

**The Continuing Legacy of the Brown Decision:
Court Action and School Segregation, 1960-2000**

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This report is based on research conducted by many staff members of the Mumford Center over the past year. We especially acknowledge the contribution of Dr. Franklin Wilson, University of Wisconsin, who made school segregation data from the late 1960's available for analysis, and other information provided by the Department of Justice, NAACP Legal Defense Fund, and National Center for Educational Statistics. This project is supported by grants from the Ford Foundation and American Educational Research Association.

Public schools have struggled with their response to the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education*. More than 700 separate court cases involving several thousand school districts have dealt with the requirement to desegregate. Yet reports from the Mumford Center ("Choosing Segregation: Racial Imbalance in American Public Schools, 1990-2000," January 2002) and the Harvard Civil Rights Project ("Race in American Public Schools: Rapidly Resegregating School Districts," August 2002) suggested a recent trend of increasing school segregation. Court decisions in the 1990's paved the way for releasing districts from desegregation orders in many cases even if whites and minorities were again becoming more separate. School districts that voluntarily sought to retain desegregation plans became subject to lawsuits from groups that opposed those plans (as in the famous case of *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg*, North Carolina).

This present study shows that the story of segregation, desegregation and resegregation is far more complex, with some surprising positive findings concerning the initial impact of *Brown v. Board of Education* and important limits on what it could accomplish.

The key findings are:

1. Court-ordered desegregation involved a small share of school districts in the nation but reached a large share of black students:

- Court-mandated desegregation plans have involved at least 1,094 school districts across the country. More than two-thirds of these are in the South, mostly decided by 1970. Cases in the rest of the country were more likely to be decided after 1970.
- A majority of black elementary school students are now enrolled in school districts that were mandated to desegregate (75% of black students in the South, 62% in other regions).

2. Segregation within school districts, which was specifically targeted by the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision and subsequent Supreme Court rulings, dropped sharply between 1968 and 1990, but little progress has been made since 1990:

- School segregation in 1968, before most plans were implemented, was extreme. The average district-level Index of Dissimilarity (which tells what share of black or white students would have to switch schools in order to achieve full racial balance) was about 80.
- By 1990 average within-district segregation had fallen to below 50. Desegregation was widespread, and segregation scores dropped even more in districts without court-mandated plans than in those with plans.
- Progress has halted since 1990. On average segregation scores did not change much after 1990 – rising by one point nationally, though in some large districts the increases have been more substantial.

3. The impact of desegregation has been limited in three ways, all of which result fundamentally from the policy decision to reject inter-district remedies:

- Metropolitan-level segregation, including separation both within and between school districts, declined very little over these three decades.
- White flight from districts with larger black populations has reduced the inter-racial contact generated by within-district desegregation.
- Desegregation within districts has left large disparities in poverty concentration for black and white students across districts in the same metropolitan region.

The Mumford Center's school segregation project

This report provides a preliminary overview of the results of an ongoing project that has two main components. The first is to develop a complete inventory of school segregation court decisions since 1950. The second is to analyze the trends in segregation over several decades and to examine how they were affected by court-ordered desegregation and what has been the enduring impact of legal actions during Civil Rights era.

The inventory is still in progress. An initial list was provided by the Department of Justice, identifying still-active cases in 1997 and 2000 to which it was a party. The NAACP Legal Defense Fund supplied another list of their current cases. Other published sources are *From Brown to Boston: Desegregation in Education 1954-1974* (edited by Leon Jones, 1979); *Desegregation in Education: A Directory of Reported Federal Decisions* (edited by Michael Wise, 1977); and *New Evidence on School Desegregation* (Finis Welch and Audrey Light, 1987).

Aside from formal court cases, the Mumford Center is also compiling information about school districts that implemented desegregation plans in response to pressure from the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. The analysis in this report incorporates partial information on those plans, based on lists compiled by HEW for the years 1977 and 1978 (*School Desegregation: A Report of State and Federal Judicial and Administrative Activity*, by the National Institute of Education, HEW 1977, 1978.).

Every case has been checked through legal databases, including Westlaw, to determine the name of the case, the school districts involved, whether the case actually included the issue of school segregation, whether there was a court-mandated desegregation plan, and the year of the initial court order. We continue to review the inventory to check whether cases have been properly coded. The case inventory now includes 358 court cases resulting in desegregation plans, involving more than 850 school districts as defendants, and 207 districts that were under pressure from HEW through 1978.

Information on school district racial and ethnic composition and levels of segregation is drawn from two sources, both of which refer specifically to public school children in the elementary grades. For the school years 1989-90 and 1999-2000, these data were provided by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). For school years 1968-69, 1969-70, and 1970-71, data were provided by Dr. Franklin Wilson and Dr. Karl Taeuber of the University of Wisconsin. If available, we use 1968-69 data here; otherwise we substitute one of the two subsequent years as the "base year" for the analysis.

For convenience in the following text and tables, "1968" refers to one of the years in the 1968-70 period, "1990" refers to the 1989-90 school year, and "2000" refers to the 1999-2000 school year.

NCES files categorize students as non-Hispanic white, non-Hispanic black, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, and other. The Wilson/Taeuber file categorizes students as non-Hispanic white, non-Hispanic black, Hispanic, and other race. In the following text, the terms white and black refer only to non-Hispanic students. Because the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision

and its implementation primarily dealt with black students, this report focuses mainly on white-black segregation.

The process of data compilation required matching of school districts across years by their NCES identification number or school district name; some districts could not be identified for all three time points, and these are omitted from the analysis. Of 13,810 districts for which we had data for 2000, we analyze demographics across three time points for 8,723 districts. These districts included 92% of all public school elementary enrollment in 2000 (23,500,000 students), and 96% of all black students (4,455,000 black students).

A webpage has been developed to present information on court cases and demographic data for all of these districts (<http://www.albany.edu/mumford/brown>). Users can select a state, and then a school district within a state. The webpage lists court cases (if any) that involved this district, and provides a link to the Westlaw text of the court decision. It also provides information on racial and ethnic composition of the elementary student population for available years, and summary indices of school segregation. The webpage includes data on Hispanic and Asian students; this report deals only with white-black segregation.

Over time it is hoped that feedback from users will make the case inventory more complete and more accurate, constituting a permanent new information resource for scholars and the public.

Court-ordered desegregation: How many districts, when, and where?

Since the 1950s there have been many court cases in which some aspect of equal educational opportunity across racial groups has been at issue, involving many districts, sometimes challenging statewide practices that affect every school district in a state. This report deals with only some of these cases.

1) “**Desegregation cases**” here include only cases where assignment of students across schools was directly at stake. This line is not always easy to draw. A case regarding North Carolina’s statewide law prohibiting busing to achieve school desegregation is treated as a segregation case; a case challenging a state’s financial support to private schools created in the wake of desegregation is not.

2) We code districts as having a “**mandated desegregation plan**” if a case results in a court decision requiring or affirming steps to reduce school segregation, regardless of whether the decision was later reversed. A plan was sometimes reached through an out-of-court settlement between the parties that was later ratified by a court. We found 358 such court cases. In addition some districts implemented a voluntary desegregation plan (where “voluntary” may have been in response to external pressure and perhaps to a lawsuit). Unless we could identify a specific court decision requiring or affirming the plan, we treat the district as having no plan. The web page gives links to unsuccessful lawsuits; this report deals only with those where a desegregation plan was required.

