

The Civil Rights Project



Proyecto Derechos Civiles

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 18, 2011

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Report Finds Separate and Unequal Schools Pervasive in Southern California

Deep Gaps in Opportunities for the Region's Students are Linked to Separation by Race, Poverty and Language

LOS ANGELES – California has become a national leader in school segregation for Latino students who are now a clear majority of all students in Southern California, the center of the nation's largest Latino community. The Southern California region is also home to the West's largest black community and African American students are also intensely segregated. This segregation is not only by race and poverty, but frequently by language as well, and it is related to fundamentally different patterns of educational opportunity and achievement. These are the basic findings of a new report from The Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles at UCLA, a leading center for research on issues of civil rights in education, which has been tracking desegregation and resegregation across the country since it was founded fifteen years ago at Harvard.

Remarkable diversity defines the Southern California region, where over 66% of the state's residents of color make their home. The report, *Divided We Fail: Segregation and Inequality in the Southland's Schools*, provides the first comprehensive, region-wide study of school enrollment and segregation patterns, achievement and college matriculation outcomes, and educational opportunity disparities in the six-counties of Southern California, including Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, and Ventura. Beginning with a detailed history of the curtailment of desegregation efforts in the state's courts and via amendments to its constitution, the report traces how California went from being a leading state system of well-supported public schools to one that has deteriorated markedly. The report shows how California led the national turn against desegregation and other civil rights policies in the 1980's and 1990's and essentially abandoned any effort to deal with the issues. Unfortunately, after several decades of state and federal policies emphasizing standards and accountability as a solution to inequality, the racial differences in educational opportunity remain very dramatically linked to segregation.

Co-authored by CRP Researchers Gary Orfield, Genevieve Siegel-Hawley and John Kucsera, the two-part report asserts serious inequities have developed and deepened without being confronted in a significant way and that they exclude the growing majority of students from opportunity.

“There is almost no public discussion of segregation in Southern California though the differences in schools and neighborhoods one or two freeway exits apart are often shocking,” says CRP Co-director Gary Orfield. “Though we must try to make progress on all fronts, it's reckless to assume that we really know how to create and operate ‘separate but equal’ schools on a large scale, since that has never been done and decades of promises to do it have turned out to be largely empty.”

Based on 2008-09 data from the U.S. Department of Education and the California Department of Education, the report shows just how segregated by race, poverty, and language Southern California schools currently are. The report notes that, for example, in a middle or high school more than 80% black, Latino, or Native American virtually all of the students live in poverty. Moreover, the great majority of students of color are isolated from white and Asian youth in their schools and neighborhoods, the report states, and this isolation by race, poverty and language are inextricably linked to disparities in educational opportunity and learning outcomes in the region. White and Asian students, on average attend very different schools.

The report uses state statistics to show that the patterns of isolation experienced by groups of students are linked to a host of educational disparities and a subsequent decline in average educational levels, which is virtually certain to produce a decline in economic success across the region.

“This research shows that throughout Southern California, the opportunity gaps between schools with varying racial concentrations are staggering,” Co-author Kucsera states, “and we are moving towards a devastating situation that excludes most of the next generation from the chance to securely advance in economic mobility.”

The report goes on to say that such issues are not addressed in the political debate going on today in the region. In fact, educational inequality has often been exacerbated through policies that only further diminish opportunity.

“It is time to revive the policy discussion on the issue of school segregation; not as a magic bullet, not as something that is feasible everywhere,” says Co-author Siegel-Hawley, “but as a fundamentally critical element in developing the region's human capital and improving the chances of success for the next generation.”

-Key findings-

As the white population has declined since 1970, patterns of isolation for Latino students deepened. In 1970, the average Latino student attended a metro area school in Los Angeles that was roughly 45% white and substantially integrated. By 1980, the proportion of white students had decreased by more than half, to 21%. By 2008, the typical Latino student in Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) went to a school where 6% of the students were white.

- From 1995 to 2009, each of the four coastal counties in the region - Ventura, Los Angeles, Orange, and San Diego – reported sharp increases in shares of Latino students; while the inland counties of San Bernardino and Riverside saw the same shares climb even more steeply. For example, roughly 39% of San Bernardino’s student population was Latino in 1995, compared to 56% in 2009.
- In 1970s-era Los Angeles, the average black student went to a school that was roughly 14% white, a figure that increased to 16% by 1980. Black students in the San Diego Unified School District went to a school that was, on average, 36% white in 1970 and 42.5% white ten years later. By the beginning of the 21st century, however, the typical black student attended a school in LAUSD that was only 6% white, compared to roughly 20% white in SDUSD.
- Today, more than two out of five Latino students and nearly one-third of all black students in the region enroll in intensely segregated learning environments--schools where 90-100% of students are from underrepresented minority backgrounds. Just 5% of Southern California’s Asian students attend intensely segregated schools, and 2% of the region’s white students do the same.

- White students make up 25% of the region's population. Yet the average White student in Southern California attends a school that is near 50% white, a figure that highlights persistent patterns of white isolation across the region.
- Together, white and Asian students make up 36% of the region-wide population. On average, however, black and Latino students in Southern California attend a school where less than a quarter of students are white and Asian.
- Across the six Southern California counties, less than 50% of Grade 9 students in intensely segregated schools failed to graduate on time in comparison to ninth graders from majority white/Asian schools (those enrolling 0-49% minority underrepresented students), where 81% of these students graduated.
- In terms of college matriculation, 22% of students from intensely segregated and 31% from segregated (those enrolling 50-89% of minority underrepresented students) schools enrolled in some form of California postsecondary institution the immediate fall after graduation, in comparison to 43% of students from majority white/Asian schools.
- Across Southern California counties, intensely segregated and segregated schools of color experienced a greater shortage of fully credentialed teachers, A-G courses, and college preparatory teachers than majority white and Asian schools in the 2008-2009 school year.

This report is the first in a series of reports produced by the CRP's LASANTI Project, which will explore many dimensions of social and economic change and inequality across the huge bi-national urbanized complex, stretching from the northern Los Angeles suburbs down through San Diego to the Tijuana metropolitan area.

For a detailed explanation of that project and the full text of this report, go to:

www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu

About the Civil Rights Project at UCLA

Founded in 1996 by former Harvard professors Gary Orfield and Christopher Edley Jr., the Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles is since 2007 co-directed by Orfield and Patricia Gándara, professors at UCLA. Its mission is to create a new generation of research in social science and law on the critical issues of civil rights and equal opportunity for racial and ethnic groups in the United States. It has commissioned more than 400 studies, published 14 books and issued numerous reports from authors at universities and research centers across the country. The Supreme Court, in its 2003 *Grutter v. Bollinger* decision, cited the Civil Rights Project's research. Its current work includes many studies of opportunity in California.

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