A Civil Rights Agenda for California's Next Quarter Century

Extreme Segregation and Policy Inaction in California Schools

SEPTEMBER 2025 Ryan Pfleger Gary Orfield

The Civil Rights Project
Proyecto Derechos Civiles

25 YEAR ANNIVERSARY

Suggested Citation:

Pfleger, R., Orfield, G (2025). *Extreme Segregation and Policy Inaction in California Schools*. Los Angeles, CA: The Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles, UCLA.

© 2025 Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles, UCLA

About the Series

A Civil Rights Agenda for the Next Quarter Century

The Civil Rights Project was founded in 1996 at Harvard University, during a period of increasingly conservative courts and political movements that were limiting, and sometimes reversing, major civil rights reforms. In 2007 the Project moved to UCLA. Its goal was—and still is—to bring together researchers, lawyers, civil rights advocates and governmental and educational leaders to create a new generation of civil rights research and communicate what is learned to those who could use it to address the problems of inequality and discrimination. Created a generation after the civil rights revolution of the 1960s, CRP's vision was to produce new understandings of challenges and research-based evidence on solutions. The Project has always maintained a strong, central focus on equal education and racial change.

We are celebrating our first quarter century by taking a serious look forward—not at the history of the issues, not at the debates over older policies, not at celebrating prior victories but at the needs of the next quarter century. Since the work of civil rights advocates and leaders of color in recent decades has often been about defending threatened, existing rights, we need innovative thinking to address the challenges facing our rapidly changing society. Political leaders often see policy in short two- and four-year election cycles but we decided to look at the upcoming generation. Because researchers are uniquely qualified to think systematically, this series is an attempt to harness the skills of several disciplines, to think deeply about how our society has changed since the civil rights revolution and what the implications are for the future of racial justice.

This effort includes two very large sets of newly commissioned work. This paper is the last of 13 studies on the potential for social change and equity policies in California, a vast state whose astonishing diversity foretells the future of the U.S. and whose profound inequality warns that there is much work to be done. The second set of studies is national in scope. All these studies will initially

be issued as working papers. They will be brought together in statewide conferences and in the U.S. Capitol and, eventually, as two major books, which we hope will help light the way in the coming decades. At each of the major events, scholars will exchange ideas and address questions from each other, from leaders and from the public.

The Civil Rights Project, like the country, is in a period of transition, identifying leadership for its next chapter. We are fortunate to have collaborated with a remarkable network of important scholars across the U.S., who contributed to our work in the last quarter century and continue to do so in this new work. We are also inspired by the nation's many young people who understand that our future depends on overcoming division. They are committed to constructing new paths to racial justice. We hope these studies open avenues for this critical work, stimulate future scholars and lawyers, and inform policymaking in a society with the unlimited potential of diversity, if it can only figure out how to achieve genuine equality.

Gary Orfield

Patricia Gándara

Table of Contents

About the Series 3
Table of Figures 6
Table of Tables 7
Executive Summary 8
Defining Segregation & Integration in a Changing California 11
Shadows of Segregation 14
The Racial Composition of Students in California's Public Schools 31
Intense Racial Segregation 36
Unequal Opportunities by Race and Social Class: Double Segregation 40
Sharing Schools: Measures of Contact Across Race 44
Variation in Segregation Across Cities, Suburbs, Towns, and Rural Areas 50
Has Choice Made a Difference? Magnet and Charter School Segregation 59
Unequal Routes to Graduation 66
Course-Taking and Racial Segregation 73
Conclusion and Recommendations 81
References 89
Appendix 97

Table of Figures

Figure 1: Racial Composition of California Public Schools, 1988–2022 33
Figure 2: California's Total Asian and Latino Population, Population under 5, and Enrollment 34
Figure 3: Percent of Public Schools That Were Intensely Segregated, 1988–2022 37
Figure 4: Percent of Intensely Segregated Schools, California's Largest Districts, 1988–2022 37
Figure 5: Share of Schools That Are Majority Single Race, 1988–2022 39
Figure 6: Student Exposure to Poorer Students, 1998–2022 42
Figure 7: Comparing School Poverty in Intensely Segregated Schools, 1998–2022 44
Figure 8: Racial Composition of Schools Attended by the Typical Student of Each Race: 1990 and 2022 45
Figure 9: Racial Composition of Schools Attended by the Typical Student of Combined Racial Groups: 1990 and 2022 47
Figure 10: Racial Composition of Schools Attended by the Typical Student of Each Race, by Locale, 2022 51
Figure 11: Exposure to White Students, by Locale Type, 2022–23 53
Figure 12: Racial Composition by Locale, 2022–23 54
Figure 13: Exposure to White Students, in Cities and Suburbs, 2022–23 56
Figure 14: Racial Composition by Large City and Suburb, 2022–23 57
Figure 15: Student Exposure to Poorer Students, by Locale, 2022 58
Figure 16: Charter and Magnet School Enrollment, 2000–2022 60
Figure 17: Exposure to White and Asian Students by Choice Type, 2000–2019 62
Figure 18: Exposure Trends in Choice Sector, Excluding Los Angeles Unified, 2000–2019 63
Figure 19: Percentage of Intensely Segregated Schools, Magnet vs. Charter, 2000–2019 65
Figure 20: Percent Meeting UC/CSU A-G Requirements, by Segregated Schools, 2021–22 72
Figure 21: Comparing A-G and non-A-G Courses by Segregation Level 75
Figure 22: Advanced Course Enrollment 76
Figure 23: Intro, Basic, Remedial, and 9th Grade English Course-Taking 77
Figure 24: Correlations Between Race and Higher Income Enrollment, 1999–2022 100
Figure 25: Exposure to White Students, in All Locales, 2022–23 102
Figure 26: Racial Composition, All Locales, 2022–23 103
Figure 27: Graduation Rates by School Racial Composition, 2021–22 104
Figure 28: Black Exposure to White, Charter & Magnet Schools, Select Districts 110
Figure 29: Racial Composition of Magnet and Charter Schools, 2000–2019 111

Table of Tables

Table 1: Public School Enrollment in California, by Race: 1990 to 2022–23 31
Table 2: Lowest Black plus Latino Exposure to White plus Asian, 25 Largest Districts 2022 49
Table 3: Schools by Locale Type in California, 2022–23 51
Table 4: Cities and Suburbs, Descriptive Statistics, 2022–23 55
Table 5. Graduation Rates by Pronounced Racial Concentration, 2021–22 70
Table 6: Mean AP Courses by Segregated School Type, High Schools, 2021–22 80
Table 7: Mean Percent of Students in AP Courses, 2021–22 80
Table 8: Distribution of Schools by Locale, 2022–23 101
Table 9: Districts in Analytic Sample, 2019 109
Table 10: Share of Enrollment by Racial Grouping, 2012–2022 112

Executive Summary

California's schools remain deeply segregated by race and class, sustaining stark educational inequities. This report presents multiple measures of segregation in California's public schools using the most recently available data. We examined double segregation by race and class, compared segregation in magnet and charter schools, and explored racial inequalities in high school graduation rates and course enrollment patterns. Our findings reveal stark contrasts between White and Asian students and their Black and Latinx peers. Double segregation by race and class remains entrenched at high levels, reinforcing severe opportunity gaps and underscoring the urgent need for strategic intervention to drive meaningful change.

