UCLA
Metro and Regional Inequalities

Title
Segregation in Neighborhoods and Schools: Impacts on Minority Children in the Boston Region

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4hz8q24w

Authors
Logan, John R.
Oakley, Deirdre
Stowell, Jacob

Publication Date
2003-09-01

eScholarship.org Powered by the California Digital Library
University of California

Segregation in Neighborhoods and Schools: Impacts on Minority Children in the Boston Region.

John R. Logan
Deirdre Oakley
Jacob Stowell

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

September 1, 2003

This paper was prepared for presentation at the Harvard Color Lines Conference, as part of the Metro Boston Equity Initiative, an initiative of The Civil Rights Project, Harvard University.

In their analysis of the sources of urban riots in the mid-1960's the National Commission on Civil Disorders observed that the country was dividing into two nations, increasingly separate and unequal. Now several decades later and in a very different social and political climate, Census 2000 reminds us that divisions remain very deep. Analyses have shown that reductions in black-white segregation have been slow and uneven. New minorities have become much more visible since the 1960s, and while Hispanics and Asians are less segregated than are blacks from whites, their levels of segregation have been unchanged or rising since 1980.

Separate neighborhoods also continue to be unequal. One of the major costs of residential segregation is that minorities live in poorer neighborhoods with less resources than do whites with comparable incomes. Analysis of the Boston metropolitan region reveals that this national pattern persists here despite a decade of widespread prosperity, and we find that disparities are experienced most strongly by children.

We look at children's experiences in the neighborhoods where they live (how separate? how unequal?) and the schools that they attend. These are both important to child development, but we believe schools have a particular importance because of how they affect children's chances for achievement in their adult lives. We also look very closely at differences within the metropolis between the City of Boston, other smaller cities, and suburbs. It turns out that the exclusion of minority children from suburban neighborhoods and schools is the most significant key to racial inequality in the Boston region.

Nearly 30 years after a court ordered Boston's city schools to desegregate (1974), school segregation continues to be a major obstacle to equal opportunity for minority children in the Boston metropolis. The issues are national in scope, but in Boston we see especially clearly how limited are the impacts of policies that are only implemented within city boundaries. Blacks and Hispanics are unusually concentrated in the City of Boston and a handful of older outlying towns and cities, while residential suburbs where most whites live hardly share in the growing ethnic and racial diversity of the region.

This study shows:

- Black and Hispanic children are highly segregated in the neighborhoods where they live. They also live in unequal neighborhoods, as measured by neighborhoods' income levels, poverty rate, unemployment, homeownership, and other indicators.

- Neighborhood segregation is especially high in the City of Boston. But seen from a regional perspective, the main source of segregation is minorities' exclusion from most residential suburbs. Less than 10% of children under 18 in the Boston region lived in the City of Boston in 2000. But nearly half of black children lived in the City. A small set of older, denser suburbs (including such places as Lynn, Lowell, Chelsea, Lawrence, and Worcester) house a majority of Hispanic children.

- School segregation is lower in Boston than in other portions of the region. This reflects the history of desegregation efforts in the City, despite erosion of these gains in the last decade. But again, the main source of segregation in the region is the exclusion of minority children from schools in the residential suburbs. Only 25-30% of black and Hispanic children in public elementary grades attend schools in these districts, compared to 85% of white children and more than half of Asian children.

- As a result, black and Hispanic students also attend unequal schools, compared to white and Asian students, as measured by the concentration of poor children in their elementary schools.

Data Sources

This study uses data about neighborhoods from the 1990 and 2000 census and corresponding data on public elementary schools gathered by the National Center for Education Statistics. In the school data students are classified as non-Hispanic white, non-Hispanic black, Hispanic, Asian, and other races. We have organized census data into these same categories, although shifts in census reporting between 1990 and 2000 complicate matters. In 2000 for the first time the census tabulated multiple races for individuals. In this study we treat as "Hispanic" all persons who identified themselves as Hispanic or Latino origin, regardless of their reported race. "Non-Hispanic blacks" are those who identified as black, alone or in combination with any other race. "Non-Hispanic whites" are those who identified as white alone. "Asians" include Asians and Pacific Islanders, alone or in combination with another race; these also include a small number of Hispanic Asians, who are therefore double-counted in this study. "Other race" is calculated as the difference between the sum of these four groups and the total population. This coding creates as much consistency as possible between 1990 and 2000 population counts, and between the census and school data sources.