3) We also code districts as having a “**mandated desegregation plan**” if there was no court case, but the district implemented a plan after having been targeted for compliance by HEW.

The cases we have identified since 1950 that mandated a desegregation plan, plus the HEW administrative actions, involved a total of 1,094 school districts. This represents about one in ten districts in the country. A single school district is party to the majority of cases, but a few cases cast their net much more widely. Some Southern cases mandated desegregation plans for dozens of districts within a state. These include *Alabama NAACP State Conference of Branches v. Wallace*, *Coffey v. State Educational Finance Commission, US* and *Ridley v. State of Georgia*, and *Lebeauf v. State Board of Education of Louisiana*.

Table 1 summarizes the number of districts in cases resulting in a mandated desegregation plan, categorized by the date of the initial decision. This figure demonstrates the very strong focus on Southern states (787 districts) compared to the North (307 districts). Although school segregation has always been a national concern, it was particularly in many Southern states that public policy mandated that white and black student attend different schools. Many early political and legal battles therefore focused on districts in the South. Note that the cases affecting most Southern districts were decided in the period 1963-1970. Only 94 non-Southern districts had been involved in such cases through 1970. But desegregation plans ordered after this time were concentrated outside the South.

Although only 1,094 districts were directly affected by these cases, they represent a very large share of the black elementary school population. In the South, 74.8% of black elementary students in 2000 (out of a total 2.6 million) were enrolled in districts that had been mandated to desegregate at some point during the 1950-1994 period. In the remainder of the country the figure is lower but still substantial: 61.9% (out of a total 2.0 million black students).

Table 1. Number of districts in cases resulting in desegregation plans, by year of decision and region

| | Total U.S. | South | Non-South |
|--------------|-------------------|--------------|------------------|
| 1951 | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| 1952 | 4 | 4 | 0 |
| 1954 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| 1955 | 6 | 5 | 1 |
| 1956 | 7 | 6 | 1 |
| 1957 | 27 | 27 | 0 |
| 1958 | 12 | 12 | 0 |
| 1959 | 9 | 9 | 0 |
| 1960 | 7 | 7 | 0 |
| 1961 | 9 | 8 | 1 |
| 1962 | 12 | 11 | 1 |
| 1963 | 118 | 115 | 3 |
| 1964 | 31 | 25 | 6 |
| 1965 | 85 | 81 | 4 |
| 1966 | 59 | 57 | 2 |
| 1967 | 32 | 29 | 3 |
| 1968 | 58 | 24 | 34 |
| 1969 | 201 | 177 | 24 |
| 1970 | 97 | 84 | 13 |
| 1971 | 33 | 22 | 11 |
| 1972 | 37 | 11 | 26 |
| 1973 | 34 | 15 | 19 |
| 1974 | 20 | 8 | 12 |
| 1975 | 23 | 14 | 9 |
| 1976 | 61 | 20 | 41 |
| 1977 | 49 | 8 | 41 |
| 1978 | 41 | 5 | 36 |
| 1979 | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| 1980 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 1983 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| 1985 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| 1986 | 11 | 0 | 11 |
| 1994 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Total | 1094 | 787 | 307 |

Trends in school segregation: The impacts of desegregation plans

What difference did this legal struggle make to separation between white and black students? We address this question first by comparing data from 1968 (constituting the “base year,” before implementation of a desegregation plan in most cases) with data from 1990 and 2000. The analysis focuses on elementary school students, since elementary schools tend to be smaller than middle schools and high schools, and if a school district is segregated, this is most likely to show up in the elementary grades.

Many school districts especially in rural areas have very few black students and only one elementary school. For this part of the study we select only those districts that meet the following criteria: they had two or more elementary schools in 2000 and at least 5% of the student population was black in that year. A total of 1,608 districts meet these criteria, and they enrolled 83% of all black elementary students in 2000.

Table 2 summarizes the trends over time, contrasting districts in the South and non-South, and districts that ever were subject to a desegregation order with those that were not.

The average values in this table are weighted by the number of black students in the district in a given year (so that a district with a large black enrollment counts more heavily than one with few black students). Hence these values reflect the “typical” experience of the minority student population over time.

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

This table reveals both the extent of school segregation nationally prior to 1970, and the trends since that time. Let’s begin with the base year of 1968:

- In 1968, segregation was very high nationally, at a level that social scientists would consider extreme. By this measure, 80.5% of black students would have had to change

their enrollment to a school where they were previously under-represented in order to achieve total racial balance.

- At this time segregation was somewhat higher in the South than elsewhere, although the regional difference was not as large as one might have expected. In some Southern districts there had already been modest progress toward integration by 1968.
- Segregation was substantially higher in districts that came under desegregation orders at some point in the 1950-1994 period, suggesting that successful litigation was highly targeted.

Then what changes occurred through 1990?

- By 1990 levels of segregation had declined dramatically to a national average below 50.
- Segregation at this time was actually lower in the South than elsewhere and by a substantial margin – clearly stronger efforts had been made in the South than in the North during the 1970s and 1980s.
- A key finding is that even more progress was made in Southern school districts that had not been party to a desegregation order.

We would have expected some overall improvement at a national level, and perhaps particularly in the South, but the degree of change here is stunning. And most important, change occurred throughout the country, not only in districts that were successfully sued. What explains this counter-intuitive result? A principal factor is that successful legal action was only one of the forces for change in this period. Considerable federal government resources had been marshaled, including close scrutiny of many districts by the Office for Civil Rights in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. As the law evolved and it became clear that many state and federal courts would ultimately demand an end to separate school systems for white and black students, potential vulnerability to litigation made a difference in many cases. There were also many school districts whose administrators and elected officials believed that desegregation was a desirable goal for social and educational reasons.

Certainly, however, such change would not have been possible without the remarkable shift in the legal environment created by the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the willingness of the nation's political leaders to enforce it, and the continuing and persistent efforts by many participants in the legal and political battles that maintained the pressure for new policies.

The trend in the last decade has been less positive. Nationally there has been a slight upward drift in school segregation, as experienced by the average black student. This was expected as a result of Supreme Court and other decisions in the 1990's that facilitated the dismissal of desegregation orders. But if dismissal of segregation orders is the source of this upward tilt, the table shows that this phenomenon applies primarily outside the South. On average segregation did not rise in Southern districts that had implemented a desegregation plan.

Still, change since 1990 has been slight in comparison with the sharp declines between 1968 and 1990.

Changes in major school districts

These figures are national averages, and they hide significant variations across districts. For full information on any individual district, consult the Mumford Center webpage at www.albany.edu/mumford/brown. The figures for districts with the largest black elementary student enrollment in 2000 that did not have a mandated desegregation plan are listed in Table 3. Tables 4-5 list comparable statistics of the largest districts with a mandated plan in the South (Table 4) and non-South (Table 5).

Among major districts that were not subject to a mandated desegregation plan, Table 3 includes several that experienced substantial reductions in segregation between 1968 and 1990. The largest improvements were in the South: Nash County, NC, and Wayne County, NC. However a number of districts outside the South also experienced drops of 20-30 points in the segregation index. Cases with only minor reductions or actual increases were the exceptions: Fort Bend, TX, Oakland, CA, Newark, NJ, and Sacramento, CA.

