based on information about individual schools, not about school districts. To the extent that whites have left school districts with growing minority populations, or minority children have become more concentrated in such districts, such trends would be revealed by this analysis.

### **National trends in school composition**

Our data include enrollments in 60,137 schools in 1990 and 65,687 schools in 2000. Total enrollment in K-6 grades grew from 22.7 million to 25.5 million. Table 4 shows how the racial/ethnic composition of students changed between 1990 and 2000.

There was almost no change in the number of white students (about 15.3 million), and their share of the total dropped from 67.5% in 1990 to 60.0% in 2000. Black enrollment increased from 3.8 million to 4.6 million, increasing from 17.0% to 18.1% of the total. Hispanics had the largest absolute and relative growth, from 2.6 million to 4.3 million, and from 11.5% to 16.9% of the total. Asians grew from .7 million to 1.0 million, up from 3.2% to 3.9% of the total.

	<b>1990</b>		<b>2000</b>	
<b>Total Students</b>	<b>22,670,360</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>25,539,958</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
Non-Hispanic white	15,296,989	67.5%	15,316,413	60.0%
Non-Hispanic black	3,842,917	17.0%	4,614,008	18.1%
Hispanic	2,600,795	11.5%	4,327,862	16.9%
Asian	717,621	3.2%	994,219	3.9%

Table 5 reports the numbers of students in each racial/ethnic group in schools with varying racial composition in 1990 and 2000: predominantly white (90% or higher white share), moderately white (more than 50% but less than 90% white), moderately minority (more than 50% but less than 90% minority), and predominantly minority (90% or more minority).

This table reflects the high level of segregation remaining in American public schools. It shows that nearly half of white students still attend schools that are more than 90% white; in fact (though not shown in the table), about a third of white students are in schools that are more than 95% white. At the same time, more than 40% of black and Hispanic students are in schools that are more than 90% minority. Nearly a third of blacks and nearly a quarter of Hispanics are in schools where above 95% of students are minorities.

Our main concern here is how the distribution changed during the 1990s. One would expect from the overall numbers that a typical school would become less white over time, and that children of all races would be shifted toward schools with a higher percentage of minority students. This is the case. The number of children in predominantly white schools declined by about 1.2 million; this is a substantial reduction, from 37.0% to 28.1% of children. Most of this decline is accounted for by white students, whose attendance in predominantly white schools dropped from 52.9% to 44.9%. Most of this shift among white students was to majority white schools (up by about five percentage points), but another substantial movement was to majority minority schools (up nearly three percentage points).



		<b>All schools</b>	<b>Predominantly white (90+%)</b>	<b>Moderately white (50%-89%)</b>	<b>Moderately minority (50%-89%)</b>	<b>Predominantly minority (90+%)</b>				
<b>All students</b>	<b>1990</b>	22,670,360	8,378,071	37.0%	8,130,058	35.9%	3,690,025	16.3%	2,472,206	10.9%
	<b>2000</b>	25,539,958	7,164,643	28.1%	9,214,049	36.1%	5,222,344	20.4%	3,938,922	15.4%
<b>White</b>	<b>1990</b>	15,296,989	8,084,919	52.9%	5,970,748	39.0%	1,180,268	7.7%	61,054	0.4%
	<b>2000</b>	15,316,413	6,880,196	44.9%	6,745,898	44.0%	1,579,015	10.3%	111,304	0.7%
<b>Black</b>	<b>1990</b>	3,842,917	109,854	2.9%	1,178,011	30.7%	1,215,711	31.6%	1,339,341	34.9%
	<b>2000</b>	4,614,008	103,565	2.2%	1,126,031	24.4%	1,528,880	33.1%	1,855,533	40.2%
<b>Hispanic</b>	<b>1990</b>	2,600,795	87,337	3.4%	615,230	23.7%	991,644	38.1%	906,585	34.9%
	<b>2000</b>	4,327,862	96,520	2.2%	839,450	19.4%	1,638,974	37.9%	1,752,918	40.5%
<b>Asian</b>	<b>1990</b>	717,621	78,923	11.0%	280,472	39.1%	257,237	35.8%	100,989	14.1%
	<b>2000</b>	994,219	70,712	7.1%	370,452	37.3%	390,656	39.3%	162,399	16.3%

At the same time, there was a movement of similar magnitude of black students from majority white schools (dropping from 30.7% to 24.4% of black children), with growth in both the majority minority and predominantly minority categories. Among Hispanics, the shift from majority white schools had its counterpart mainly in the growth of predominantly minority schools. Finally, Asians shifted from predominantly white and majority white schools to those that were majority minority or predominantly minority – though certainly Asians were less likely than blacks or Hispanics in either year to be found in predominantly minority schools.