Highlights from our analysis include:

- California's school demographics shifted dramatically over the past 30 years. Relative to 1990, there were over 1 million fewer White students in 2022 and more that 1.4 million additional Latinx students. Since the late 1980s, the share of California schools that had a majority of White students plummeted from 60% to 14% while the share of schools that were majority Latinx grew from one-sixth to more than half.
- California has two racially identifiable advantaged groups, White and Asian, who are less likely to be enrolled in schools of concentrated poverty than three marginalized groups: Latinx, Black, and American Indian. The typical White student was in a school with 42.9% poor students and the typical Asian student was in a similar school with 42.4% poor students. On the other hand, we observed 67% poor enrollment for the typical Black student and 70% poor enrollment for the typical Latinx student.
- The typical student of a combined White and Asian group attended a school with 52.3% White and Asian students. However, the typical Black and Latinx student attended a school where only 21.6% of students were White and Asian.

- California is the state with the highest proportion of intensely segregated schools in the continental U.S. The proportion of these schools with greater than 90% students of color quadrupled over the last three decades, rising from 11.4% to 44.5%. By this measure, California schools became intensely segregated at a faster rate than all other states.
- Most large school districts saw an increase in intensely segregated schools, with San Bernadino City rising dramatically from 0% to 92% intensely segregated schools over the last three decades. By 2018, all schools in Santa Ana had become intensely segregated, a trend that has persisted for the last five years. Oakland was the only district to slightly reduce the proportion of intensely segregated schools, from 73% to 68%.
- Racial and economic segregation overlap. The poverty rate in overwhelmingly underrepresented minority (URM) schools was more than three times higher than in overwhelmingly White and Asian schools. In 2022, 84.5% of students in high-URM schools (defined as those with greater than 90% Black, Latinx, Multiracial, and American Indian) qualified for subsidized meals compared to 26.0% in schools that were high White and Asian schools (defined as those with more than 90% White and Asian).
- White, Black, and Latinx students experienced growing exposure to poverty, while the typical Asian student's exposure remained almost unchanged from 1998 to 2022.
- Black students have the highest school-based exposure to White students in smaller towns and the lowest in larger cities. Latinx students are most exposed to White students in rural schools and least in cities.
- Charter schools were more segregated than similarly located magnet schools. In magnet schools, the average Black and Latinx student was in a school that was 15.2% White and Asian in 2019. In charter schools, the comparable exposure statistic was slightly lower at

12.5%. Over the last 20 years, charter schools became more intensely segregated. As of 2019, 59% of charter schools in our sample of districts were intensely segregated. Magnet schools in these same districts were much less segregated, with 36% of them intensely segregated. Charter school enrollment increased approximately 760% over 20 years, while magnet school enrollment declined.

- Graduation rates were higher in the most segregated White and Asian schools than in the most segregated Black and Latinx schools (96.3% vs. 87.5%). The gap was even more pronounced in the completion of "A-G" requirements—a sequence of high school courses required for admission to California's exclusive public universities—with 68.7% of students meeting the requirements in the most White and Asian schools versus 43.1% in schools with the most underrepresented minorities.
- Course enrollment, a measure of the opportunity available in high schools for students to learn, varied substantially across segregated schools. The top 10% White and Asian schools had higher overall course enrollment per student, higher A-G course enrollment, and higher advanced course enrollment than the top 10% URM schools. However, "basic" course enrollment was higher in the schools with the most underrepresented minorities.

Extreme Segregation and Policy Inaction in California Schools

Ryan Pfleger and Gary Orfield

Defining Segregation & Integration in a Changing California

Historically the great fight about school segregation came in the 17 states where Black students were excluded from the schools of the dominant White majority by state laws and discrimination. After generations of unsuccessful struggles by Black communities to make the segregated schools equal, movement leaders challenged the entire system and the Supreme Court concluded in its 1954 *Brown v Board* decision that such segregation was "inherently unequal" and violated basic constitutional rights. The violation was racial segregation and the remedy was desegregation. The idea was that integrated schooling would expose Black children to richer educational opportunities and that contact between races in school would create better relationships between the two groups and decrease prejudice that justified the segregation system. The key mechanisms were access and contact. Because the South in that period had – with the exception of Texas – only two major racial groups, the measures of segregation and desegregation were about level of access for Black students to White schools and level of contact between Blacks and Whites in schools, school districts, and states.

California has a different society and a different history, and the U.S. as a whole has gone through vast demographic changes in the last half century. The state has extraordinary multiracial diversity in overall population, but high degrees of educational and residential separation among major groups, and great racial and ethnic gaps in terms of educational outcomes. How can we best describe these differences and think about equity goals?

Measures of segregation are most valuable when they reflect the reality of overall society and the access of marginalized groups to the schools with better opportunities and outcomes. It is important to measure the levels of contact between the most advantaged and least advantaged

groups. The basic groups used nationally are White, Asian, Latino, Black, and Native American Indian, plus a multiracial group increasing in size. Though each of these groups has considerable internal diversity in education and socioeconomic status, they are distinctive groups with different histories in the U.S. and very different school outcomes. See the Appendix for a detailed explanation of terms, data and measures, and exposure calculations used throughout this report.

In today's California, there are two relatively large and identifiable advantaged groups, White and Asian, and three disadvantaged groups, including Latino, Black, and American Indian communities. Segregation among groups with varying levels of advantage is a key predictor of inequitable resources and outcomes. The advantaged groups tend to attend high-achieving middle-class schools and often in contact with each other, while the other groups largely attend schools with substantial concentrated poverty. Thus, understanding desegregation in a multiracial California requires new comparisons, which our report explores. The most effective policies will encourage schools to be more racially diverse and educationally equitable in ways that support democracy. Disparities in the opportunity to achieve similar outcomes, which statistically relate to race and class, indicate that our state's educational system is not currently structured to enable fair participation. Measures of contact and concentration across race and class reveal critical aspects of schools that impact fair participation that policymakers, educators, and advocates should work to address.

School advantages operate, as extensive research shows, through better offerings at higher levels, stronger more supportive peer groups, networks of information, school connections with colleges, reputational value of credential, and more experienced teachers and administrators (Pfleger & Orfield, 2024a). Anyone who seriously follows education in California knows that the state has public schools that range very widely in opportunities and outcomes and that those are related to race and poverty. The advantages are related to actual contact across racial and ethnic lines, measured here by exposure and concentration statistics. These are simple statistics, but this report and other research show they are related to outcomes.

In contemporary California, the most highly educated group with the lowest level of poverty is Asian (though there are far less privileged subgroups). The White and Asian patterns of attending middle class schools with strong opportunities and outcomes differ widely from typical Latino and Black experiences. Whites and Asians tend to go to the same schools. Latinos and Blacks typically attend concentrated poverty schools, segregated by race and class with less qualified teachers and more limited offerings and connections. The statistics in this report clearly show these patterns. If the goal of integration is to create more access for historically excluded groups to crucial opportunities, it is important that groups confined to seriously inferior schools have more access to the schools serving families and communities with more resources. From the standpoint of more privileged students, integrated schools offer an opportunity to understand and operate more effectively in California's present and future society.

Historically, desegregation was triggered by violations and laws. Desegregation was a remedy for unjust exclusion and, as research has shown, a major educational treatment that can improve opportunities and outcomes. Desegregation is increasingly about educational effects, not merely violations or remedies to address explicit discrimination. And desegregation efforts are about using local and state policies to reach equitable goals, not court mandates that are increasingly limited within our current legal framework. It is not about a zero-sum game, taking opportunities from one group and giving them to another. The goal is a positive-sum game in which all groups gain, and students have more chances to learn how to live and work effectively in a multiracial society. A formal curriculum that is enriched by diverse perspectives is a needed component of successful integration policy—merely placing students together without making a more diverse curriculum that sustains multiple cultural perspectives is bound for failure. Increasing the number of ways students can engage and learn across cultural difference for the purpose of creating a pluralistic society that is inclusive of all offers benefits far beyond the narrow and unproductive goals of colorblindness and assimilation.