The region studied includes a seven-county area around Boston (formally, the Boston NECMA), with a total population of over 5 million. The City of Boston is by far the single largest community in this area, but with a population under 600,000 it accounts for only about a tenth of the region's residents. The region also includes a number of densely settled cities and towns, many with roots in the 19th Century and some that are officially designated as "central cities" by the federal government. Closest to Boston itself are Cambridge, Chelsea, Everett, Lynn, Malden, Somerville, and Waltham. Further west are Worcester, Leominster, and Fitchburg. Gloucester, Lawrence and Lowell are to the north, and Attleboro, Brockton, Fall River, and New Bedford to the south. Altogether these 17 "other cities" have well over a million residents, considerably outnumbering the City of Boston. The rest of the region, with over 3 million people, is treated here collectively as residential suburbs, or more simply, the suburbs. As we will see, distinguishing between the City of Boston, other cities, and suburbs is central to understanding how segregation and place inequality are organized in this metropolis.

Diversity and segregation of the child population

The Boston region has historically had only modest minority populations. Table 1 shows that as recently as 1990 nearly 90% of the population was non-Hispanic white. Blacks and Hispanics each accounted for close to 5% of the total, and Asians were 2.7%. During the 1990s, as the region grew slowly, the white population actually declined by about 60,000, while minorities grew at a rapid rate. Hence whites now are only 81.2% of the total. Hispanics are the largest minority with 6.6%, followed by blacks (5.9%) and Asians (4.7%).

Table 1. Racial and ethnic composition of the Boston region

	Population all ages				Population under 18			
	1990		2000		1990		2000	
White	4,349,389	87.4%	4,272,023	81.2%	910,024	82.0%	934,676	75.0%
Black	233,732	4.7%	311,354	5.9%	70,185	6.3%	100,401	8.1%
Hispanic	232,964	4.7%	346,866	6.6%	83,418	7.5%	123,505	9.9%
Asian	132,407	2.7%	245,412	4.7%	38,284	3.4%	65,161	5.2%
Other races	26,788	0.5%	84,150	1.6%	8,412	0.8%	22,491	1.8%
Total	4,975,280	100%	5,259,805	100%	1,110,323	100%	1,246,234	100%

The decline in the white population stems partly from the fact that this is an older group, and Table 1 shows that the under-18 population is substantially less white than the total. By 2000 whites were only 75% of the children in the region, while Hispanics were almost 10%, blacks 8.1% and Asians 5.2%. So there is now considerable racial and ethnic diversity among children in the region.

This diversity in the region as a whole is not very well reflected at the level of neighborhoods. Instead, there is a strong tendency for children to live separately from those of other backgrounds. We measure this tendency in Table 2 in two ways, based on data for census tracts (geographic areas that typically have 3000-4000 residents). Researchers often use both measures together, because they each tell us about a distinct aspect of people's neighborhoods:

- The traditional and most commonly used measure of segregation is the Index of Dissimilarity (D), which measures the "unevenness of the distribution" of children of different races across neighborhoods. If all neighborhoods had the same racial composition, D would have a value of 0. In a situation of complete apartheid (for example, where neighborhoods were either all white or all black) D would have a value of 100. Based on many studies of different racial and ethnic groups, researchers generally consider values below 30 to represent a low level of segregation (typical, for example, of separation between different white ethnic groups in most cities). Values between 30 and 50 or 55 are interpreted as moderate segregation. Higher values are considered extreme levels of segregation. This index isn't affected by the relative size of the white or black or other populations.

Whatever the diversity of the population, it measures whether they are similarly distributed across neighborhoods.

- The second approach is to determine the racial composition of the neighborhood where the average person lives. Table 2 presents one aspect of neighborhood composition, the percentage of residents who are of the same race or ethnicity for the average white, black, Hispanic, or Asian child. This is called the Index of Isolation, because at the extreme value (100) it means all children in the neighborhood have the same race. This measure depends in part on how diverse is the population in the region as a whole – for example, if the percentage of black residents is very low, it would be unlikely for blacks to live in majority-black neighborhoods, even if segregation (thinking now of segregation as unevenness of distribution) were quite high.

The upper panel of Table 2 lists the Index of Segregation for the Boston region. Nationally black-white segregation averages around 65; Hispanic-white segregation averages just over 50; and Asian-white segregation averages about 40, which is considered moderate. In Boston, although black-white segregation is falling slowly, it remains very close to the national average. Segregation of Hispanics and Asians is above the average and rising. Most important for our purpose, levels of segregation are higher than this for minority children – values of dissimilarity *vis a vis* white children are between 65 and 70 for both black and Hispanic children. This means that the experience of separated neighborhoods is felt most keenly by children.