### **Composition of majority-white and majority-minority schools**

The shift of whites out of predominantly white schools is matched by a shift of blacks and Hispanics into majority minority schools. This overall movement toward schools that are less white and more minority in 2000 than in 1990 is an expected consequence of the decline of whites as a proportion of public school students.

Is it possible, though, that majority-white schools were becoming whiter while majority-minority schools were moving toward having higher shares of minority students? In that case the shifts would support the interpretation that schools are becoming more racially polarized.

To test this possibility, we have analyzed the racial composition of schools where a majority of students are white, and those where a majority are minority students. Table 6 provides information about majority-white schools in both years. The figures in each column describe the racial/ethnic composition of majority-white schools attended by children of a specific group. (In other words, these are weighted averages, where the weight is the number of group members attending the school.)

First, majority-white schools became less white. For example, the typical white student in a majority-white school attended a school that was 87.4% white in 1990 and 85.6% white in 2000. Similar small declines are shown for other groups. For most groups (but not for Hispanics) this was balanced by a growth in the Hispanic share.

	<u>All groups</u>	<u>Whites</u>	<u>Blacks</u>	<u>Hispanics</u>	<u>Asians</u>
<b>1990 racial composition:</b>					
<b>White</b>	85.0	87.4	69.8	71.3	76.0
<b>Black</b>	7.8	6.4	24.0	6.8	7.1
<b>Hispanic</b>	4.2	3.6	3.7	17.5	6.9
<b>Asian</b>	2.2	1.9	2.0	3.5	9.3
<b>2000 racial composition:</b>					
<b>White</b>	83.1	85.6	69.5	70.6	74.5
<b>Black</b>	7.5	6.3	21.8	7.3	7.1
<b>Hispanic</b>	5.7	4.9	5.6	17.3	7.9
<b>Asian</b>	2.7	2.4	2.6	3.7	9.6

Table 7 describes the composition of majority-minority schools. On average these schools also became less white (from 20.1% to 18.5%). And they became less black (41.5% to 36.9%) while becoming more Hispanic and Asian. The average white and black student in majority-minority schools was in a school that was both less white and less black in 2000 than in 1990, and considerably more Hispanic. This table reveals other aspects of racial isolation in these schools. Black children in majority-minority schools for the most part have had black classmates, though there was a small decline in black percentage between 1990 and 2000. Hispanic students have been in schools where two-thirds of classmates are Hispanic, and this percentage rose slightly. Apparently it is not common for majority-minority schools to include substantial shares of both blacks and Hispanics. In fact, black children had more white classmates than Hispanics in their majority-minority schools, and Hispanic children had more white than black classmates.

	<u>All groups</u>	<u>Whites</u>	<u>Blacks</u>	<u>Hispanics</u>	<u>Asians</u>
<b>1990 racial composition:</b>					
<b>White</b>	20.1	34.8	15.8	16.3	4.4
<b>Black</b>	41.5	32.5	72.2	12.9	14.6
<b>Hispanic</b>	30.7	24.9	9.6	65.6	29.1
<b>Asian</b>	5.8	6.3	2.0	4.6	51.1
<b>2000 racial composition:</b>					
<b>White</b>	18.5	33.1	14.6	14.5	4.8
<b>Black</b>	36.9	29.2	69.4	12.9	18.2
<b>Hispanic</b>	37.0	29.2	13.0	67.1	39.0
<b>Asian</b>	6.0	6.9	2.6	4.7	37.6

## Shifts at every level of racial composition

A more comprehensive way to evaluate these trends is to classify schools' racial composition more finely than the few categories used above. Table 8 reports the cumulative percentage of students of each racial/ethnic group by the percent minority in the schools that they attended. Figures 1 and 2 graph these distributions by percentiles, and illustrate how they shifted over time.