Where there is proof of discrimination, of course, both state and federal law can and should impose remedies. The data in this report show the patterns and trends that indicate segregation, not the causes, but certainly could be used to suggest places where causation would be important to examine.

Shadows of Segregation

California is a remarkable place with a history of transformation, but it is showing warning signs of failure in managing a vast racial change. The state has dangerous levels of racial and economic inequality and separation but no plan for equalizing opportunity and providing people of color high-quality education. With a vast population of people of color who aren't getting the education they need, equal preparation for California's future is a lost hope. Equal school opportunity must be part of any solution. As the data in this report show, in spite of California school reforms, Latino and Black students get weaker opportunities. Segregation has created two major sets of schools in this diverse state: White and Asian middle-class schools with much stronger average outcomes and educational opportunities, and Latino, Black, and American Indian schools that offer fewer opportunities to learn and less access to the state's strong, but highly stratified, public colleges.

Thinking about the future, no one would suggest it would be a good idea to sort out children by race and ethnicity and sending the most marginalized of them to inferior schools where the classes are full of kids from families struggling with poverty, housing insecurity, and their many related challenges. Who would favor sending the least experienced teachers to those schools and running a high school system where very few in segregated schools would be prepared for a good university? Who would want to create a huge new system of privately operated, publicly funded charter schools of choice that seem to promise deeper choice but only deepen the separation? Most Black and Brown students are in schools lacking strong precollegiate classes, qualified teachers, and

well-prepared fellow students. California has one of the largest populations of American Indian students, especially in Los Angeles County, but they are a small share of a vast population and seldom get attention. No one would choose to isolate students by race and class in schools that perpetuate inequality. Does it make sense to concentrate Black students in schools with few middle-class students or to send language minority students to schools with few bilingual teachers? But that's the system we have.

We cannot, of course, simply restart the society we inherit. It's the product of many generations of beliefs and practices which created a society and its stratified educational institutions. That history has embedded in the public mind. Change proposals, even using voluntary desegregation methods, can trigger fears and stereotypes about racial change. European Americans believed themselves superior to the native tribes and Mexicans whose land they seized and to the former African slaves, defining them as inferior and offering very limited education. The Mexican-American War's end and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, signed in 1848, gave rights to Mexicans residing in the land acquired by the U.S. But they soon lost most of their property in the California courts and faced discrimination (Pitt, 1970). For many years, there was bitter resistance to Asian immigrants and Asian immigration was forbidden. That has changed with a remarkable immigration including mostly highly educated immigrants since the 1965 reform.

Privileged families try to transmit their privilege to the next generation. Education, as it developed, was initially designed to serve White students as others fought for opportunities. Schooling has always been unequal by race and class. Though there were real changes in the civil rights era, the opponents surged into power and moved policy backward for generations. The soaring promises of the high stakes testing and market solutions of the Reagan period have fallen far short. The flows of aid from the Local Control Funding Formula, pandemic funding, and state control of most federal school funding have not closed large gaps. We are still far from making up for the increased gaps from the pandemic. College-going is unequal and well past its peak. Unequal

schools and neighborhoods are transmitting stratification from generation to generation. We're stuck and things are getting worse. Schools are supposed to equalize opportunity, but they do not. The system of inequality is not healing itself. We need a strategy.

Segregation and resegregation in schools and communities have been self-perpetuating. Segregation has been spreading in the state's vast suburbs. The data presented in this report reflect stasis and inaction. The integration efforts of the civil rights era were tried briefly, sputtered, faced resistance, and were largely abandoned in a conservative era, in spite of research now showing the large lifetime benefits of diverse schools. California needs to set the goal of equal integrated education, explain the reasons, and provide research-based answers to the fears of the public that their children's opportunities will be at risk.

Segregation at the start.

The tradition of segregation goes back to the beginning of California and has been challenged significantly only during the civil rights era. When the Gold Rush surged California's population just after the U.S. takeover, people came from everywhere. The treasure hunters came armed and there were fierce racial conflicts. It was the period of "manifest destiny" and European colonialism. It is important to understand the roots of practices, policies, and beliefs because racial attitudes and stereotypes became embedded. California had been a very thinly settled outlying portion of Mexico before it suddenly became a U.S. state following the end of the Mexican-American War in 1848. There had been only small military outposts, the former missions, and land grants to families, mostly for ranches. The Gold Rush two years later suddenly made San Francisco an important city. The new state's politics were overtly racist toward Native Americans, Asians, Blacks, and Latinos. There were fierce conflicts for land and intense White opposition to Asians, including those who helped build the transcontinental railroads that profoundly changed California by the later 1800s. Indian tribes were treated very badly. Mexicans were mostly reduced to poverty and unskilled labor. There were few Blacks, less than 2% of the population until the World War II

labor shortage, but they faced deep discrimination. There were successive waves of bitter anti-immigrant state policy, even in the late 20th century. California's workers organized on racial lines and the state was deeply involved in national efforts to restrict immigration.

Schools were rapidly organized for White students, but others were left out. Under pressure, San Francisco set up a small, segregated school for Black children (Wollenberg, 1976). When Chinese parents asked for public schools, their children were turned down, in spite of a treaty guaranteeing educational rights. After the state Supreme Court ordered the San Francisco district to educate Chinese children, the city created a separate "Oriental School" (Weinberg, 1997).

In 1905, the San Francisco Board of Education violated another international agreement, forbidding Japanese students to enroll in regular schools. It created a major international incident and President Theodore Roosevelt met with San Francisco school authorities to resolve the issue, gaining admission for those students, but setting in motion the "Gentlemen's Agreement" ending immigration from Japan (Daniels, 1962; Roosevelt, 1906). During World War II, loyal Japanese American families were sent away to detention camps. The virtual exclusion of immigration from Asia lasted until 1965.

Indian tribes, mostly small communities with very limited resources, faced violent resistance, attacked by the army and California militias. With widespread violence the Indian population was estimated to have been cut by almost nine-tenths by 1880. Native Americans were confined in reservations with no rights (Wollenberg, 1970). Federal officials negotiated treaties which provided for schools, but the Senate never ratified the California treaties because of local resistance. The promised Central Valley land for the tribes was not provided. State law banned Native Americans from attending White schools and few got public education for many years. It was the 1920s before the California Supreme Court ruled that Indian children had a right to attend public schools (Blalock-Moore, 2012). Separate schools for Blacks were initially established. Blacks actively resisted this process and by 1890 the state Supreme Court in the *Wysinger v. Crookshank* decision (1890) said

that school districts were no longer permitted under existing state law to create separate Black schools but upheld the legislature's right to restore segregation. When the once small population of Blacks soared in the 1940s, so did increasingly rigid segregation, reflecting intense housing discrimination and local school system decisions, not official state segregation policy.

Latino Segregation.

California developed Latino school segregation though they were not legally defined as a separate race. In the mid-twentieth century, California still had a small share of Latino residents. California was heavily settled by White immigrants from the Midwest, East, and South. The Mexican border was wide open until Congress created the Border Patrol in 1924 and there had been a long history of free border crossings, much of it temporary along a porous border. In 1950, only 7.2% of the state's population was Latino, rising to 9.1% in 1960, with the great majority born in the U.S. Many Mexican workers had been expelled in "Operation Wetback" in the 1950s and earlier expulsions by local authorities during the Great Depression.[1] Latinos had been eagerly recruited during labor shortages and then restricted. Latinos were already a mostly urbanized population with 85% living in urban areas by 1960. There were also many migrant agricultural workers. The state reported that Latinos were heavily concentrated in unskilled jobs with minimal education requirements. Half had not gone beyond elementary school. Only one in 12 men and one in 16 women had as much as a year of college education. Additionally, 8% of men and 6% of women had no formal education at all, and 44% of the state total were living in the Los Angeles–Long Beach metro and another 7% in the adjacent San Bernardino–Riverside metro (California Dept. of Industrial Relations, 1964). This area became the national epicenter of Latino population growth and school segregation.