Table 2. Residential patterns of groups in the Boston region

	All Ages		Under 18	
	1990	**2000**	**1990**	**2000**
Segregation from whites				
Index of Dissimilarity				
Black	66.5	62.9	70.9	67.9
Hispanic	57.6	60.3	64.8	66.8
Asian	45.6	46.0	48.3	48.1
Isolation: The average group member lives in a neighborhood with this percentage of the same group:				
Whites	91.4	86.9	89.4	85.0
Blacks	39.5	33.1	43.4	36.7
Hispanics	20.4	25.8	30.5	34.4
Asians	9.7	12.2	12.8	14.5

The lower panels of Table 2 list values of the Isolation Index, showing that Boston's average white child lives in a neighborhood where 85% of children are white (though in the region only 75% of children are white). The average black and Hispanic children are in neighborhoods where more than a third of other children are black or Hispanic, respectively – three or four times their representation in the region. And Asian

children, while only 5.2% of the region's total, live in neighborhoods where 14.5% of children are Asian. Again, minority children are somewhat more isolated than the minority population of all ages. However, reflecting changes in overall population composition, isolation is declining slowly over time for whites and blacks.

Fragmentation of the Boston metropolis

A major reason why children of different races live so separately is the extreme concentration of white children in the region's suburbs, while minority children are very much under-represented in the suburbs. Boston is not the only case like this in the country; other areas where minorities still have not gained much access to suburban communities include Detroit, Milwaukee, and several upstate New York cities. But 40% or more of minorities nationally now live in the suburbs, and Boston is clearly out of step with the nation in this respect.

The Boston pattern is depicted visually in the map showing where black and Hispanic children lived in 2000. There is a large area including Boston and the cities and towns immediately adjacent to Boston where these groups account for a majority of the child population. In addition the "satellite" minority communities to the north, west, and south are shown very distinctly. Generally these are 19th Century suburbs or mill towns that now have an older, denser, and less desirable housing stock than the suburban towns around them.

Figure 1. Neighborhood Segregation of Children.