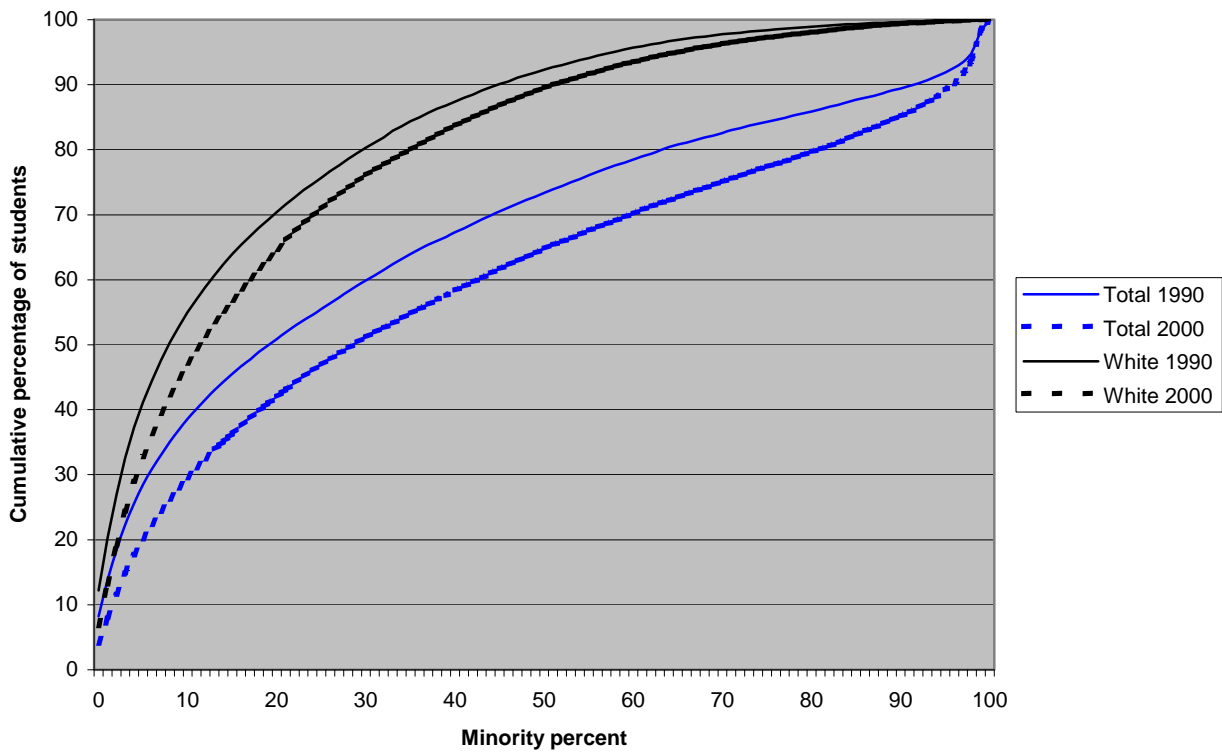
Minority percentage	White		Black		Hispanic		Asian	
	1990	2000	1990	2000	1990	2000	1990	2000
<b>0</b>	12.2	6.8	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.3	0.1
<b>&lt;1</b>	20.3	13.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.1	1.1	0.5
<b>&lt;10</b>	55.0	47.2	3.3	2.6	3.8	2.6	12.2	8.0
<b>&lt;20</b>	70.4	64.7	8.5	6.8	8.6	6.4	23.2	18.1
<b>&lt;30</b>	80.3	76.1	16.2	12.7	14.0	11.0	32.6	27.9
<b>&lt;40</b>	87.4	83.7	25.1	19.4	20.5	16.2	41.5	36.7
<b>&lt;50</b>	92.3	89.5	34.5	27.5	27.7	22.4	50.9	45.4
<b>&lt;60</b>	95.7	93.5	43.8	35.9	36.1	29.1	59.1	53.1
<b>&lt;70</b>	97.8	96.3	51.8	43.7	45.2	37.2	67.5	61.5
<b>&lt;80</b>	98.9	98.1	58.5	51.5	54.1	46.6	75.7	71.7
<b>&lt;90</b>	99.6	99.4	65.9	60.9	66.3	61.3	87.2	85.5
<b>&lt;99</b>	100	100	91.2	92.8	97.5	98.0	98.8	99.9
<b>&lt;100</b>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table 8 reveals again how extreme are the differences across groups in the racial composition of their schools. For example, in 2000 there were still 6.8% of white students in schools with no minority students, and 13.2% in schools that were less than 1% minority. Conversely, 7.2% of blacks and 2.0% of Hispanics were in schools that were more than 99% minority.

Figure 1 graphs these data for all students and for white students. The horizontal axis shows the minority percentage in the schools; the vertical axis shows the cumulative percentage of all students (the blue lines) and white students (the black lines) who attended schools with up to that level of minority presence. The solid lines represent 1990 and the dotted lines represent 2000.