[1] This was the Eisenhower administration policy that has been much discussed in the 2024 presidential campaign.

Although there was no segregation law, Mexican American children were often educated in separate schools and classrooms, a pattern clearly disclosed when a major case arose in Orange County where the Mendez family objected to their child being excluded from the school local Whites attended. Parents from four districts joined in and documented a pattern of serious segregation. The 1946 *Mendez v. Westminster* case produced a key ruling from the federal district court which was affirmed by the powerful 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, which directed the admission of Sylvia Mendez to the local school (*Mendez v. Westminster School Dist. of Orange County*, 1946). It was not a case ordering the district to integrate its schools or forbidding race segregation (because Latinos were then legally defined as Whites in California). The decision simply admitted Latino residents within an attendance area to the local schools. Together with decisions in other states it raised important claims for rights for a population that was to increase immensely through an extraordinary wave of immigration from Mexico (Valencia, 2005).

When the federal court permitted Miss Mendez to enroll, California still had state laws permitting official segregation of Asian and Indian children. In 1947, Gov. Earl Warren signed a law taking that language out of state statutes, just seven years before his unanimous *Brown* opinion, as Chief Justice, stuck down segregation laws in the 17 states that still had such laws (Newton, 2006).

Latinos were often excluded from the educational process. The 1960 census showed that 28% of Mexican Americans nationally "were functional illiterates; that is, had four years of schooling or less" (Grebler, Moore, & Guzman, 1970). In the Southwest, only about one-sixth were finishing high school. California was modestly better (Grebler, Moore, & Guzman, 1970, see table 7–5). California was the first state in the region to release racial enrollment data, in 1966. There was already a pattern of segregation developing in eight of the state's large city districts. By 1968 when the first national statistics were released, California had 64,000 Mexican American students in schools that were 80–100% Mexican American. Statewide, however, segregation was far less severe, and 1970 data showed that the average California Latino student was in a school with a small White

majority, much less segregated than those in Texas and some other Southwest regions. By 1974, however, 55% of Los Angeles Latinos were in schools with 80–100% minority populations (Carter & Segura, 1979). Urban segregation was growing. The courts were being drawn into it. The suburbs, marketed almost exclusively to Whites, were exploding. Conservative leaders were opposed to any positive action.

California histories often imply that Latino segregation was solved by *Mendez*. However, there were many segregated schools and neighborhoods for Black and Latino families and there were few desegregation plans, such as those developed in the South to actually create integrated schools, support the transition, and give courts continuing jurisdiction over affected school districts. There was no policy requiring positive steps as the Latino communities grew rapidly, or any steps to prevent the deepening separation. By mid-century, all of the once officially segregated groups in California had the right to attend a public school if they lived in the attendance area. But there was no enforcement of this right. And there was nothing to prevent changes in attendance boundaries and school sites from increasing segregation. There were no rights created for the children of color isolated in the surging ghettos and barrio housing who were shut out of the White housing market and the suburban schools that were mushrooming in the state's metro areas. There were some rights but no real remedies.

What had become clear in desegregation of Black students in the South is that very little happened after the Supreme Court's *Brown* decision until the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act gave the federal government powerful tools to force change and there was an administration ready to use that authority to force change. Civil rights agencies have never had the resources to take on each individual district, examine its history, and prove its guilt. The Supreme Court's 1973 *Keyes* decision brought the first formal recognition of the rights of Latino students to class action remedies in desegregation orders two decades after *Brown* (*Keyes v. School Dist. No. 1*, 1973). Unfortunately, it required very complex proof and went unenforced in California as a tidal wave of Mexican

immigrants began to pour into California and transform the state. When the *Keyes* decision came down, the Nixon Administration was in power and was opposed to urban desegregation and shifted the attention from desegregation to bilingualism for Latinos (Orfield, 1978). Nixon, from suburban LA, strongly attacked the Los Angeles desegregation effort. Within a single generation, Latinos, who had been far less segregated than Blacks in 1970, became even more isolated than Blacks as their numbers grew and policy efforts were abandoned. The Nixon administration put civil rights opponents in charge of the Justice Department. (It would be a quarter century after *Mendez* before the U.S. Supreme Court would recognize, in the 1973 *Keyes* case from Denver, that Latinos were entitled as a group to desegregation remedies, but that decision never received serious federal or state enforcement.) The Supreme Court made it almost impossible for civil rights groups to win the kind of remedies California now needed in federal courts.

Civil Rights Initiatives and Reversals.

From the mid-1960s through the 1970s there were both initiatives and reversals in the development of desegregation policy under California law. At the peak of the civil rights movement in the early 1960s there were positive steps. The State Supreme Court initially upheld desegregation requirements in the 1963 *Jackson* decision which held that segregation of schools violated state law (*Jackson v. Pasadena City School District*, 1963). The California Supreme Court ruled that the state constitution required action: "The right to equal opportunity for education and the harmful consequences of segregation require that school boards take steps, insofar as is reasonably feasible, to alleviate racial imbalance in schools regardless of its cause." There was, however, still no basic information on school segregation in California until the state government ordered and published a first racial census of schools in 1966, responding to a widespread demand of civil rights groups. Outside the South, state and local education leaders often followed a "colorblind" argument against collecting and providing information on race and assured the public that things were working out well and everyone was being treated fairly. With no data it is almost impossible to prove violations

or monitor remedies. Where and when the statistics became available, they showed that large problems had been covered up.

Only in the civil rights era was the issue of segregated education seriously considered in California education policy. In the 1960s and early 1970s, state law was clarified, and desegregation cases were brought in major districts, including Los Angeles, San Francisco, and San Diego. Most California desegregation cases were brought under state law decisions, including in big cities like San Diego and Los Angeles because of favorable state law not requiring proof of violations and defining desegregation as an obligation of school districts (e.g., *Jackson v. Pasadena City School District*, 1963).[2] The California courts held that districts had an obligation to act against segregation. In a major 1979 decision, a state appellate court ruled in a case from the Palo Alto area that the state had the primary responsibility and that the state constitution gave the courts power to desegregate across district lines if necessary, something the U.S. Supreme Court had ruled out in federal cases in 1974 (*Tinsley v. Palo Alto Unified School District*, 1979). Within just a few years, however, California would turn decisively backward in part in response to the developing Los Angeles case.

It was a time of movements and racial conflict. The civil rights movement peaked in the mid-1960s with impacts across the country, clearly heightening the consciousness of segregation in California. But it was also a time of urban violence and political reversals. The huge 1965 Los Angeles Watts riot, the largest in many years, stirred public fears and the rise of conservative movements turned attention from racial injustice to "law and order" politics. Ronald Reagan, a strong opponent of civil rights law, became California Governor on a pro-law enforcement platform in 1966. Nixon ran for President in 1968 promising harsh crime measures and strengthened police bringing an end to racial uprisings and anti-war protests in the cities. He was opposed to civil rights reforms and embraced the "Southern strategy" in his 1968 campaign, including strong opposition to

[2] There were a few important federal cases in San Francisco and San Jose and others in Pasadena and Bakersfield.

urban school desegregation (Farrell, 2017). The campaign brought Southern segregationists into the GOP; their leading goal was blocking urban school desegregation efforts (Carter, 1996; Dent, 1978). Both President Nixon and future President Reagan harshly attacked the idea of desegregating Los Angeles.