In several cases in Table 3 there is evidence of re-segregation in the last decade. There were increases in the index of five points or more in 8 of the 23 districts on the list. In 6 districts there were declines, though some of these were slight and some were in districts that had increasing segregation in the earlier period.

Table 4 lists major Southern districts that had a mandated desegregation plan. Several fit the average Southern profile that was revealed in Table 2, with extremely high segregation in 1968 and steep decline by 1990. In many but not all such cases there was a subsequent return of 5-10 points in segregation after 1990, but typically segregation remains at much lower levels in 2000 than in 1968.

Some of the most dramatic drops in the initial period took place in Aldine, TX, Mecklenburg County, NC, Jefferson County, KY, Wake County, NC, Pinellas County, FL, Forsyth County, SC, Little Rock, AR, and Greenville County, SC. Forsyth County is an example of a district that subsequently reversed about half of the gains; Pinellas County is a case where re-segregation has been more modest.

But there are also some Southern districts where we found a mandated desegregation plan but not much improvement. These districts merit greater scrutiny to understand what were the weaknesses in the plan or its enforcement that yielded so little fruit. In Baltimore, Atlanta, Fulton County, GA, segregation dipped only moderately; in Washington, DC, it has actually increased steadily over time.

Table 3. Segregation trends in school districts with more than 5,000 black elementary students in 2000. Districts not subject to court-ordered desegregation.

| | | Index of Dissimilarity | | | Black enrollment |
|--------------------------------------|----|------------------------|------|------|------------------|
| | | 1968 | 1990 | 2000 | 2000 |
| Southern school districts | | | | | |
| Virginia Beach City | VA | 45.0 | 27.1 | 32.9 | 11,877 |
| Gwinnett County | GA | 58.6 | 50.0 | 46.4 | 9,526 |
| Anne Arundel County | MD | 53.3 | 47.6 | 50.7 | 8,260 |
| Fort Bend. | TX | 18.8 | 70.6 | 63.3 | 7,452 |
| Hampton City | VA | 68.3 | 27.7 | 40.5 | 7,447 |
| Killeen | AZ | 41.4 | 20.1 | 20.3 | 7,206 |
| Chesapeake City | MD | 77.3 | 47.4 | 48.3 | 7,039 |
| North Forest | TX | 76.4 | 62.7 | 34.3 | 6,162 |
| Nash County | NC | 82.5 | 27.6 | 48.4 | 5,910 |
| Aiken County | SC | 69.7 | 20.8 | 21.6 | 5,093 |
| Wayne County | NC | 73.2 | 29.1 | 48.1 | 5,002 |
| Non-Southern school districts | | | | | |
| Oakland Unified | CA | 73.3 | 68.5 | 69.3 | 16,364 |
| Newark City | NJ | 81.0 | 90.6 | 86.5 | 14,984 |
| Gary Community School Corp | IN | 92.0 | 61.1 | 43.6 | 11,143 |
| Long Beach Unified | CA | 81.8 | 39.1 | 49.7 | 10,082 |
| West Contra Costa Unified | CA | 75.8 | 53.9 | 51.9 | 6,517 |
| East Orange | NJ | 56.0 | 37.2 | 84.7 | 6,380 |
| Compton Unified | CA | 78.1 | 40.2 | 52.7 | 6,218 |
| St. Paul | MN | 60.6 | 32.8 | 32.3 | 5,972 |

Table 4. Segregation trends in the 50 Southern school districts with largest black enrollment in 2000. Districts subject to court-ordered desegregation.

| | | Index of Dissimilarity | | | Black enrollment |
|------------------------|----|------------------------|------|------|------------------|
| | | 1968 | 1990 | 2000 | 2000 |
| Dade County | FL | 92.4 | 68.5 | 72.2 | 64,442 |
| Memphis City | TN | 94.8 | 71.7 | 67.1 | 56,275 |
| Prince George's County | MD | 70.7 | 46.5 | 56.0 | 54,688 |
| Baltimore City | MD | 86.8 | 77.4 | 79.9 | 53,290 |
| Broward County | FL | 94.1 | 61.6 | 60.9 | 49,791 |
| Orleans Parish | LA | 85.5 | 73.7 | 78.6 | 43,817 |
| Houston | TX | 91.7 | 66.6 | 74.1 | 42,870 |
| Dekalb County | GA | 86.3 | 56.5 | 68.8 | 42,261 |
| District Of Columbia | DC | 80.7 | 86.9 | 90.6 | 37,890 |
| Dallas | TX | 94.7 | 68.3 | 70.0 | 35,755 |
| Atlanta City | GA | 93.1 | 83.8 | 82.7 | 33,122 |
| Duval County | FL | 89.9 | 42.1 | 43.6 | 32,381 |

Table 4 (continued). Segregation trends in the 50 Southern school districts with largest black enrollment in 2000. Districts subject to court-ordered desegregation.

| | | Index of Dissimilarity | | | Black enrollment |
|----------------------------------|----|---------------------------|------|------|------------------|
| | | 1968 | 1990 | 2000 | 2000 |
| | | | | | |
| Mecklenburg County | NC | 78.4 | 22.3 | 33.6 | 25,392 |
| Palm Beach County | FL | 86.5 | 61.5 | 58.2 | 25,366 |
| Orange County | FL | 89.3 | 51.9 | 55.8 | 24,442 |
| Hillsborough County | FL | 87.2 | 32.3 | 46.6 | 23,970 |
| East Baton Rouge Parish School B | LA | 93.3 | 47.2 | 58.8 | 21,300 |
| Birmingham City | AL | 94.1 | 75.8 | 68.6 | 21,152 |
| Mobile County | AL | 88.2 | 59.3 | 68.1 | 18,697 |
| Nashville-Davidson County | TN | 84.4 | 29.5 | 33.8 | 18,205 |
| Jefferson Co | KY | 84.7 | 14.7 | 21.8 | 17,907 |
| Clayton County | GA | 88.1 | 36.7 | 34.1 | 17,157 |
| Jackson Public | MS | 93.8 | 76.7 | 67.0 | 16,529 |
| Caddo Parish | LA | 98.0 | 56.2 | 62.6 | 16,497 |
| Norfolk City | VA | 91.5 | 40.4 | 41.6 | 16,019 |
| Guilford County | NC | 62.6 | 39.6 | 49.5 | 16,006 |
| Wake County | NC | 87.0 | 21.2 | 28.2 | 15,839 |
| Fulton County | GA | 89.2 | 74.1 | 75.6 | 15,470 |
| Charleston County | SC | 88.2 | 49.5 | 57.0 | 15,398 |
| Fort Worth | TX | 93.1 | 66.8 | 63.6 | 14,680 |
| Richmond City | VA | 91.9 | 46.1 | 51.7 | 14,634 |
| Montgomery County | AL | 95.4 | 46.4 | 55.0 | 14,465 |
| Richmond County | GA | 93.3 | 47.5 | 49.8 | 14,355 |
| Jefferson Parish | LA | 81.6 | 28.2 | 42.5 | 14,196 |
| Chatham County | GA | 89.5 | 32.0 | 40.3 | 14,053 |
| Cumberland County | NC | 62.8 | 26.3 | 35.0 | 14,025 |
| Pinellas County | FL | 90.6 | 27.3 | 31.2 | 12,691 |
| Richland School District 01 | SC | 85.7 | 56.5 | 62.4 | 12,620 |
| Muscogee County | GA | 91.0 | 59.1 | 58.2 | 11,612 |
| Aldine | TX | 90.8 | 24.0 | 28.8 | 11,046 |
| Polk County | FL | 83.5 | 48.8 | 22.7 | 10,658 |
| Newport News City | VA | 90.4 | 33.6 | 30.5 | 10,595 |
| Durham County | NC | 94.9 | 50.8 | 38.4 | 10,445 |
| Bibb County | GA | 84.1 | 59.7 | 60.7 | 10,420 |
| Forsyth County | NC | 91.1 | 15.4 | 50.5 | 10,180 |
| Tulsa | OK | 93.9 | 60.8 | 54.8 | 9,893 |
| Little Rock | AR | 86.1 | 25.0 | 37.8 | 9,797 |
| Greenville County | SC | 87.8 | 24.8 | 37.7 | 9,767 |
| Escambia County | FL | 79.3 | 50.5 | 48.9 | 9,736 |
| Oklahoma City | OK | 94.1 | 51.1 | 56.0 | 9,426 |