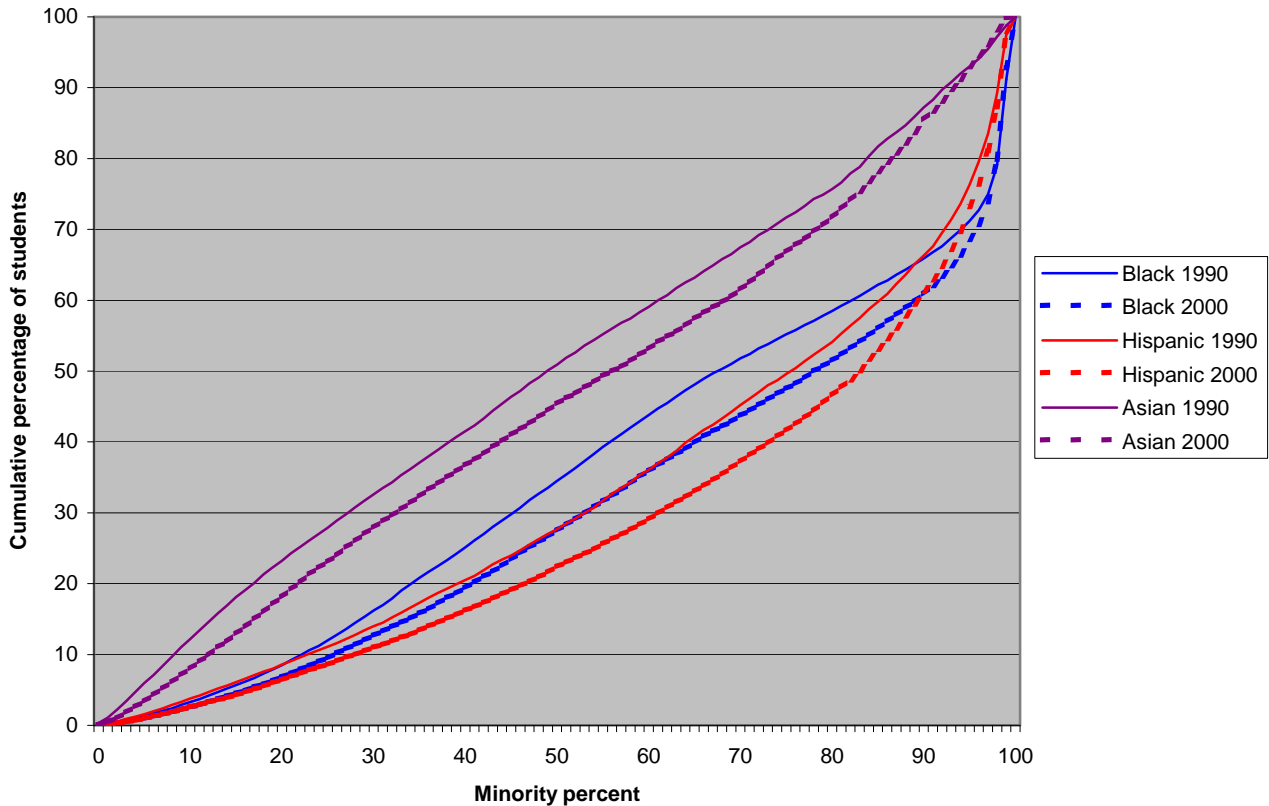
Note that both curves shifted toward the right between 1990 and 2000. Select any point on the horizontal axis, and compare the value on the 1990 line to the value on the 2000 line. Across almost the whole range of minority percent, there was a smaller share of students – and also a smaller share of white students – in schools with less than any given percentage of minority enrollment.

Figure 1. Distribution of all students and white students by percent minority in their school, 1990 and 2000



A similar shift occurred for black, Hispanic, and Asian students, as shown in Figure 2. Of course the curves for these groups are all shallower than those for whites (that is, they fall in the lower right quadrant of the figure instead of the upper left). We wish to call attention to the extent of the shift from 1990 to 2000. All three groups, like whites, had a smaller share of their members in schools with low percentages of minorities by 2000. This is the shift that the Civil Rights Project report described as increasing racial isolation, or more specifically as resegregation. But the fact that the same direction of change in composition of schools was experienced by students of all races, including whites, undercuts that interpretation.