The early 1970s brought major resistance to school desegregation led by President Nixon, who created a hostile Justice Department and refused to enforce a central provision of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. The statewide election ballot of 1972, the Nixon reelection ballot, contained a proposition repealing a California law requiring districts to study and consider options to diminish segregation. Known as the Wakefield Anti-Busing Proposition, it explicitly forbade the race-conscious assignment of students for purposes of desegregation. Explicit consideration of student race was, of course, a basic element of desegregation and teacher integration plans. Sixty-two percent of Californians voted to adopt the Wakefield Proposition in the 1972 election (California Secretary of State, 1972; *Crawford v. Los Angeles Board of Education*, 1976). Ultimately, though, it was overruled by the California Supreme Court as illegitimately eliminating basic constitutional rights, a decision protecting desegregation law for a time (*Crawford v. Los Angeles Board of Education*, 1976). California continued to have a legal standard far more demanding than that set in federal courts but only because it was protected by state courts. The *Tinsley v. Palo Alto Unified School District* decision eventually affected students in the overwhelmingly non-White Ravenswood district and, in implementing an eventual 1986 settlement, six Silicon Valley districts accepted transfers. The agreement settling that case continues to operate.

Conservatives dominated much of the late 20th century in California. Governor George Deukmejian's "law and order" administration, 1983-1991, was also a period in which three more progressive members of the state's Supreme Court were recalled and removed, in a partisan campaign in 1986 strongly supported by the Governor. The recall success moved the court strongly toward the right. Deukmejian and his successor, Pete Wilson, implemented conservative racial

policies in their 16 years from 1983–1999, using issues of crime, immigration, and racial change to win elections. The policies alienated many in the growing non-White voting population and eventually made it virtually impossible for Republicans to win statewide offices after 2011. California's desegregation agency, the Intergroup Relations Bureau of the Department of Education, which had been active encouraging integration efforts in the 1960s and 1970s, especially in smaller cities, was closed during the conservative era. The conservative era and its changes in the law crippled desegregation efforts. Three conservative California governors and two U.S. presidents from California helped turn the state and the nation away from school integration.

The Largest City: The rise and fall of the integration effort, politics, and loss of state constitutional rights.

The California Supreme Court held (Crawford, 1976) that Los Angeles was required to desegregate, so the case was turned over to a local judge. The initial judge in the case, Alfred Gitelson, handed down an opinion requiring action, but the appeals court did not support it, and he was defeated for reelection by a heated campaign against desegregation which was mobilized against him (Gitelson, 1975). Trial judges are elected in California and none of the city's judges would take the case after that experience. Gitelson clarified the law was defeated and the court had to find a judge from outside the city (Orfield, 1984).

Paul Egly, the suburban judge who eventually agreed to hear the Los Angeles *Crawford* case, quickly found himself in a maelstrom of judicial and political battles. His idea was to get the advice of leading experts and, hopefully, to work out a solution with local authorities, but he was bitterly disappointed. The Los Angeles system was already in rapid racial change, like most big city systems, by the time the desegregation litigation began in earnest. It had 56% White students in 1966, with 21% Blacks and 19% Latinos. By the time the court implemented the first phase of desegregation in 1977 it was down to 34% White students before desegregation. There were almost a third Latinos and about a fourth Blacks (Egly, 2008). Large transformations happened within a single decade of

the epic California suburbanization.[3] If that enrollment had been stable and the courts had exercised their power earlier before suburbanization was so advanced, there could have been substantial desegregation, but the population was rapidly changing, and the politics were negative. There were already significant non-White settlements in parts of the suburban ring but there were no major suburban desegregation plans.

The Los Angeles Court appointed expert demographers and sociologists to examine the segregation in the nation's second largest district.[4] An analysis for the Court, of racial change in Los Angeles schools, showed that there was virtually no stable neighborhood school integration for the city's Black students. On average, the time from the entry of the first Black student into an elementary school to virtually complete resegregation was just seven years (Gifford, 1978). Segregationist practices were built into the housing market. The only way to provide school integration was to break away from the neighborhood level, where the housing market was spreading segregation at a very rapid rate and Mexican immigration was pouring into the city and parts of the county. Martin Luther King wrote about the underlying dynamic of segregation, noting that "the task grows greater as the ghettos expand in impoverished, fenced-in numbers" (Foreword, in Sullivan & Stewart, 1969, p. ix). The experts appointed by Judge Egly informed the Court that there was no feasible lasting plan limited to the city given the extremely rapid demographic changes; they concluded that any lasting remedy would require involving suburban districts and crossing district lines (Crain, 1978; Pettigrew, 1978; Orfield, 1978, November 14; Farley, 1978), as had been authorized later in the *Tinsley v. Palo Alto Unified School District* case. Almost immediately, however, a proposal was initiated to amend the state constitution to block that remedy. Proposition 1 passed by a large majority in 1979, and it shut down the court-ordered desegregation plan in Los Angeles and

[3] This was a period of very rapid racial change in big city enrollment and birthrates by race whether or not there were desegregation plans in place.
[4] The experts included this report's co-author, Gary Orfield.

eliminated state constitutional desegregation rights in California. Los Angeles was the first major U.S. city to end its desegregation plan, which had only been partially implemented before it was shut down. The metropolitan plan was never developed or implemented but many of the predictions of the Court's experts did come true, including the resegregation of neighborhoods where the anti-busing opposition was organized. The opposition's promise that ending school desegregation would end the rapid spread of housing segregation proved incorrect.

A Changing State with No Integration Policies.

From the 1970s and continuing until the Great Recession of 2007, there was an historic wave of Latino immigration which produced a tide of Latino students, often in spreading segregated neighborhoods, especially in Southern California which was the epicenter of immigration. That and low White birth and immigration numbers of Whites transformed California and helped intensify school segregation. In 1968 when national statistics were becoming available, 61% of Latino students in California were still in majority White schools and only 20% of the students in the leading district, Los Angeles, were Latino. The average Latino student in California was in a 54% White school. Other Southwest states were far more segregated (Orfield, 1983). By 1980, however, segregation was rapidly growing with no effort to stop it.

Greater Los Angeles came to have the nation's most intense racial isolation for Latinos, in conditions of concentrated poverty, surging as the state's policy was turning back. Latino and Black students of California are now similarly segregated, by both isolation from Whites and exposure to poverty. Black students, who were a declining share of the state's enrollment, often found themselves enrolled in schools where the large majority of students were poor Latinos. Two disadvantaged groups ended up in the same concentrated poverty schools.

After the passage of Proposition 1, and its upholding by California courts and the U.S. Supreme Court, school desegregation could continue only with a finding of intentional segregation. The trial judge in Los Angeles' *Crawford* case held that there had been a finding of intentional

discrimination in the district, only to be overturned by the appellate court which promptly ordered the termination of Los Angeles' limited mandatory desegregation plan. The state Supreme Court—under fierce attack by conservatives—then refused to hear the case, stunning observers who had watched it uphold desegregation mandates for decades. Civil rights groups appealed Proposition 1 all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, where a more conservative Supreme Court ruled in 1982 that the California proposition was legal though a similar proposition in Washington state had been found to be unconstitutional (*Crawford v. Los Angeles Board of Education*, 1982). The legal framework for dealing with California's racial transformation had been dissolved as judicial appointments had turned the courts into barriers to desegregation.