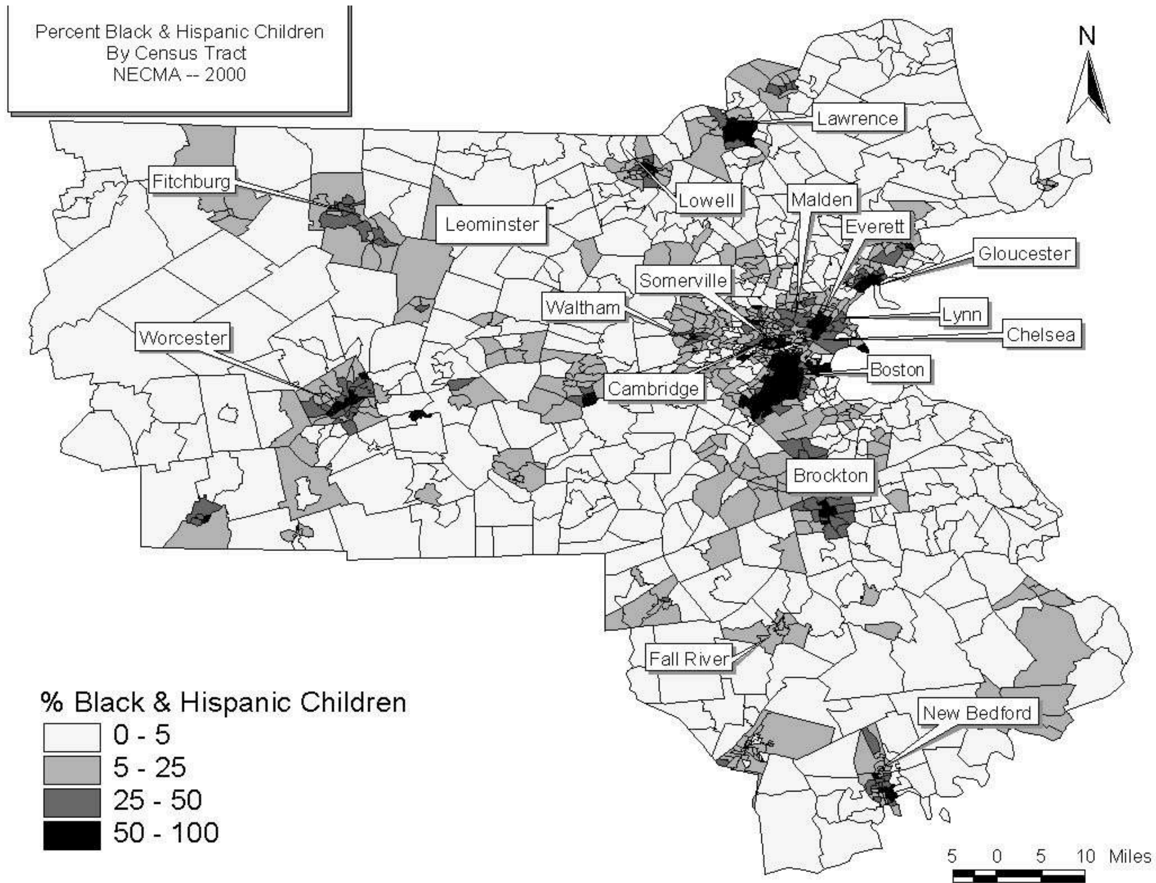


Table 3 tracks the location of the under-18 population across the different sectors of the Boston metropolis in 1990 and 2000. Already in 1990 about three times as many white children lived in the suburbs than in the City of Boston and other cities combined. In the 1990-2000 decade, their number in cities dropped by about a third, while continuing to grow in suburbs. Indeed, very few white children remained in Boston itself by 2000, under 30,000 and about a quarter of the Boston population. Though we think of Boston as the major population center in the region, it is not so significant for white children – only about 3% of white children in the region live in the city.

Table 3. Racial and ethnic composition of the under-18 population in the Boston region, by geographic sector

		White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Other	Total
City of Boston	**1990**	40,271	40,957	19,836	6,595	2,174	109,833
		36.7%	37.3%	18.1%	6.0%	2.0%	100.0%
	2000	29,644	46,961	27,831	8,354	3,769	116,559
		25.4%	40.3%	23.9%	7.2%	3.2%	100.0%
Other Cities	**1990**	193,025	17,919	44,503	14,132	3,520	273,099
		70.7%	6.6%	16.3%	5.2%	1.3%	100.0%
	2000	158,025	31,962	65,891	23,285	9,865	289,028
		54.7%	11.1%	22.8%	8.1%	3.4%	100.0%
Suburbs	**1990**	678,122	11,315	19,095	17,560	2,729	728,821
		93.0%	1.6%	2.6%	2.4%	0.4%	100.0%
	2000	747,007	21,478	29,783	33,522	8,857	840,647
		88.9%	2.6%	3.5%	4.0%	1.1%	100.0%

In the other cities, which have retained more of their traditional white working class residents, white children were more than half the total in 2000. But in the suburbs they were nearly 90% of the under-18 residents.

A majority of Asian children, too, live in suburbs. But they are only 4% of the suburban child population, compared to 7-8% in Boston and other cities. Black children are most likely found in Boston proper, where they are fully 40.3% of the total, vs. the suburbs where they are only 2.6% of the child population. A majority of Hispanic children live in the smaller cities, places like Lynn, continuing a pattern already found in 1990. Hispanics are just under a quarter of the child population in the City of Boston and other cities, compared to 3.5% in the suburbs.

In addition to these broad differences across geographic sectors, Table 4 shows that there is considerable segregation within them – especially in Boston, where black-white segregation of the under-18 population was at the extreme of 79.1 in 1990, and remains above 70 in 2000.

Table 4. Segregation of children by sector in the Boston region

Segregation from whites
Index of Dissimilarity

		Blacks	Hispanics	Asians
City of Boston	**1990**	79.1	63.1	53.6
	2000	72.7	56.4	50.8
Other Cities	**1990**	47.5	54.2	48.1
	2000	42.4	52.1	43.8
Suburbs	**1990**	42.8	42.1	39.8
	2000	43.1	45.2	41.3

Isolation: The average child lives in a neighborhood with this percentage of the same group:

		Whites	Blacks	Hispanics	Asians
City of Boston	**1990**	70.2	65.8	30.7	26.0
	2000	55.9	60.7	34.3	22.2
Other Cities	**1990**	78.4	16.1	38.6	14.7
	2000	65.7	19.8	43.1	18.4
Suburbs	**1990**	93.6	5.5	11.4	6.3
	2000	90.2	9.5	15.2	9.8

For all minority groups, segregation is lower in the other cities and in the suburbs, generally in the 40-50 range. This reflects the national phenomenon that minorities tend to be less segregated in areas where they are fewer in number. Nevertheless, despite lower segregation as measured by the Index of Dissimilarity, white children are much more isolated in the suburbs than in Boston. Because there are so few suburban minority children, even if they were thoroughly dispersed among suburbs (that is, if segregation within suburbia were very low), there would hardly be a minority presence anywhere in the suburban zone. In the cities, despite higher segregation, neighborhoods still turn out to be more diverse.

Separate and unequal

One of the costs of segregation, paid by children of all races, is that young people are insulated from inter-racial contact. Neither whites, nor blacks, nor Hispanics, nor Asians come into daily contact with a mix of people that fully reflects the growing diversity of the region. But white children reap advantages from segregation because they live in the most privileged areas, while black and Hispanic children live in worse neighborhoods. The situation of Asian children, as we will see, depends on whether their families live in the central city or in the suburbs.