**Figure 2. Distribution of minority students by percent minority in their school, 1990 and 2000**



### Tracing enrollments in individual schools over time

These various tables and figures lead us to an alternative interpretation of the Civil Rights Project’s main evidence of resegregation of public schools. It is a fact that blacks and Hispanics were less likely to attend majority white schools in 2000 than in 1990. So were Asians. So were whites. The driving force behind this fact was the changing composition of the national student population, not an increasing separation between white and minority students. A considerable number of schools that were majority white became majority minority during the decade because Hispanics and Asians were the growing sectors of the overall student body.

This conclusion is further investigated in Table 9. The data in this table are based upon a subset of schools that we were able to identify in both 1990 and 2000 (it omits schools that closed after 1990 and schools that were newly opened in the 1990s, as well as some that changed their name and their NCEES id number). They include over 52,000 schools with a total enrollment of 21.2 million in 2000 (out of the national total of 25.5 million). These are the schools where we can trace enrollment trends over time for an individual school. We can categorize majority white schools (as of 2000) into those that were already majority white in 1990 (the “remained” column) and those that were previously majority minority but became majority white). Similarly we can distinguish between schools that remained or became majority minority.

The table shows how many white, black, Hispanic, and Asian students were in each category of school in 1990 and in 2000. In support of a “resegregation” interpretation, were many white students enrolled in schools that became majority white? Was there an increasing white enrollment in those schools that remained majority white? Was most of the growth in black and Hispanic enrollment found in those schools that remained majority minority, or perhaps in those that became majority minority in the 1990s?

**Table 9. Enrollment by race in schools that were majority-white or majority-minority in 2000 -- classified by whether they remained in this category or changed since 1990**

		Majority White		Majority Minority	
		Remained	Became	Remained	Became
<b>White</b>	<b>1990</b>	11,687,287	47,775	1,102,074	1,264,941
	<b>2000</b>	11,089,599	66,420	664,546	761,857
	<b>Growth</b>	-597,688	18,645	-437,528	-503,084
<b>Black</b>	<b>1990</b>	823,304	45,100	2,286,343	382,838
	<b>2000</b>	983,245	29,342	2,336,794	566,300
	<b>Growth</b>	159,942	-15,758	50,451	183,462
<b>Hispanic</b>	<b>1990</b>	394,766	14,512	1,798,928	269,834
	<b>2000</b>	740,346	13,587	2,279,297	585,476
	<b>Growth</b>	345,580	-925	480,369	315,641
<b>Asian</b>	<b>1990</b>	247,779	3,961	324,752	94,728
	<b>2000</b>	345,641	3,945	343,293	137,700
	<b>Growth</b>	97,862	-15	18,541	42,972

In fact almost no schools became majority white – less than 100,000 out of more than 11 million white students were enrolled in 2000 in such schools. And while white enrollment in schools that remained or became majority minority dropped by 400,000-500,000 in each category, white enrollment also dropped by nearly 600,000 in schools that remained majority white. Consequently (not shown in the table) the average “remained majority white” school that was 88.2% white in 1990 was only 83.4% white in 2000.

Now let us examine changes in minority enrollments. There was almost no change in black enrollment in schools that were already majority minority in 1990. This is the largest category for blacks at over 2 million, but it increased by only 50,000. The two categories experiencing growth were those that became majority minority (up 183,000) and those that remained majority white (up 159,000).

Hispanic growth is the most pronounced of any group, and it was largest in schools that remained majority minority. Not shown in the table, these schools shifted from 32.0% Hispanic in 1990 to 39.9% in 2000. The next largest Hispanic growth was in schools that remained majority white, up by 345,000. These schools increased from 3.0% to 5.6% Hispanic. Finally,

Hispanic enrollment grew by 315,000 in schools that became majority minority, shifting from 13.3% to 28.1% of students in those schools.

Finally, Asians increased most in schools that remained majority white, and also grew substantially in schools that became majority minority.

In short, in this set of schools that we can follow over time there was almost no shift of whites to newly majority white schools, and white enrollment declined most in schools that remained majority white. The second largest growth for both blacks and Hispanics, and the largest growth for Asians, was in schools that remained majority white.

The table clearly reflects the high levels of segregation that remained in public schools – whites predominantly in majority white schools and blacks and Hispanics predominantly in majority minority schools. But we cannot interpret the growing share of blacks and Hispanics in majority minority schools as evidence of resegregation without also taking into account the considerable decline of white students in those schools that remained majority white, and the growth in minority enrollment in those same schools. Most schools, regardless of their initial racial composition, experienced a growth in their minority enrollment.