Judge Egly was deeply disappointed by the way the city's active mass media publicized the political attacks on his court, rather than reporting on the compelling evidence presented. He talked about how, day after day, he heard testimony about the profound inequality in segregated schools, but every day television ignored the testimony and gave a platform to the opponents organizing their political movement against integration, developing fears which enabled their organization to win the school board elections and change California's constitution (Orfield & Gándara, 2009). In the end, he was heartbroken over the abandonment of the issue by the state Supreme Court. His judicial career was over, and he was left shocked at the outcome, still expressing his sense of betrayal by the courts, local officials, and the media decades later (Ettinger, 2003).

Since it was impossible for Los Angeles civil rights groups to obtain sufficient resources to carry out a massive, very costly federal lawsuit proving the history of discrimination among hundreds of Los Angeles schools, the U.S. Supreme Court's 1982 decision regarding Proposition 1—and the state Supreme Court's refusal to hear the case—marked the end of desegregation in the city (apart from a small program of magnet schools where desegregation goals were often not realized) after less than two years of implementing a modest plan. The judicial actions signaled an elimination of rights that had consistently been found to be part of the California constitution—and

a virtual guarantee that nothing of consequence could be done to desegregate California's largest cities in state courts.

The final step came in 1989. The NAACP had filed a federal lawsuit attempting to meet the federal requirements for a court order for the huge district. Los Angeles NAACP President Joseph Duff said that the group had neither the money nor the staff to prosecute the case and asked the Court to dismiss it, ending the case (Woo, 1989). This last step meant that the largest concentration of Latinos and Blacks in the West had no integration plan. Following the Supreme Court's 1991 *Board of Education v. Dowell* decision which set policies that led to the shutting down of federal court orders, the substantial desegregation plans in San Francisco and San Jose were abandoned. California came into the twenty-first century with no policies to address segregation which had, on some measures, become the most extreme in the U.S. for both Black and Latino students. A sad irony was that as segregation deepened so too did the accumulation of major research findings showing the lifelong advantages of integrated education.

Since 1980, although the state has extremely high levels of segregated education and educational opportunities are strikingly unequal, the issue has been virtually ignored. Education policy was passive as segregation spread into large areas of racially changing suburbs and gentrification in the state's major cities brought highly educated families back to impoverished non-White neighborhoods, but usually not into local schools. When progressives have been in power, the basic idea has been to pump more funds into high-poverty schools, doing little to nothing about segregation. The history of the years since *Brown* shows that you do not get substantial numbers of integrated schools in residentially segregated communities without goals and plans. California has neither.

Housing Integration Could Help but California Has a Bad Record on Fair Housing.

School desegregation was not the only civil rights imperative on which California had fared badly. In 1950, with the strong support of the real estate industry, California voters wrote into the state Constitution Article 34, which makes it impossible to build subsidized housing in a community without local support, greatly reducing the kinds of housing that would aid many non-White families and gain access to suburban schools. Seventy-four years later, it had been impossible to change this policy in the only state with such a constitutional prohibition (Los Angeles Times Staff, 2022). In 1964, at the peak of the national civil rights movement, the year Congress passed the most powerful civil rights law in U.S. history, California voters faced an anti-civil rights ballot proposition to overturn a new state fair housing law and to prohibit any law forbidding housing discrimination in the future. It passed by a massive majority, including a majority of voters of all age groups and of both parties (Hahn, 1968). It was supported by future Gov. Ronald Reagan. In response, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the referendum itself was a civil rights violation, and the fair housing law was allowed to go into effect. In the *Reitman v. Mulkey* decision, the Warren Court ruled that repealing and forbidding anti-discrimination housing laws encouraged racial discrimination, thus violating the guarantee of "equal protection of the laws" (*Reitman v. Mulkey*, 1967). (As appointments made the Court more conservative, that principle would change when the LA school desegregation case came to the Supreme Court.)

California had a large White majority in the mid-twentieth century and projected a national image in the 1950s and 1960s of a suburban lifestyle of open informal ranch houses that swept the country. It was a time of growing wealth, massive public investments, a surging higher education system envied by other states, high technology, and enormous growth of opportunity. There was a powerful coming together of developers, investors, real estate, and banking interests to offer young White families a suburban dream of access to the city and its jobs and culture without social tension. White suburbanites could thus skirt responsibilities for growing concentrations of low-income

racially marginalized people in cities. The historic wave of White suburbanization that took hold during the 1950s baby boom was highly segregated, with communities developed and marketed to Whites only, in spite of pioneering litigation against restrictive covenants that used the courts to block minority residence in White neighborhoods.

Whites could have the best of the Golden State, largely built and maintained by people of color, and they would shift the costs to others. Suburbs radiated out across mountains and canyons into deserts in endless lines of shopping centers and freeways. In the cities, increasingly isolated Black and Latino communities had second-class education and opportunities.

From the 1970s and continuing until the Great Recession of 2007, California experienced a sustained wave of Latino immigration and declining White births, dramatically reshaping the state's demographics and intensifying school segregation. In 1968, when national statistics were first becoming available, 61% of Latino students in California attended majority-White schools. By 1980, however, segregation was rapidly increasing, with no policy efforts to counteract it. Over time, California became home to the most extreme Latino segregation in the nation, surpassing even the levels of isolation historically experienced by Black students, as state policies moved away from integration. As California enters 2025, the state faces a critical juncture.

The momentum toward desegregation—sparked by landmark events such as *Mendez* (1947), *Brown* (1954), *Jackson* (1963), the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and federal support for magnet schooling in the 1970s—always faced contemporary resistance but was in significant retreat by the 1980s. While these earlier trends provide essential historical context, the most detailed patterns of segregation emerge from analysis of detailed data available over the past three decades. The following sections examine the transformation of California's schools, focusing on trends starting around 1990, when comprehensive, annual state and national datasets became available.

The Racial Composition of Students in California's Public Schools

California was a state with a huge White majority little more than a half century ago, but it has changed radically, and the society continues to change. Between 1990 and 2022, the racial composition of California's public-school students changed dramatically—with White student enrollment declining by 48% and Latino student enrollment increasing by 87%. Black and Native American numbers were also down by about a third, as Asians grew by about a third (Table 1).[5] School officials and communities are dealing with fundamental population changes. These conditions are likely to continue to mid-century according to recent demographic projections (Van Hook et al., 2023).

Table 1: Public School Enrollment in California, by Race: 1990 to 2022–23

	1990	2000	2010	2020	2022	Change over 32 years
White	2,243,311 (45.6%)	2,095,933 (36.0%)	1,594,683 (26.7%)	1,256,571 (21.7%)	1,164,247 (20.6%)	-1,079,064
Black	422,784 (8.6%)	486,990 (8.4%)	387,760 (6.5%)	294,664 (5.1%)	274,947 (4.9%)	-147,837
Latino	1,690,684 (34.4%)	2,527,233 (43.5%)	3,069,016 (51.4%)	3,213,871 (55.4%)	3,158,335 (55.9%)	1,467,651
Asian	522,283 (10.6%)	655,791 (11.3%)	707,244 (11.8%)	718,203 (12.4%)	709,932 (12.6%)	187,649
American Indian	37,890 (0.8%)	49,487 (0.9%)	41,156 (0.7%)	27,140 (0.5%)	24,828 (0.4%)	-13,062
Multiracial	-	-	174,300 (2.9%)	289,031 (5.0%)	316,967 (5.6%)	NA
Total	4,916,952	5,815,434	5,974,159	5,799,480	5,649,256	415,337