Neighborhood inequality is demonstrated in Table 5 for selected indicators of neighborhood character: median income (using constant 2000 dollars), poverty, education level, and incidence of speaking a language other than English at home. The first three of these certainly reflect the conventional measures of neighborhood quality; language use has some links to socioeconomic success, but it is used here mainly to indicate the degree of formation of immigrant residential enclaves that may offer both advantages and disadvantages to residents.

Table 5. Neighborhood characteristics for children in the Boston region

		City of Boston		Other Cities		Suburbs		Region total	
		1990	**2000**	**1990**	**2000**	**1990**	**2000**	**1990**	**2000**
The average child lives in a neighborhood with these characteristics:									
Median income	**White**	$42,014	$46,969	$40,124	$41,789	$61,560	$68,205	$56,162	$63,065
	Black	$33,894	$33,665	$35,026	$36,765	$56,338	$58,943	$37,800	$40,060
	Hispanic	$33,219	$33,411	$29,277	$31,225	$50,816	$52,964	$35,140	$36,960
	Asian	$33,515	$36,240	$34,423	$38,499	$64,760	$71,109	$48,180	$54,985
% Poor	**White**	13.6	13.8	12.8	13.3	4.5	4.5	6.6	6.3
	Black	24.4	22.6	18.1	17.8	6.2	6.7	19.9	17.6
	Hispanic	24.6	24.0	26.3	23.3	9.2	10.2	22.0	20.3
	Asian	21.6	22.6	20.7	17.2	5.3	5.3	13.8	11.8
% College educated	**White**	26.7	35.3	17.2	21.3	30.4	38.5	27.4	35.5
	Black	15.7	18.4	18.3	19.9	29.4	34.1	18.6	22.2
	Hispanic	19.7	21.7	11.7	13.6	25.4	29.6	16.7	19.3
	Asian	27.6	29.7	16.2	19.9	36.9	46.1	27.7	34.6
% Other language	**White**	21.2	29.2	25.0	29.1	9.3	10.9	13.2	14.6
	Black	27.0	35.4	28.6	36.4	12.5	17.7	25.1	31.9
	Hispanic	36.9	42.5	42.6	49.4	17.1	22.2	35.4	41.3
	Asian	38.1	41.6	33.8	40.1	12.6	17.2	24.8	28.5

One way to interpret this table is to ask how different sectors of the metropolis compare to each other. Let us begin by focusing on the characteristics of neighborhoods where white children lived in 2000. The suburbs, which are where most lived, stand out from Boston and other cities. Compared to white children in Boston and other cities, those in the suburbs lived by far in the most affluent neighborhoods (median income of $68,205), with the lowest poverty rate (4.5%), highest share of college-educated residents (38.5%), and with the least exposure to non-English speaking people (10.9%). White children's neighborhoods in Boston and other cities were rather alike in terms of poverty and language use. But children in the City of Boston lived in neighborhoods with higher average incomes and a much higher share of college educated residents. Because in both of these respects the values for Boston in 2000 represent considerable gains from just ten years before, we interpret the pattern as evidence of a degree of gentrification of whites' neighborhoods. Perhaps as some of the older white working class zones of the city have

lost many white residents, other newly popular neighborhoods have attracted more affluent white families back into the city. For white children in such families, living in Boston may offer some real advantages over living in the smaller cities of the region, though not nearly equal to suburban contexts.

The suburban advantage is also very clear for minorities. For black children, for example, living in the suburbs compared to the City of Boston provides a $25,000 improvement in the average income of their neighborhood, a 16-point reduction in poverty rate and a 16-point improvement in percent with a college education. The relative status of neighborhoods in Boston and other cities varies across groups and indicators. But black children in Boston live in lower income neighborhoods with higher poverty and less college educated neighbors than do the smaller number of black children in the other cities. Hispanic children in the other cities live in neighborhoods with higher concentrations on non-English speakers, lower college rates, and lower incomes than do the smaller number of Hispanic children in Boston. So the variations seem to place black and Hispanic children in precisely the setting where they are most disadvantaged.

The very high degree of suburbanization of white children, in contrast to minority children, puts them in more desirable residential settings. At the same time, regardless of which sector of the metropolis they live in, white children's neighborhoods are very different from those of blacks and Hispanics. Suburban Asian children actually live in better neighborhoods than suburban white children, but the situation is reversed elsewhere.

