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Contact: John McDonald - [jmcdonald@gseis.ucla.edu](mailto:jmcdonald@gseis.ucla.edu)

Laurie Russman – [Russman@gseis.ucla.edu](mailto:Russman@gseis.ucla.edu)

**New UCLA Civil Rights Project report details extensive segregation in suburban schools of largest U.S. metros amid policy vacuum**

*Report underscores the need for a renewed civil rights agenda to combat the spread of suburban school segregation*

Almost one-third (30%) of students in public schools in the United States are enrolled in suburban schools in the nation’s largest 25 metro areas, where two-thirds of children in metropolitan areas are educated. According to a [new study](#) published by the Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles at UCLA, these suburban schools are experiencing a substantial proliferation of school segregation, underscoring an urgent need for a civil rights agenda that addresses the challenges to educational opportunity and lasting integration.

“We are a long way from the mythology of the all-white suburban school or district of previous generations,” says report co-author Erica Frankenberg, professor of education and demography in the College of Education, and director of the Center for Education and Civil Rights at the Pennsylvania State University. “As the families of Black and Latinx students have moved into the suburbs, ongoing housing and school policy fails to create stable, diverse communities, which means these students are increasingly enrolling in suburban school communities that resemble patterns of racially and economically isolated urban cores. We need an ambitious policy agenda to combat suburban school segregation.”

The new report, “[Understanding Suburban School Segregation: Toward a Renewed Civil Rights Agenda](#),” finds evidence of continued racial transition in America’s suburban school districts. While still high, the report details declining white enrollment and segregation, and significant increases in enrollment of Latino students. Segregation for suburban Black and Latinx students also rose sharply. Black and Latino students are also significantly more likely to be concentrated in schools with low-income students than white or Asian students. A proliferation of segregated suburban charter schools as well as school closures and openings also disproportionately impacted Black and Latinx students. The findings underscore the increasingly suburban and stratified nature of our society’s schools.

“There are clear signs that rather than learn from the destructive spread of segregation across our central cities and their schools in the twentieth century, we may be repeating the failure in large swaths of suburbia,” says Gary Orfield, co-director of Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles at UCLA. “This paper provides needed information for a critical analysis of these trends and is a wake-up call for

suburban communities and educational leaders. Segregation destroys possibilities. Working for lasting integration is the way toward a more viable future.”

\*Among the key findings:

- 30% of the entire public school enrollment in the US is in the largest 25 **suburban** areas. This percentage also includes a loss of 850,000 white students, which is more than offset by an increase of nearly 1 million new Latinx suburban students.
- Substantial racial transition continues in the suburban public schools of major U.S. metros. White students remain the largest group of suburban students but have declined considerably, from 48% to 40% of enrollment. On average, suburban schools saw a decline in White enrollment of 7.5 percentage points. Latinx students are the next largest suburban group, making up about a third of the enrollment, while the Black enrollment share declined to about 15%. Asian students are approximately 8% and multiracial students represent 4.5%.
- The suburban enrollment of Latinx students rose considerably over the last decade. Latinx enrollment in the suburbs is the largest in the West (45%). Five of the top 25 metros report that Latinx students make up majorities of the suburban enrollment.
- Black student suburban enrollment held relatively steady across most of the 25 largest metros and was largest in Atlanta. Regionally, the suburbs of large Border and southern metros reported an increase in Black students.
- Suburban charter segregation is intensifying. Roughly 27% of suburban charters in 2019 were 90-100% Black and Latinx; nearly two in three were newly opened in the past decade.
- Close to half (43.5%) of new schools opened in the suburbs of the top 25 metros were charter schools. These new charter schools served disproportionately high shares of students of color—reporting enrollments, on average, that were 44% Latinx and 26% white.
- Asian students, historically the most integrated with White students, experienced rising isolation with same-race peers over the past decade. Asian isolation with other Asian students increased more sharply than isolation for any other racial/ethnic group.
- Racial segregation by race overlaps with resegregation by household income in suburbia. The typical White or Asian student goes to a suburban school where just over 30% of students qualify for subsidized lunches. That figure doubles to 60% for the typical Black or Latinx student.

\*A complete list of key findings is included in the report.

The report’s authors contend that fast-paced demographic change and segregation in public schools and districts are occurring in a policy vacuum. Too little planning and leadership occur around an affirmative, regional, and cross-sector vision for more equitable metropolitan education.

“If our society is to advance equitable opportunity for all, children learning together in suburban schools must be part of the solution,” says Genevieve Siegel-Hawley, a professor of education leadership at Virginia Commonwealth University and report co-author. “We need to think clearly about what a renewed civil rights agenda entails, given our complex and multiracial geography of inequality, and we must understand the extent to which suburban school districts are segregated—and why. We also need to think deeply about policy responses to advance integration with equitable status for all children. Without that vision, and accompanying action, enormous swaths of schools in large metropolitan areas will be segregated.”

The report's authors offer a set of evidence-based policies and practices to address growing demographic diversity and segregation within and across suburban school systems. An overarching recommendation is to move beyond simplistic urban/suburban/exurban dichotomies and to instead think in highly regional ways. Looking at cross-metro comparisons, the authors also suggest policies that might further integration, as well as political efforts that have supported the adoption or sustainment of policies to combat increasing segregation. Policy recommendations are targeted at educational actors at various levels (school, district, regional, state) and non-educational policymakers.

*"[Understanding Suburban School Segregation: Toward a Renewed Civil Rights Agenda](#),"* by Erica Frankenberg and Genevieve Siegel-Hawley, is commissioned and published by The Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles, UCLA, as part of its ongoing research series, *A Civil Rights Agenda for the Next Quarter Century*, in commemoration of the Project's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

About the UCLA Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles:

The Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles is co-directed by UCLA Research Professors Gary Orfield and Patricia Gándara. Founded in 1996 at Harvard University, CRP's mission is to create a new generation of research in social science and law on the critical issues of civil rights and equal opportunity for racial and ethnic groups in the U.S. CRP is a trusted source of segregation statistics, has commissioned more than [400 studies](#), published more than 25 books and issued numerous reports monitoring the success of American schools in equalizing opportunity. The U.S. Supreme Court, in its 2003 [Grutter v. Bollinger](#) decision upholding affirmative action, and in Justice Breyer's dissent (joined by three other Justices) to its 2007 [Parents Involved](#) decision, cited the Civil Rights Project's research. In June 2023 Justice Sotomayor cited CRP's research in her dissent to the court's decision banning affirmative action in *SFFA v Harvard College*.

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