Table 5. Segregation trends in non-Southern school districts with more than 5,000 black elementary students in 2000. Districts subject to court-ordered desegregation.

| | State | Index of Dissimilarity | | | Black enrollment |
|-------------------------------------|-------|------------------------|------|------|------------------|
| | | 1968 | 1990 | 2000 | 2000 |
| New York City | NY | 72.2 | 81.7 | 81.7 | 193,748 |
| City Of Chicago School District 299 | IL | 93.7 | 84.2 | 87.7 | 146,076 |
| Detroit City | MI | 79.3 | 68.2 | 76.2 | 93,216 |
| Philadelphia City | PA | 79.8 | 80.2 | 76.5 | 73,092 |
| Los Angeles Unified | CA | 93.0 | 74.2 | 72.9 | 51,177 |
| Milwaukee | WI | 89.3 | 35.4 | 57.5 | 38,193 |
| Cleveland Municipal | OH | 89.4 | 22.7 | 72.9 | 33,283 |
| Columbus City | OH | 81.6 | 23.2 | 53.4 | 22,593 |
| St. Louis City | MO | 89.1 | 62.6 | 51.1 | 22,449 |
| Cincinnati City | OH | 76.2 | 37.7 | 55.9 | 21,155 |
| Clark County | NV | 84.6 | 32.0 | 42.4 | 18,286 |
| Boston | MA | 78.6 | 32.8 | 44.8 | 17,592 |
| Kansas City 33 | MO | 82.2 | 38.0 | 60.3 | 15,428 |
| Buffalo City | NY | 77.7 | 19.7 | 32.2 | 15,069 |
| Indianapolis | IN | 86.1 | 24.4 | 39.9 | 15,045 |
| Rochester City | NY | 60.3 | 40.7 | 45.2 | 14,083 |
| San Diego City Unified | CA | 79.9 | 46.5 | 54.0 | 13,876 |
| Minneapolis | MN | 72.2 | 21.8 | 46.0 | 12,886 |
| Pittsburgh | PA | 74.2 | 40.5 | 51.7 | 11,913 |
| Flint City | MI | 78.6 | 63.6 | 70.2 | 10,997 |
| Toledo City | OH | 81.0 | 64.2 | 65.2 | 10,454 |
| Dayton City | OH | 87.0 | 31.1 | 39.9 | 9,834 |
| Denver County 1 | CO | 83.8 | 46.3 | 63.1 | 8,730 |
| Picotte Elementary School | NE | 87.7 | 42.7 | 57.1 | 8,404 |
| Akron City | OH | 72.6 | 53.9 | 50.0 | 8,370 |
| East St Louis School Dist 189 | IL | 87.9 | 86.9 | 80.8 | 7,310 |
| New Haven | CT | 65.3 | 61.6 | 56.0 | 6,964 |
| Jersey City | NJ | 66.0 | 66.3 | 60.8 | 6,954 |
| Sacramento City Unified | CA | 39.6 | 37.8 | 37.9 | 6,847 |
| Wichita | KS | 82.4 | 20.6 | 29.9 | 6,608 |
| Grand Rapids | MI | 86.7 | 55.9 | 52.9 | 6,601 |
| Camden City | NJ | 74.0 | 58.4 | 47.3 | 6,376 |
| Seattle | WA | 65.4 | 34.0 | 55.8 | 6,334 |
| Syracuse City School District | NY | 47.9 | 22.2 | 36.2 | 6,265 |
| San Bernardino City Unified | CA | 69.9 | 29.9 | 27.0 | 6,161 |
| Paterson City | NJ | 62.6 | 71.6 | 69.7 | 6,155 |
| Kansas City | KS | 81.1 | 40.6 | 41.1 | 6,108 |
| Bridgeport | CT | 60.5 | 46.9 | 41.8 | 5,984 |
| Hartford | CT | 73.5 | 78.7 | 69.1 | 5,966 |
| Peoria School District 150 | IL | 65.5 | 36.1 | 43.9 | 5,565 |
| San Francisco Unified | CA | 67.4 | 46.0 | 58.6 | 5,517 |
| Fresno Unified | CA | 86.3 | 47.3 | 40.1 | 5,266 |
| Rockford School Dist 205 | IL | 79.3 | 48.9 | 18.5 | 5,132 |

There were also several districts outside the South (Table 5) where legal action resulted in substantial reduction in segregation in the initial period. Especially large changes occurred in Cleveland, Columbus, Buffalo, Indianapolis, Minneapolis, Dayton, and Wichita. In these seven districts there has been a pronounced re-segregation in the last decade, most notably in Cleveland.

But Table 5 also shows that some districts with mandated plans did not even improve in the initial period. Segregation increased or stayed the same between 1968 and 1990 in New York City, Philadelphia, East St. Louis, Jersey City, Sacramento, Paterson City, and Hartford. In some of these districts, such as New York City, the initial court order was weakened by subsequent legal action.

On the whole, inspection of the trends in these districts with large black student enrollments gives a less optimistic picture than the national averages. Segregation is clearly more entrenched in larger districts with more substantial minority populations. Greater efforts may be required to desegregate in such places, and the gains have often proven to be more fragile. At the same time, the national averages in Table 2 have been weighted by the number of black students in every district. So if we wish to know the experience of the typical black student (rather than the typical large district), these averages are more informative, and these show great improvements during 1968-1990.

It is also useful to be aware of those districts that displayed the most progress, even without a court mandate for change. Table 6 lists a select group of districts where one would expect desegregation to face great obstacles: these are large districts (more than 10,000 elementary students in 2000) with at least 5% black enrollment. None of these districts was required by a court order or HEW action to implement a desegregation plan. But they achieved very significant changes between 1968 and 1990, and in most cases they have managed to protect their gains. In an era when legal trends seem to jeopardize the legacy of *Brown v. Board of Education*, these districts are a reminder that much still depends on local decisions.