The contrasts are generally most severe for white vs. Hispanic children's neighborhoods. In terms of median income, Hispanic children's neighborhoods are about $15,000 below whites' neighborhoods in the suburbs, $10,000 below in smaller cities, and $13,000 below in Boston. Their poverty rates are 6 points higher in the suburbs, 10 points higher in smaller cities, and 8 points higher in Boston. They average 9% less college educated neighbors in the suburbs, 10% less in smaller cities, and 14% less in Boston. All of these contrasts are probably associated with the presence of Hispanic enclaves in each of these segments, since Hispanic children's neighborhoods also have 12% more residents speaking another language in the suburbs, 20% more in smaller cities, and 13% more in Boston.

The result is that residential segregation within each portion of the metropolis also contributes to place advantages for white children and disadvantages especially for black and Hispanic children. These disparities have in some respects deepened in the last decade, especially in Boston and in the suburbs. For example, white children's neighborhood median income increased by about $5000 in Boston and $7000 in the suburbs; the figures for black and Hispanic children did not change appreciably in Boston, and increased by only about $2000 in the suburbs. Rather than catching up, we see signs that these children fell further behind in the 1990s.

Segregation in public elementary schools

School segregation often replicates neighborhood patterns. However the assignment of children to schools within school districts varies according to administrative policies, and in a region like Boston with a heritage of court-ordered school desegregation we might expect to see some continuing impacts of efforts to equalize educational opportunities.

This analysis is complicated by white students' continuing avoidance of public schools in the City of Boston. Aside from white flight out of the city, we see in Table 6 that white students are only 13.6% of total public elementary enrollment in Boston, whereas white

children are 25.4% of the under-18 population. In 1990 whites were 36.7% of under-18 children, but only 23.5% of elementary enrollment. Presumably these differences reflect disproportionate private school attendance by a substantial share of white children whose families have remained in the city. About half of Boston's white children attend private schools rather than public schools.

Table 6. Composition of public elementary schools in the Boston region

		White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Other	Total
City of Boston	**1989-90**	8,212	16,514	7,311	2,753	129	34,919
		23.5%	47.3%	20.9%	7.9%	0.4%	100%
	1999-00	5,041	18,335	10,677	2,924	169	37,146
		13.6%	49.4%	28.7%	7.9%	0.5%	100%
Other Cities	**1989-90**	60,099	7,574	15,132	5,712	104	88,621
		67.8%	8.5%	17.1%	6.4%	0.1%	100%
	1999-00	54,754	13,715	27,021	8,806	385	104,682
		52.3%	13.1%	25.8%	8.4%	0.4%	100%
Suburbs	**1989-90**	197,121	5,395	5,021	5,531	86	213,154
		92.5%	2.5%	2.4%	2.6%	0.0%	100%
	1999-00	273,143	10,250	13,519	11,057	453	308,423
		88.6%	3.3%	4.4%	3.6%	0.1%	100%
Region total	**1989-90**	303,221	30,065	27,755	14,410	337	375,788
		80.7%	8.0%	7.4%	3.8%	0.1%	100.0%
	1999-00	325,578	40,654	47,182	21,532	977	435,923
		74.7%	9.3%	10.8%	4.9%	0.2%	100.0%

Table 7 displays levels of school segregation and isolation indices that can be compared to the neighborhood indices discussed above in Tables 2-3. There are some similarities as well as startling contrasts.

Table 7. Segregation in public elementary schools in the Boston region

Segregation from whites
Index of Dissimilarity

		Blacks	Hispanics	Asians
Region total	**1989-90**	67.5	70.3	55.0
	1999-00	67.5	69.6	54.9
City of Boston	**1989-90**	32.8	48.8	55.6
	1999-00	45.1	46.4	46.8
Other Cities	**1989-90**	44.7	51.9	53.0
	1999-00	42.4	47.8	44.9
Suburbs	**1989-90**	46.0	56.5	44.8
	1999-00	48.3	60.6	48.0

Isolation: The average child attends a school with this percentage of the same group:

		Whites	Blacks	Hispanics	Asians
Region total	**1989-90**	88.4	35.8	33.2	17.4
	1999-00	85.5	38.0	39.2	16.8
City of Boston	**1989-90**	33.8	54.5	33.9	28.5
	1999-00	23.6	60.1	44.3	27.5
Other Cities	**1989-90**	74.8	18.2	39.7	20.9
	1999-00	62.1	25.7	46.3	20.5
Suburbs	**1989-90**	93.2	6.5	13.5	9.5
	1999-00	90.7	11.2	25.2	10.8