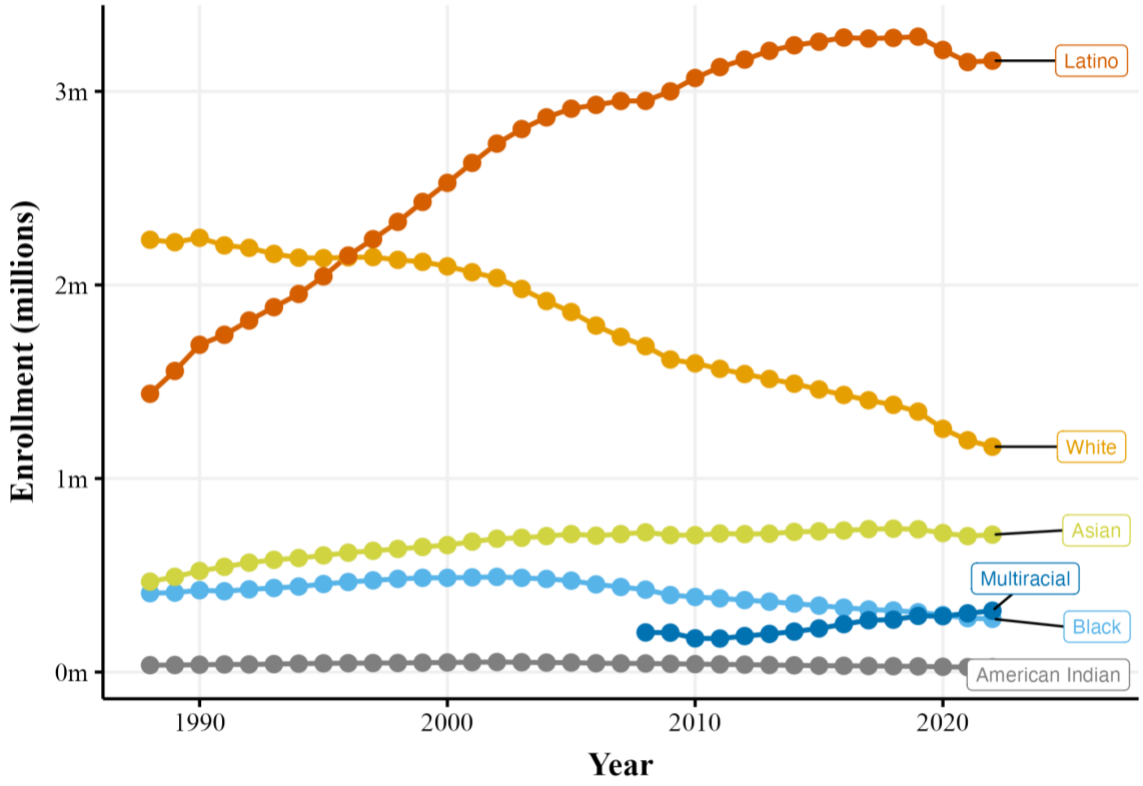
Note. Enrollment in millions. Column proportions in parentheses. Excludes higher education. Interpret with caution, as differences in how race and ethnicity were categorized in the CCD, particularly around 2010, may affect comparisons over time. Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Common Core of Data (CCD), Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey Data, Education Data Portal (Version 0.21.0).

[5] Interpretations across time should be made with caution because there was a significant racial classification change instituted by the U.S. Department of Education around 2008 that changed how student race was reported (Richards & Stroub, 2020). A multiracial category, or individual students simultaneously reporting more than one racial classification, was included for the first time.

Public school enrollment grew by approximately 15% from 1990 to 2022 (from 4.9 to 5.6 million), although it peaked around 2010 and has been on a downward trend since. And the racial composition substantially changed with more than 1 million fewer White students in 2022, and more than 1.4 million more Latino students compared to 1990. Latino enrollment grew substantially from 1990 through about 2005 but has grown less rapidly since and even decreased in two of the last three years (Figure 1). All of California's major racial and ethnic groups have birthrates below the population replacement level (Mathews & Hamilton, 2019). Latino birthrates, long much higher, have declined substantially since the Great Recession. Immigration has declined sharply. These factors influence school enrollment. Asian enrollment increased somewhat over the last three decades, from 10.6% to 13.1% of the student body, while the American Indian population decreased from 0.8% to 0.5%. The proportion of California's student population that was Black fell to 4.7%.

Historically, California schools were overwhelmingly White institutions designed and operated by White officials and the major civil rights issues had been raised in courts by Black communities. Now the combined White and Black share of the total enrollment is 25.5% in a majority Latino system with a rising Asian share. Projections show that if the existing demographic trends continue, California is headed toward declining enrollment and a modest growth of the Asian share.

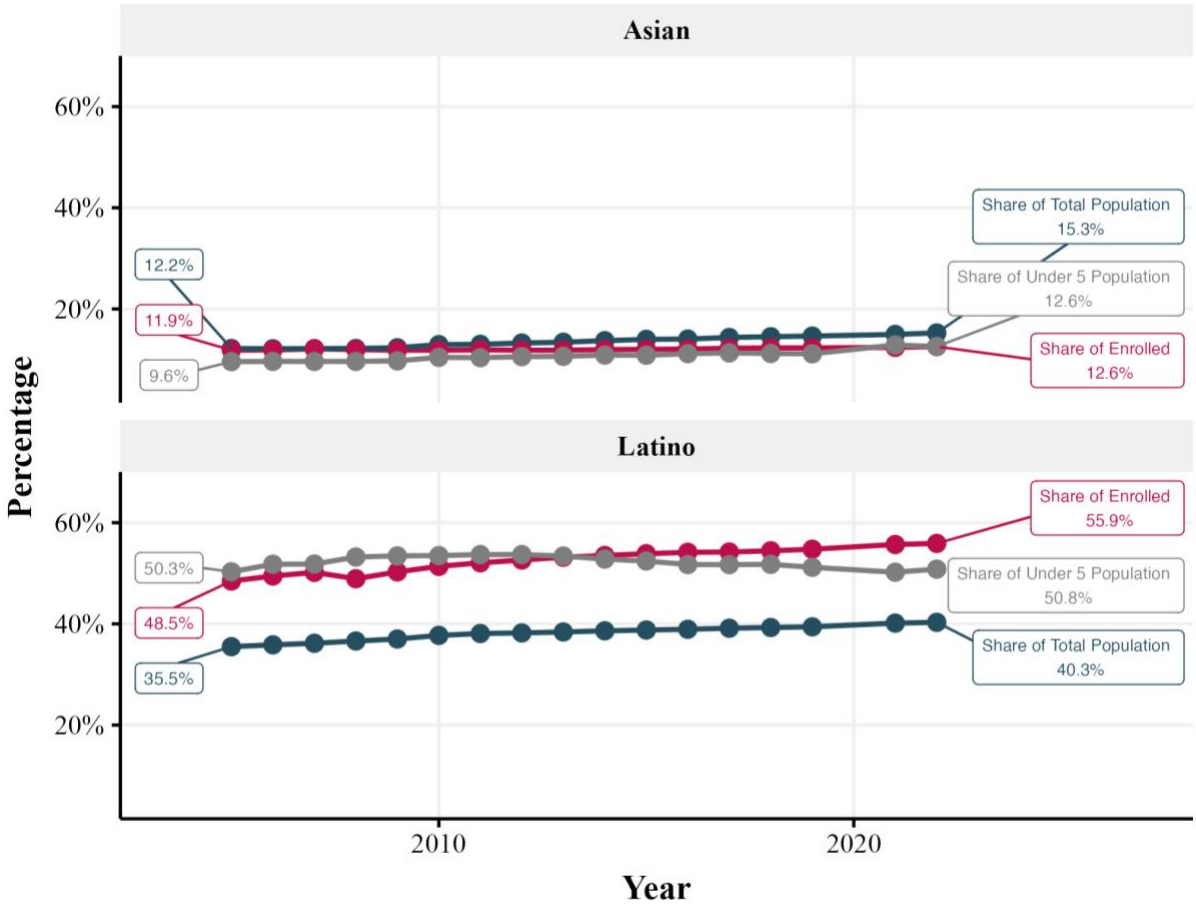
Figure 1: Racial Composition of California Public Schools, 1988–2022



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Common Core of Data (CCD), Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey Data, Education Data Portal (Version 0.21.0).