Table 6. Large school districts not facing court mandated desegregation but with large declines in segregation

| | | % Black in 2000 | Segregation (D) | | |
|------------------------------|----|--------------------|-----------------|------|------|
| | | | 1968 | 1990 | 2000 |
| Grand Prairie | TX | 13.2 | 97.7 | 24.8 | 20.4 |
| Katy | TX | 5.2 | 96.6 | 25.0 | 25.6 |
| Desoto County | MS | 16.3 | 94.0 | 33.2 | 18.8 |
| Henry County | GA | 17.0 | 91.6 | 23.8 | 25.6 |
| Aldine | TX | 34.9 | 90.8 | 24.0 | 28.8 |
| Mesquite | TX | 17.0 | 82.8 | 23.5 | 21.0 |
| Garland | TX | 16.1 | 81.2 | 21.3 | 26.0 |
| Olathe 233 | KS | 5.1 | 79.8 | 26.7 | 28.9 |
| Clear Creek | TX | 5.9 | 77.0 | 24.1 | 26.2 |
| Hurst-Euless-Bedford | TX | 8.7 | 76.2 | 30.7 | 23.9 |
| Ontario-Montclair Elementary | CA | 6.2 | 74.7 | 29.3 | 28.5 |
| Antioch Unified | CA | 13.2 | 73.4 | 24.7 | 13.4 |
| Aiken County | SC | 36.5 | 69.7 | 20.8 | 21.6 |
| Corona-Norco Unified | CA | 5.4 | 69.2 | 22.4 | 29.7 |
| A B C Unified | CA | 9.8 | 67.5 | 19.5 | 20.3 |
| Fontana Unified | CA | 10.4 | 66.9 | 24.1 | 25.9 |
| Worcester | MA | 10.0 | 66.6 | 33.9 | 15.5 |
| Lawton | OK | 31.2 | 65.9 | 19.0 | 15.7 |
| Madison | WI | 19.7 | 59.6 | 32.8 | 29.5 |
| Tacoma | WA | 20.2 | 58.0 | 25.6 | 29.2 |
| Hayward Unified | CA | 16.9 | 57.5 | 19.5 | 18.9 |
| Brockton | MA | 39.2 | 47.1 | 23.0 | 17.2 |
| Plano | TX | 6.7 | 45.9 | 29.2 | 28.9 |
| Federal Way | WA | 12.5 | 45.6 | 21.2 | 24.1 |
| Alhambra Elementary 068 | AZ | 8.9 | 45.4 | 10.9 | 17.3 |

Qualifying the progress: the failure to desegregate across district lines

The preceding analyses show that much progress has been made in the struggle against segregated schools. Although this movement was brought to a halt in the last decade, there has been no return to the pre-*Brown* status quo. But the assessment of progress needs to be qualified in three major ways, all of which are tied to the failure to reach across school district lines in most desegregation plans.

1. Preserving segregation at the metropolitan level

The gains achieved by plans that have been implemented within districts, under court order or not, have been undermined by white families’ withdrawal from public schools or residential mobility to communities to which minorities have not yet gained full access.

Although some court cases sought inter-district remedies, especially linking central city school districts with surrounding suburbs, constitutional law has mostly been interpreted to bar such action. The key legal case in this respect was for the Detroit metropolitan region, decided by the U.S. Supreme Court (*Milliken v. Bradley 1974*). In this decision, the Supreme Court blocked efforts for interdistrict, city-suburban desegregation remedies as a means to integrate racially isolated city schools. The Court prohibited such remedies unless plaintiffs could demonstrate that the suburbs or the state had taken actions that contributed to segregation in the city. A high bar was set to prove such collusion.

To demonstrate the impact of this constraint, Table 7 provides information on the average levels of segregation in metropolitan areas (rural schools are omitted in this part of the analysis, but this part of the analysis includes all districts regardless of black enrollment). Segregation is calculated in two ways. The first is the level of segregation in the metropolitan region as a whole, including separation both within and between school districts. The second is the level of segregation in the average school district (weighted by the number of black students in each district). This tells us the degree of separation within metropolitan school districts (necessarily limited to districts with more than one school).

Much rests on understanding the distinction between these two averages. If all school districts in a metropolis had the same racial composition, then there would be no “between-district” segregation. Metropolitan segregation would be entirely due to separation between children within districts. At the other extreme, if there were no segregation at all within districts, but if whites in a given metropolitan region tended to be concentrated in some districts and blacks in others, then there could still be considerable metropolitan segregation, but now entirely due to segregation between districts.

In Table 7, the “average district” columns represent segregation within districts. District level segregation has been averaged for all districts in every metropolitan region, and then the metropolitan averages have been brought together in a South, non-South, and total metro mean. The “overall metropolitan region” columns include this within district segregation as well as segregation between districts. (Averages are weighted by the number of black students enrolled in each year.)

| | Overall metropolitan region | | | Average district | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|------|------|------------------|------|------|
| | 1968 | 1990 | 2000 | 1968 | 1990 | 2000 |
| South | 83.4 | 53.3 | 56.2 | 83.0 | 42.5 | 43.0 |
| Non-South | 81.5 | 70.7 | 70.7 | 74.4 | 49.3 | 48.7 |
| Total metro | 82.4 | 61.8 | 63.3 | 79.4 | 45.4 | 45.5 |

Table 7 shows that in 1968 there was little difference nationally between these two measures – both were close to 80, a level that is similar to what was reported in Table 2. Outside the South,

though, average district segregation was only 74.4, about seven points below average metropolitan segregation. This means that between-district effects were already visible outside the South. This is to be expected, given regional differences in how school districts are organized. In much of the South school districts encompass an entire county, including a central city and many suburbs. Elsewhere there are typically one or more large central city districts and many suburban districts, often with very unequal racial composition.

By 2000, there had been very sharp reductions in within-district segregation, similar to the 30-40 point drop that was reported in Table 2. But metropolitan segregation had declined by less than 20 points, and outside the South the decline was only about 10 points.

Hence especially in Northern and Western metropolitan regions the great progress made toward racial balance within school districts was largely undermined by continued imbalance between districts – **about two-thirds of the potential gain was not realized for this reason.**

To clarify this point, Table 8 lists the same information for individual metropolitan regions with more than 20,000 black elementary students in 2000. The table is divided into Southern and non-Southern metros. By 2000 the largest disparity between the average district and overall metropolitan segregation was in Nassau-Suffolk, NY (Long Island). Here, segregation in the district attended by the average black student was only 22.9; but as a result of additional separation between districts, the overall level of segregation was 70.3. In this example there is no central city school district, but there is considerable fragmentation of districts among suburban towns and villages. Another important example is Boston, where the average district had a segregation level of only 35.2 (in large part as a result of a history of desegregation policies in the City of Boston and a few other districts). But the overall metropolitan segregation was 70.2 – almost the same as it had been in 1968. It is ironic that this particular region endured a traumatic struggle over busing within Boston, achieving substantial changes in city schools, but the broader impacts of this effort have been negligible because of what happened beyond the city's borders.

In contrast, a majority of the areas in the South in this table have disparities between the average district and overall metropolitan segregation of less than 10 points in 2000. Typically both of these measures declined by a large margin between 1968 and 2000 (or more precisely, between 1968 and 1990). In several cases the two measures are approximately equal, reflecting the fact the schools in some of these metropolitan regions are organized into countywide districts.