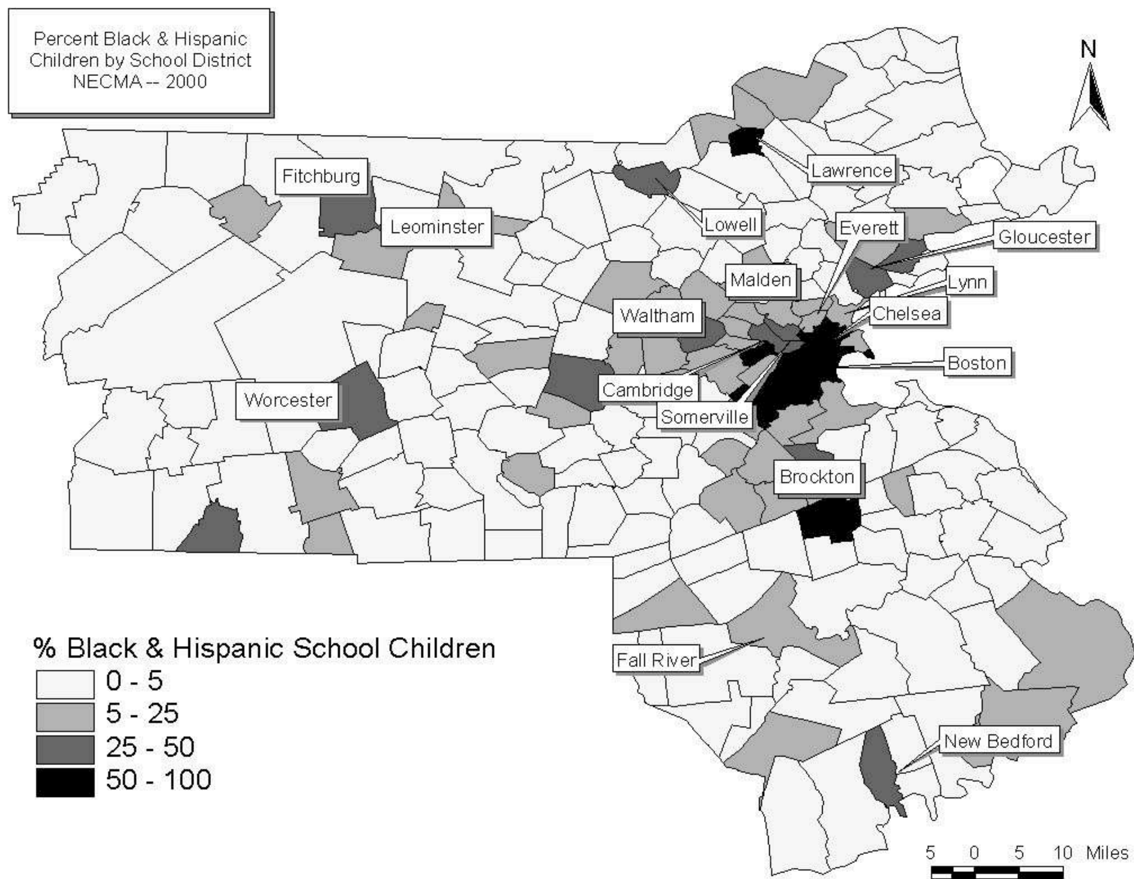
For the region as a whole, segregation of black and Hispanic schoolchildren is similar to the segregation of children across neighborhoods. Asian school segregation (54.9) is somewhat higher than Asian children's residential segregation (48.1). All of these segregation scores for the Boston region are higher than the national metropolitan averages: about 3 points higher for blacks, 7 points higher for Asians, and 12 points higher for Hispanics (national figures can be found in a report on this website: http://mumford1.dyndns.org/cen2000/SchoolPop/SPReport/page1.html). Hence Hispanic school segregation is the dimension on which the Boston region most stands out.

School segregation within the City of Boston is much lower than this. Especially for black children, the value in 1989-90 was remarkably low, clearly reflecting the desegregation

policies that were in effect at that time. In the last decade, typical of many big-city school systems in the 1990's, segregation in Boston schools jumped noticeably (the Index of Dissimilarity increased from 32.8 to 45.1). But it is still low in comparison to most comparable cities. Black-white segregation among schools in the smaller cities and in the suburbs is also in the moderate range (though in these cases it is somewhat higher than residential segregation). Lynn, MA is one of the smaller city school districts (with 23 elementary schools) with the most racially diverse student populations – about 15% black and 14% Asian, 27% Hispanic, and 44% white. Segregation scores are all below 40 in Lynn. Worcester, MA schools, which are 53% white and 10% black, have a black-white segregation score of only 15.5. In Cambridge, MA black-white segregation is only 14.6.

Clearly, then, a major component of school segregation in this region is across school districts rather than within them, and a very important contributor to this is the low representation of whites in the City of Boston public schools and of minorities in the suburban schools. This pattern is depicted in Figure 2, which maps school districts in the Boston region in the 1999-2000 academic year. School districts are typically much larger than census tracts, with the result that this map smoothes over the variations within districts that appeared in the residential map in Figure 1. But the same overall pattern is apparent – strong concentrations of black and Hispanic children in the Boston School District, in some districts adjacent to Boston, and in the region's outlying cities, juxtaposed to very low representation in suburban districts.