### **Conclusion: Understanding the legacy of the Brown decision**

This detailed analysis of how schools changed after 1990 has important implications for the way in which we understand the impact and legacy of the Brown decision. In the spring of 2004 many Americans are taking stock of what was achieved through decades of legal and political struggle.

We are keenly aware that what is reported to the nation about where this effort now stands may affect the future course of policy. The claim that our schools have substantially resegregated, reversing the hard-won progress of the 1970s and 1980s, could be read differently by different people. For some, it might be an alarm, a signal of crisis and a call for renewed efforts to reclaim lost ground. This is the intention of the Civil Rights Project report, to call attention to the damage that may be done by the withdrawal of desegregation orders. For others, it might be a cause for resignation, evidence of a failed public policy and a reason to turn in other directions to deal with the real problems facing our schools. That would be a mistake, because the national determination to desegregate American schools was among the most effective efforts ever made in this country to achieve social change through public policy.

It is certainly true that progress toward desegregation of America's public schools has faltered since the early 1990's. The Supreme Court decision in the case of *Board of Education of Oklahoma City v. Dowell* (1991) is a strong symbol of the nation's sense that the historical legacy of separate and unequal schools has been sufficiently addressed. This decision restricted the conditions under which courts could maintain supervision over desegregation plans, and civil rights lawyers since that time have clearly been on the defensive.

It is also true that segregation (measured by the Index of Dissimilarity) has increased dramatically in a number of major school districts around the country, including districts that were never under court order (like East Orange, NJ) and districts that have been released from court orders (like Cleveland, OH, Forsyth County, NC, and Seattle, WA).

Hence this is not a time for complacency. Data presented in this report offer a sobering reminder of how separate are the schools attended by children of different races. Other reports have emphasized the more limited gains that have been made at the metropolitan level, even where many individual school districts sharply reduced segregation within their boundaries. Separate continues to mean unequal. The average white child attends an elementary school where about 30% of classmates are enrolled in the reduced-price lunch program; two-thirds of classmates of black and Hispanic children are eligible for this program.

But the fact is that most gains that were made in the struggle against desegregated schools have been protected since 1990. Among districts that were more than 5% black in 2000, 1325 districts had segregation levels below 20 in that year. These included districts like Warren County, MS; Newburgh, NY; Dorchester County, SC; Pike Township, IN; Troup County, GA; St. Lucie, FL; Lawton, OK; Evanston, IL; Brockton, MA; Hayward, CA; Kalamazoo, MI; and Duncanville, TX. Communities like these where public officials continued to carry out policies to equalize educational choices for students of all races greatly outnumber the more visible cases where such policies have been overturned. This is the continuing legacy of the Brown decision.



## Appendix on Data and Method

The analysis for this report is based on the Common Core of Data (CCD) collected annually by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). NCES is the federal entity responsible for collecting data on all public schools in the United States. For every public elementary and secondary school, CCD provides data for the student population. Our analysis was conducted using data primarily for the 1989-90 and 1999-2000 school years.

### Missing Racial Composition Data

Because compliance with NCES reporting is voluntary for state education agencies, statewide gaps in the reporting of student racial composition occur on an annual basis. Student racial composition was not reported for Idaho for any year between 1989 and 1999. Therefore Idaho was omitted from our analysis. In 1989-90 schools in the following states did not report student racial composition: Georgia, Maine, Missouri, Montana, South Dakota, Virginia, and Wyoming. In 1999-2000, schools in Tennessee did not report student racial composition. For these states we merged the student membership and racial composition data from the next year in which these variables were available. The table below shows the states that did not report racial composition for each time period, and the years in which data were extracted and added to the 1989-90 and 1999-2000 files.

1989-90	1999-2000
Montana, Wyoming (1990-91)	Tennessee (1998-99)
Missouri (1991-92)	
South Dakota, Virginia (1992-93)	
Georgia, Maine (1993-94)	

### Criteria for Identifying Elementary School Children

Approximately 10 percent of the schools in the NCES database comprise both elementary and non-elementary grades. Therefore for this report we did not select “elementary schools” but rather “elementary grades.” In every school we counted the numbers of students in grades pre-kindergarten through six. Because in most schools we knew the racial composition of the school as a whole, not for any particular grades, we assumed that the elementary children in a school that also included non-elementary grades had the same racial composition as the entire school. For 1999-2000 our sample of 49,367 schools enrolled a total of 21.2 million elementary students. For 1989-1990 the sample was slightly smaller at 42,531 schools with a total of 18.1 million elementary students.