Table 8. Segregation: overall metropolitan total and average school district in the metropolis (metros with more than 20,000 black students)

| Metropolitan Region | Overall metropolitan region | | | Average district | | |
|--|-----------------------------|------|------|------------------|------|------|
| | 1968 | 1990 | 2000 | 1968 | 1990 | 2000 |
| South: | | | | | | |
| Nashville, TN | 73.1 | 45.2 | 54.3 | 75.4 | 29.9 | 32.9 |
| Birmingham, AL | 93.3 | 73.0 | 76.4 | 94.1 | 66.0 | 58.9 |
| Jackson, MS | 91.0 | 69.5 | 69.0 | 91.0 | 61.6 | 53.8 |
| Richmond-Petersburg, VA | 84.2 | 60.8 | 59.3 | 86.7 | 40.4 | 44.1 |
| Houston, TX | 88.5 | 60.5 | 67.8 | 88.3 | 53.5 | 53.3 |
| Fort Worth-Arlington, TX | 88.8 | 63.1 | 60.3 | 89.9 | 55.2 | 48.4 |
| Dallas, TX | 87.4 | 60.1 | 60.5 | 89.0 | 52.2 | 49.2 |
| Columbia, SC | 79.9 | 53.1 | 55.5 | 82.3 | 43.2 | 45.7 |
| Greensboro--Winston-Salem--High Point, NC | 74.1 | 41.2 | 51.8 | 75.8 | 27.1 | 43.0 |
| Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill, NC | 81.2 | 32.0 | 36.5 | 79.9 | 28.6 | 29.5 |
| Washington, DC-MD-VA-WV | 79.8 | 60.8 | 64.2 | 73.2 | 56.7 | 57.4 |
| Baton Rouge, LA | 94.8 | 52.4 | 62.9 | 94.7 | 45.7 | 56.1 |
| Augusta-Aiken, GA-SC | 84.8 | 41.6 | 43.6 | 84.2 | 35.4 | 38.1 |
| Charlotte-Gastonia-Rock Hill, NC-SC | 67.6 | 33.5 | 39.8 | 70.0 | 24.2 | 34.3 |
| Atlanta, GA | 83.5 | 65.3 | 64.3 | 84.7 | 59.5 | 59.0 |
| Memphis, TN-AR-MS | 93.1 | 68.8 | 67.4 | 93.4 | 64.0 | 62.2 |
| Charleston-North Charleston, SC | 89.6 | 49.4 | 48.9 | 90.2 | 44.0 | 43.9 |
| Jacksonville, FL | 86.6 | 44.3 | 48.0 | 87.2 | 40.9 | 43.2 |
| Norfolk-Virginia Beach-Newport News, VA-NC | 80.4 | 41.7 | 41.6 | 83.4 | 32.9 | 37.1 |
| Greenville-Spartanburg-Anderson, SC | 76.1 | 34.5 | 40.5 | 76.8 | 31.1 | 36.1 |
| Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater, FL | 87.2 | 33.9 | 44.5 | 87.3 | 31.5 | 41.3 |
| New Orleans, LA | 83.3 | 61.0 | 66.8 | 84.0 | 60.5 | 65.3 |
| Miami, FL | 92.4 | 68.5 | 72.2 | 92.4 | 68.5 | 72.2 |
| Fort Lauderdale, FL | 94.1 | 61.6 | 60.9 | 94.1 | 61.6 | 60.9 |
| West Palm Beach-Boca Raton, FL | 86.1 | 60.1 | 57.3 | 86.1 | 60.1 | 57.5 |
| Mobile, AL | 90.4 | 56.8 | 65.0 | 89.9 | 56.8 | 65.3 |
| Orlando, FL | 84.5 | 48.6 | 51.2 | 84.2 | 48.8 | 52.6 |
| Shreveport-Bossier City, LA | 97.5 | 50.8 | 55.2 | 97.6 | 51.8 | 57.8 |
| Baltimore, MD | 80.6 | 67.2 | 67.1 | 82.1 | 70.5 | 70.4 |

Table 8. (Continued) Segregation: overall metropolitan total and average school district in the metropolis (metros with more than 20,000 black students)

| Metropolitan Region | Overall metropolitan region | | | Average district | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|------|------|------------------|------|------|
| | 1968 | 1990 | 2000 | 1968 | 1990 | 2000 |
| North: | | | | | | |
| Nassau-Suffolk, NY | 74.7 | 68.8 | 70.3 | 32.1 | 25.3 | 22.9 |
| Pittsburgh, PA | 73.1 | 69.8 | 71.6 | 64.7 | 33.7 | 34.3 |
| Boston, MA-NH | 75.6 | 69.8 | 70.2 | 70.9 | 28.8 | 35.2 |
| Indianapolis, IN | 88.2 | 53.7 | 63.2 | 85.2 | 22.5 | 29.4 |
| Cincinnati, OH-KY-IN | 79.7 | 76.4 | 80.8 | 71.9 | 35.9 | 50.6 |
| Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN-WI | 76.2 | 67.7 | 68.7 | 67.4 | 25.4 | 38.8 |
| Kansas City, MO-KS | 84.9 | 72.0 | 72.3 | 80.0 | 36.3 | 44.4 |
| St. Louis, MO-IL | 88.2 | 66.2 | 69.0 | 84.7 | 47.9 | 44.2 |
| Newark, NJ | 83.3 | 83.5 | 80.2 | 73.0 | 61.7 | 56.6 |
| Milwaukee-Waukesha, WI | 92.3 | 68.4 | 76.3 | 89.2 | 33.6 | 54.1 |
| Riverside-San Bernardino, CA | 61.2 | 43.7 | 46.6 | 53.2 | 25.7 | 24.4 |
| Cleveland-Lorain-Elyria, OH | 87.9 | 76.2 | 79.3 | 83.9 | 28.1 | 57.9 |
| Oakland, CA | 79.2 | 70.4 | 68.5 | 64.4 | 52.9 | 47.2 |
| Detroit, MI | 86.4 | 87.8 | 87.3 | 78.1 | 62.4 | 66.0 |
| Columbus, OH | 82.6 | 67.6 | 67.6 | 79.8 | 23.6 | 47.6 |
| Philadelphia, PA-NJ | 77.9 | 72.9 | 72.4 | 73.8 | 62.3 | 58.0 |
| Los Angeles-Long Beach, CA | 91.7 | 70.7 | 66.9 | 86.1 | 56.5 | 54.2 |
| Chicago, IL | 92.4 | 81.3 | 82.1 | 90.4 | 73.3 | 71.5 |
| San Diego, CA | 79.8 | 51.7 | 53.2 | 76.7 | 39.3 | 43.7 |
| New York, NY | 72.8 | 80.3 | 80.8 | 70.3 | 78.2 | 77.0 |

2. Limited inter-racial contact despite desegregation

In many school districts, desegregation was accompanied by a substantial flight of white students to private schools or to other school districts (often in the suburbs) where desegregation's impact would be limited. If desegregation were accompanied by massive white flight, it is possible in theory for "segregation" to decline but for black students to be integrated with relatively few white classmates remaining in their schools.

Some studies focus exclusively on this question: what is the racial composition of schools that students of different races attend, and how has it changed over time? For example, the Harvard Civil Rights Project has issued a series of reports on school segregation (most recently "A Multiracial Society with Segregated Schools: Are We Losing the Dream?" by Erica Frankenberg, Chungmei Lee, and Gary Orfield, January 2003). Their reports show declines in the last decade in black exposure to white students, and an increase in the proportion of blacks attending majority-minority schools.