Figure 2. Segregation of Elementary School Children across School Districts



The observation that school segregation is derived in large part from inter-district differences also applies very clearly to school inequality. We do not currently have direct measures of educational outcomes in these schools, but a strong indicator of the educational challenges in them is the concentration of poverty among students. Table 8 reports the percent of students eligible for free or reduced price lunches in the schools where students of different racial/ethnic groups attend. Within Boston schools, these figures are almost uniform across groups, around 80%. In the smaller cities' schools, there is more variation – below 50% for white students' schools, somewhat higher than that for black and Asian students' schools, and above two-thirds for Hispanic children. There are also some variations across suburban schools. But the biggest gaps are across segments of the metropolis: 78.3% in Boston, 52.7% in other cities, and only 13.9% in suburbs. This is the principal reason why in the region overall less than 20% of the average white child's classmates are poor, while around 60% of the average black or Hispanics' classmates are poor.

Table 8. Percent eligible for free/reduced price lunches in the elementary school of the average child, 1999-2000

	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Total
Region total	18.5	58.9	62.5	40.5	26.8
City of Boston	78.7	80.5	82.7	81.0	78.3
Other Cities	49.3	55.2	67.4	55.7	52.7
Suburbs	12.1	24.8	41.1	19.1	13.9

Conclusion and policy implications

Minority children in the Boston region, especially black and Hispanic children, are highly segregated from other children, excluded from the more advantaged suburban portion of the metropolis, and concentrated in schools where poverty is the norm.

Asian children suffer the same disadvantages, although to a much lesser extent. About half of them live in the suburbs, and this segment of the Asian population lives in neighborhoods and attends schools that compare favorably with those of white children.

White children have almost entirely escaped the City of Boston, and those who remain in the city live in increasingly advantaged city neighborhoods; half of them attend private schools. The vast majority of them live in the suburbs, and in the suburbs they grow up in neighborhoods and attend schools that are typically 90% white and remarkably affluent.

Certainly this pattern of spatial segregation and inequality reduces the life chances for minority children, even for those whose families have found homes in suburban areas. What are its causes and how can public policy equalize opportunities for all children?

Most Americans presume that we have entered an era when the civil rights struggles of the mid-20th Century protect minorities from unequal treatment in jobs, housing, and schools. Differences in where people live and in the neighborhood and school resources available to them are widely thought to stem from simple economic forces – especially the fact that black and Hispanic families have lower incomes than whites and Asians, which inevitably puts them at a disadvantage in the housing market.

In other research we have demonstrated that this "class interpretation" does not explain much of the locational inequality shown here. Nationally, the average black family earning over $60,000 lives in a neighborhood with a higher poverty rate than the average white family earning under $30,000. In the greater Boston metropolis, there certainly are income differences across racial groups – blacks and Hispanics on average have household incomes only 55% to 60% as high as do whites. But even if we restrict our attention to the most successful households, we find huge differences in the character of neighborhoods. The average white household with an income over $60,000 lives in a neighborhood where the average household income is over $67,000 and 45% of residents have a college degree. With the same income, the average black household lives in a neighborhood with an average income of only $45,000 and only 29% have a college education. The average Hispanic household in this income bracket lives in a neighborhood with an average income of $49,000 and 33% have a college degree.

Even having a good job and a high income does not bring these minority households into equivalent neighborhoods. There are two main reasons. One is typical of American metropolitan areas, the racial segregation experienced by black and Hispanic residents regardless of which part of the metropolis they live in. The other is unique to Boston and a few other spots in the country, like Detroit, Milwaukee, and much of upstate New York: in these places minorities have not yet gained significant access to suburbs, where the great majority of whites in the region now live.

This means that the one arena in which tremendous efforts have been made over the past several decades – the desegregation of public school systems within school districts – has scarcely affected racial inequality. Simply put, the achievements of Boston, or Lynn, or Cambridge, or any community that has managed to limit inequalities within its boundaries are countermanded when the most affluent school systems where most white children go to school are largely off-limits to minority children. The only way that desegregation plans could substantially reduce the separate and unequal character of public education is if they were applied region-wide.

It also means that the longer-term solution of equalizing educational opportunity by integrating neighborhoods has made little headway, and it cannot progress more substantially until the barriers to minority suburbanization are discovered and attacked. We stress that it is not so much a question of affordability as it is race and ethnicity, based on mechanisms ranging from outright discrimination to historic color lines that people hesitate to cross. Until this does change, it is minority children who pay the highest price of the status quo.