To examine this aspect of the process, we employ different measures of segregation than used above. These are called "exposure indices," and they calculate the proportions of white, black, and other students in the school that the average child attends. Table 9 displays the average

values of two such indices for white students. These are average values, weighted by the number of white students in each district for a given year. For this analysis, all school districts are included (even those with a single school) if data are available for all three time points.

Nationally whites have experienced steadily growing diversity in their schools over time. In 1968 85.9% of the average white student's classmates were white; this dropped to 79.3% in 2000. Much of this change is due to increasing exposure to blacks, which grew from a modest 4.2% in 1968 to 9.3% thirty years later. These changes at the national level certainly are small, suggesting a very different magnitude of change than we found in within-district segregation scores. To a large extent this result is due to the fact that many white students were already concentrated in school districts, including suburban school districts, that were predominantly white in 1968, and white students shifted toward such districts in subsequent years.

Table 9 also allows us to see where change occurred. Overall the greatest shift was in the South, and particularly in Southern school districts that were subject to desegregation plans. The racial composition of the average white student's classmates in those districts changed from 91.4% white and 6.1% black (in 1968) to 67.8% white and 22.7% black (in 2000).

Outside of the South change appears only in districts with desegregation plans. The racial composition of the average white student's classmates in those non-Southern districts changed from 83.0% white and 8.6% black in the base year to 59.9% white and 18.3% black three decades later.

These findings show that the impacts of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision on inter-racial contact in schools were more limited than was the progress toward desegregating individual school districts. And effects were greatest within districts that were subject to legally mandated desegregation.

| 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 |

Table 10 reports similar indices from the perspective of black students. Black children now attend schools with a higher share of white classmates than was true thirty years ago. Nationally the percent white in the average black student's school increased from 19.1% in 1968 to 33.6% in 1990, but then it declined to 29.1%.

The 1968 Wilson/Taeuber file does not provide the percent black in the school attended by the average black student; these cells are left blank in the table. However, knowing the percent white in these schools allows us to infer the percent minority (including blacks, Hispanics, and children of other races). During the last decade and at the national level, there was almost no change in black exposure to black classmates (it increased only from 56.4% to 56.8%, and indeed there was little change in category of school district). The 4 point drop in exposure to whites, then, resulted from growing exposure to other racial and ethnic groups. The growth of the Hispanic and Asian populations in most regions of the country is becoming an important ingredient in school composition, affecting schools attended by both whites and blacks.

Table 10 allows us to determine where black exposure to whites was more likely to increase. First, change occurred mainly in the South, where there is a net 17-point increase over the three decades; the net change in the rest of the country was minimal. Second, whether there was a segregation plan made a small difference in the South; exposure to whites increased more in districts without a plan in the first twenty years, but then also declined more in the next decade.

Do these trends constitute widespread re-segregation of black students, seen in terms of intergroup contact? Here in brief are the findings: 1) whites slowly but steadily are attending schools with a more diverse racial composition, 2) whites' exposure to blacks grew significantly in the 1970-90 period before coming to a halt, 3) blacks' exposure to whites increased substantially during 1970-90 and was still substantially higher in 2000 than it was in 1970, and 4) most of the last decade's reduction in white students' and black students' exposure to whites occurred due to growing Hispanic and Asian populations.

| 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 |

Bringing together all of these elements of the situation leads to a different conclusion. As we saw with the earlier measure of racial balance, the Index of Dissimilarity, desegregation made the most progress in the 1970-90 period, and has halted or reversed since then. Changes in intergroup contact have been smaller and more specifically focused in the South and in districts with desegregation plans than have changes in within-district racial balance. But on balance the exposure indices show that most of the gains since 1968 were preserved in the last decade of the 20th Century.

3. Metropolitan segregation and concentrated poverty

For many participants in the struggle for desegregated schools, the end goal was not integration for its own sake, but equality in educational opportunity. Indeed current policy discussions now focus almost exclusively on school outcomes. To what degree has “less separate” in public schools translated into “more equal”?

Considerable information on school performance (test scores, identification of failing schools, and other measures) is becoming available. At this time the only national measure is the degree of concentrated poverty in schools that white and black students attend. This is a valid measure because considerable evidence has accumulated to show that high levels of poverty undermine the educational process, creating additional barriers that have to be overcome by teachers and students.

The National Center for Education Statistics collects annual reports on the numbers of students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch programs, an indicator of the number of poor or near-poor students in the school. Long-term trends cannot be analyzed because no data are available for 1968 and reporting was still very incomplete in 1990. We analyze data for schools in metropolitan regions (that is, in cities or suburbs) for 2000, including all states except Arizona, Illinois, Tennessee, and Washington, states that did not report lunch program participation. Results are summarized in Table 11.

| Table 11. Poverty rates in the school attended by the average student, 2000 | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| | Poverty rate in average school | Disparity with black students |
| Black students: national average | 64.3% | |
| White students: national average | 29.6% | 34.7% |
| White students: comparing within metropolitan regions | 32.5% | 31.8% |
| White students: comparing within school districts | 48.8% | 15.5% |

The average black elementary student in a metropolitan school district attended a school where 64.3% of classmates were poor. This contrasts with 29.6% in the average white student’s school. Such a vast disparity in the class composition of schools seems inconsistent with the reductions in segregation that have been achieved. But it is a natural result of the fact that white and black

students are concentrated in different school districts, even if they are now less segregated within districts.

The table provides two other average figures for white students. “Comparing within metropolitan regions” is the white average for a mix of metropolitan areas identical to those where black students are enrolled. Another way to describe it is “white exposure to poverty in the metropolitan area of the average black student.” The value is 32.5%, almost identical to the national white average. This means that the disparity between whites and blacks is mostly not due to cross-metropolitan differences in racial composition.

“Comparing within school districts” provides the white exposure to poverty in the school district of the average black student – much higher at 48.8%. This shows that more than half of the disparity between whites and blacks is due to segregation between districts in the same metropolitan region.

The remaining disparity (64.3% vs. 48.8%) is due to segregation within districts.

This point can be reinforced by looking at the data for the largest metropolitan regions in the country (more than 30,000 black students in 2000). Table 12 (in the “metropolitan averages” columns) shows that in the Detroit metropolitan region the average white student attended a school that was only 21.1% poor, compared to 76.2% for the average black student, a disparity of more than 55 points. But we can look only at differences within school districts by calculating the white exposure to poverty in the school district attended by the average black student – and it is almost as high as blacks’, 74.4%. In other words, in Detroit nearly all of the disparity in attending schools with concentrated poverty is due to differences between districts, rather than within them.

Other districts near the top of the list are similar – disparities within districts are all less than ten points in Newark, Milwaukee, Cleveland, Boston, Kansas City, and St. Louis, but disparities across the metropolis are greater than 40 points. These are all areas with a traditional fragmented structure of school administration, with deep divisions between cities and suburbs.

At the other end of the table, the Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater metro is made up of just five countywide school districts, and almost all of the disparity between white and black exposure to poverty is within these districts rather than between them. Other metros near the bottom of the list are similar both in the predominance of countywide (or parish) school districts and in the very small role that cross-district segregation plays in assigning black students to high-poverty schools.

The clear conclusion is that the failure to achieve more even racial balance across school districts in much of the country has sharply limited progress toward equal educational opportunity by placing black students disproportionately in high-poverty schools.

Table 12. White and black exposure to poverty in selected metropolitan regions in 2000

| | Metropolitan averages | | | Within district averages | | |
|--|-----------------------|-------|-----------|--------------------------|-------|-----------|
| | White | Black | Disparity | White | Black | Disparity |
| Detroit, MI | 21.1% | 76.2% | 55.1% | 74.4% | 76.2% | 1.9% |
| Newark, NJ | 12.4% | 69.2% | 56.8% | 60.5% | 68.8% | 8.3% |
| Milwaukee-Waukesha, WI | 19.6% | 66.9% | 47.3% | 66.9% | 66.9% | 0.0% |
| Cleveland-Lorain-Elyria, OH | 25.2% | 74.1% | 48.9% | 68.1% | 72.5% | 4.5% |
| Boston, MA-NH | 15.6% | 61.5% | 45.9% | 58.8% | 61.3% | 2.5% |
| Kansas City, MO-KS | 22.3% | 64.3% | 42.0% | 56.6% | 64.0% | 7.4% |
| Philadelphia, PA-NJ | 17.7% | 67.1% | 49.4% | 51.4% | 67.0% | 15.5% |
| St. Louis, MO-IL | 26.6% | 67.0% | 40.4% | 57.4% | 66.9% | 9.5% |
| Baltimore, MD | 19.6% | 62.0% | 42.4% | 43.7% | 61.9% | 18.2% |
| Dallas, TX | 28.5% | 61.2% | 32.7% | 50.8% | 61.4% | 10.6% |
| Los Angeles-Long Beach, CA | 36.4% | 74.2% | 37.8% | 54.9% | 74.2% | 19.3% |
| Richmond-Petersburg, VA | 18.6% | 56.7% | 38.1% | 37.1% | 56.8% | 19.7% |
| Memphis, TN-AR-MS | 34.3% | 70.2% | 35.9% | 52.6% | 70.2% | 17.6% |
| Houston, TX | 28.5% | 65.8% | 37.3% | 44.1% | 65.6% | 21.5% |
| New York, NY | 39.9% | 76.7% | 36.8% | 54.2% | 76.7% | 22.4% |
| Oakland, CA | 20.3% | 58.8% | 38.5% | 33.1% | 58.6% | 25.5% |
| Norfolk-Virginia Beach-Newport News, VA-NC | 32.4% | 57.8% | 25.4% | 44.2% | 57.9% | 13.8% |
| Birmingham, AL | 31.0% | 57.6% | 26.6% | 42.2% | 57.6% | 15.4% |
| Riverside-San Bernardino, CA | 46.4% | 63.0% | 16.6% | 57.3% | 63.0% | 5.6% |
| Atlanta, GA | 25.1% | 63.0% | 37.9% | 33.5% | 62.7% | 29.2% |
| Jacksonville, FL | 40.0% | 64.1% | 24.1% | 45.5% | 63.9% | 18.3% |
| Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill, NC | 33.5% | 48.4% | 14.9% | 38.6% | 48.8% | 10.3% |
| Washington, DC-MD-VA-WV | 19.6% | 49.5% | 29.9% | 23.5% | 49.7% | 26.2% |
| Greensboro--Winston-Salem--High Point, NC | 34.9% | 56.4% | 21.5% | 36.8% | 56.7% | 19.9% |
| Charlotte-Gastonia-Rock Hill, NC-SC | 34.2% | 51.9% | 17.7% | 35.7% | 51.8% | 16.1% |
| Orlando, FL | 41.4% | 64.4% | 23.0% | 42.1% | 64.2% | 22.1% |
| New Orleans, LA | 50.7% | 83.5% | 32.8% | 51.0% | 83.5% | 32.5% |
| Fort Lauderdale, FL | 29.4% | 64.0% | 34.6% | 29.4% | 64.0% | 34.6% |
| Miami, FL | 47.2% | 81.6% | 34.4% | 47.2% | 81.6% | 34.4% |
| Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater, FL | 46.2% | 64.3% | 18.1% | 46.0% | 64.1% | 18.1% |

What difference did *Brown v. Board of Education* make?

Litigation over segregation embroiled many of this country's school districts during the decades since the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Our results demonstrate that the nation does have something to show for all of this effort.

It is often debated whether court rulings have any real effect on major social divisions. In the *Brown v. Board of Education* case, it is not only the Supreme Court decision but also decades of continuing effort by federal and state courts, public officials at every level, and national and local organizations that made the difference. There was real progress in reducing segregation, and it extended to every part of the country and to school districts that were not party to mandated desegregation plans as well as those that were.

There are concerns that the country has begun to experience a sharp reversal of these gains in the years since 1990. The analysis documents that no further progress was made during the 1990's. There is evidence of actual resegregation in some school districts, and in some cases (e.g., Cleveland) this seems to have coincided with dismissal of court ordered desegregation plans. On average, however, there has been very little change in black-white segregation in this later period.

A shift in the overall racial and ethnic composition of the student population is now adding large numbers of Hispanics and Asians into the schools. In the last decade the growth of these new groups has combined with the continuing decline of the white share of enrollment to change patterns of intergroup exposure in public schools. Both whites and blacks are now more likely to be in schools with falling percentages of white students, stable percentages of black students, and growing percentages of Hispanics and Asians. In many parts of the country the issues of segregation and educational opportunity increasingly involve these new groups.

If desegregation has made considerable progress, we must also remember that there is much yet to accomplish. Racial imbalance between whites and blacks has been cut nearly in half, but it remains large. In some of the nation's most important metropolitan centers there has been very little change. Current 2000 segregation levels in the following districts are above or near the national average value of the Index of Dissimilarity thirty years earlier: District of Columbia (90.6), Chicago (87.7), Newark (86.5), East Orange, NJ (84.7), East St. Louis (82.8), Atlanta (82.7), New York City (81.7), Baltimore (79.9), Orleans Parish, LA (78.6), Philadelphia (76.5), Detroit (76.2), Fulton County, GA (75.6), Houston (74.1), Los Angeles (72.9), Cleveland (72.9), and Dade County (72.2).

There are also limitations that were built into the strategy of carrying out desegregation almost entirely within school districts. Especially outside of the South, public officials, lawyers, and others involved in these cases were always reluctant to think about the problems in regional terms. Supreme Court's *Milliken v. Bradley* decision for Detroit ratified this approach, making it very difficult to deal effectively with segregation in the North and West.

We have shown that segregation across schools in the metropolis overall has remained much higher than segregation in the average school district. Consequently dramatic improvements in racial imbalance within the average school district have had only modest impacts on intergroup contact. As long as blacks do not gain equal access to the full range of communities in the

metropolis, desegregation within districts can have only a limited impact on contact between white and black students.

In addition, black students attend schools with more than double the poverty rate of the schools that white students attend. We have shown that disparities across school districts within the same metropolitan region account for about half of this difference. Even if desegregation within districts had run its full course, black students would still be educated in very different and more difficult school settings than white children.

The public discourse on education is in a post-*Brown* phase. In the 1950's segregation was understood as a key element in the problem of unequal educational opportunity for black and white children. Today segregation is treated as a lesson of history, and current policy options disregard the persistence of racial imbalance within and between school districts. This report shows that much progress has been made, but that the approach to desegregation in the aftermath of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision inherently limited its impact. Future efforts to "leave no child behind" will have to address the strong connection between continued segregation at the metropolitan level, limited intergroup contact in children's formative years, and extreme racial disparities in concentrated poverty among children's classmates.