Comparing basic population statistics for the state with school enrollments, the data shows that Latinos have a significantly larger share of the public schools than of the total population while the Asian population is growing faster than its representation in the public schools.

Figure 2: California's Total Asian and Latino Population, Population under 5, and Enrollment



Sources: ACS and CCD.
Note. Share of total and share < 5 are based on 1-yr ACS estimates, which began in 2005. There were ACS data anomalies in 2020, which is excluded in the series presented here. The denominator for the share of <5 years old statistics in the panels above is the all-race sum of children less than 5 years (e.g., In 2022, 50.8% of Californians under 5 years old were Latino). Share of enrolled data is computed from CDE data.

The share of Californians that were immigrants soared in the late 20th century but has been relatively stable at around 27% in the years since 2000 (Perez et al., 2023). Contrary to some prevailing notions, more than 80% of those born abroad have some form of legal status (e.g., naturalized, green card, or visa) and only about a third of the most recent immigrants to California were born in Latin America (35%) and 51% are from Asia (Perez et al., 2023). Immigration affects

who attends California's schools, but it is not the only factor. The rising shares of Asian children under 5 (Figure 2) suggest an increasing share of Asian children born in the US.[6]

Asians have lower birthrates and higher private school use, and this was the reverse for the Latinx population. There were over half a million students in over 3,000 private k-12 schools in California in 2018-19 (Broughman et al., 2021). Private enrollment constituted about 8% of total state enrollment as of 2022, down two percentage points since 1996 (California Department of Education, 2023b). National private school data can provide a sense of demographic changes. Across the United States, Asian students disproportionately enroll in private schools (Broughman et al., 2021) compared to public schools (and the opposite is the case for Black and Latinx students). An earlier report by the Civil Rights Project found that approximately triple the share of Asian students enroll in private schools compared to Latinx students (Ee et al., 2018). The same report found that Asian enrollment was growing faster in private than public schools. Research consistently finds private schools are significantly segregated across multiple measures (Ee et al., 2018; Reardon & Yun, 2002). Furthermore, private school enrollment patterns contribute to overall school segregation in both public and private sectors.

Private school enrollment statistics from the 2015–2016 academic year show that White students, on average, attended schools with more than 80% White classmates (even higher in the Northeast and Midwest) while Black and Latino students were in private schools with an average of about one-third Whites. Whites attended schools with 86% White plus Asian enrollment and the typical Asian student was in a school that was 76% White plus Asian. (In the West, where the Asian share of population is highest, the average Asian student was in a 41% Asian, 34% White school). California private schools were distinctive in their very high non-White proportions and the state is

[6] Another possibility is that recent immigrants are younger and more numerous, which evidence does not support. According to Migration Policy Institute (2015), the median age of immigrants in the U.S. increased and the share less than 15 years old decreased from 1990 to 2013.

among the most segregated for Latino private school students (Ee et al., 2023). There has been a substantial increase in public funds for private voucher programs in conservative states in recent years with advocates often claiming that non-White students make academic gains in such schools. However, research actually shows that Latino and Black students tend to perform worse in the voucher schools, in part because of the quality of schools accepting vouchers and a lack of free transportation to better schools. Over time, the voucher programs disproportionately support higher income Whites in religious schools (Welner, Orfield, & Huerta, 2023).

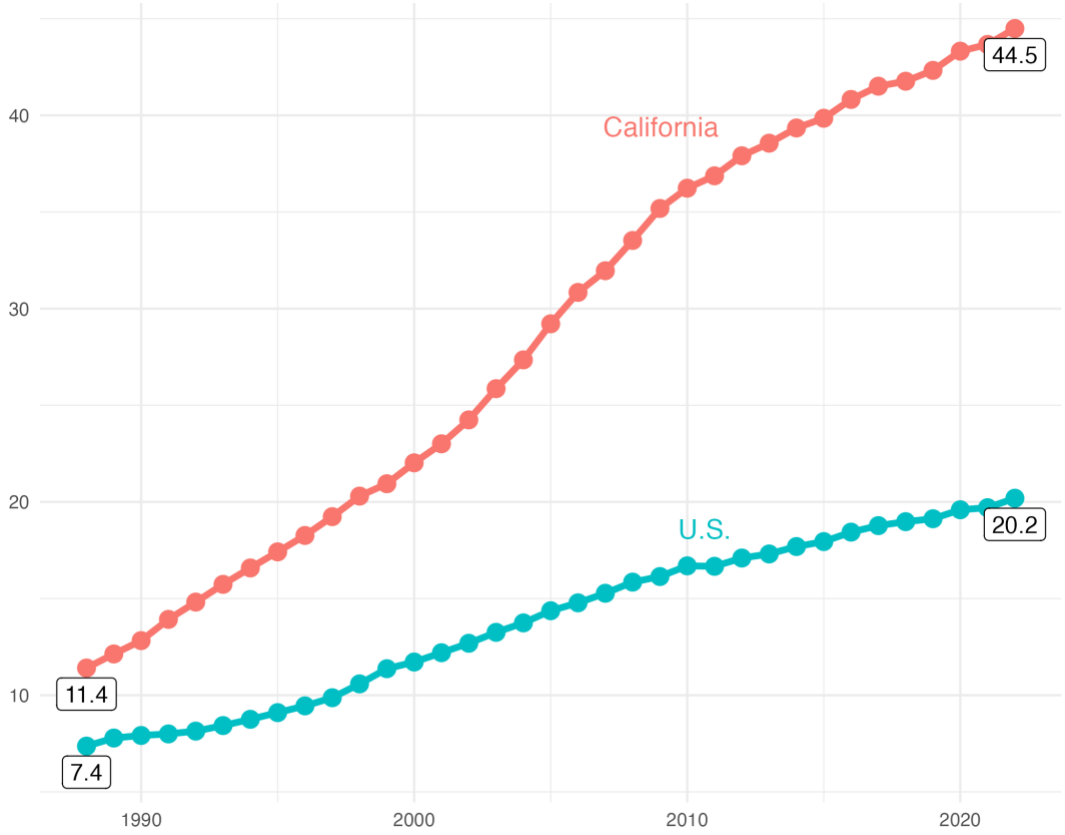
Intense Racial Segregation

Intensely segregated public schools, which we define as schools that have 90–100% students of color (i.e., non-White), pose significant problems. These schools are significantly more likely than others to predominately enroll students who are poor (as discussed later). The proportion of these racially segregated schools has surged over the last 30 years (Figure 3).

From 1988 to 2022, the share of intensely segregated schools increased steadily, slightly faster between 2000 and 2010. In 1988, about 11.4% of schools enrolled more than 90% students of color. By 2022, this statistic had jumped to more than 44%. California's schools became more intensely segregated than all other states in the continental U.S. (Orfield & Pfleger, 2024).

This near quadrupling of intensely segregated schools over 30 years is partly a story of changing demographics: fewer White students and more Latino students. Sufficient racial diversity, however, exists in California to have far fewer intensely segregated schools. Even taking geographic and residential distribution as given (which is not a necessity), substantially more integration is possible.

Figure 3: Percent of Public Schools That Were Intensely Segregated, 1988–2022

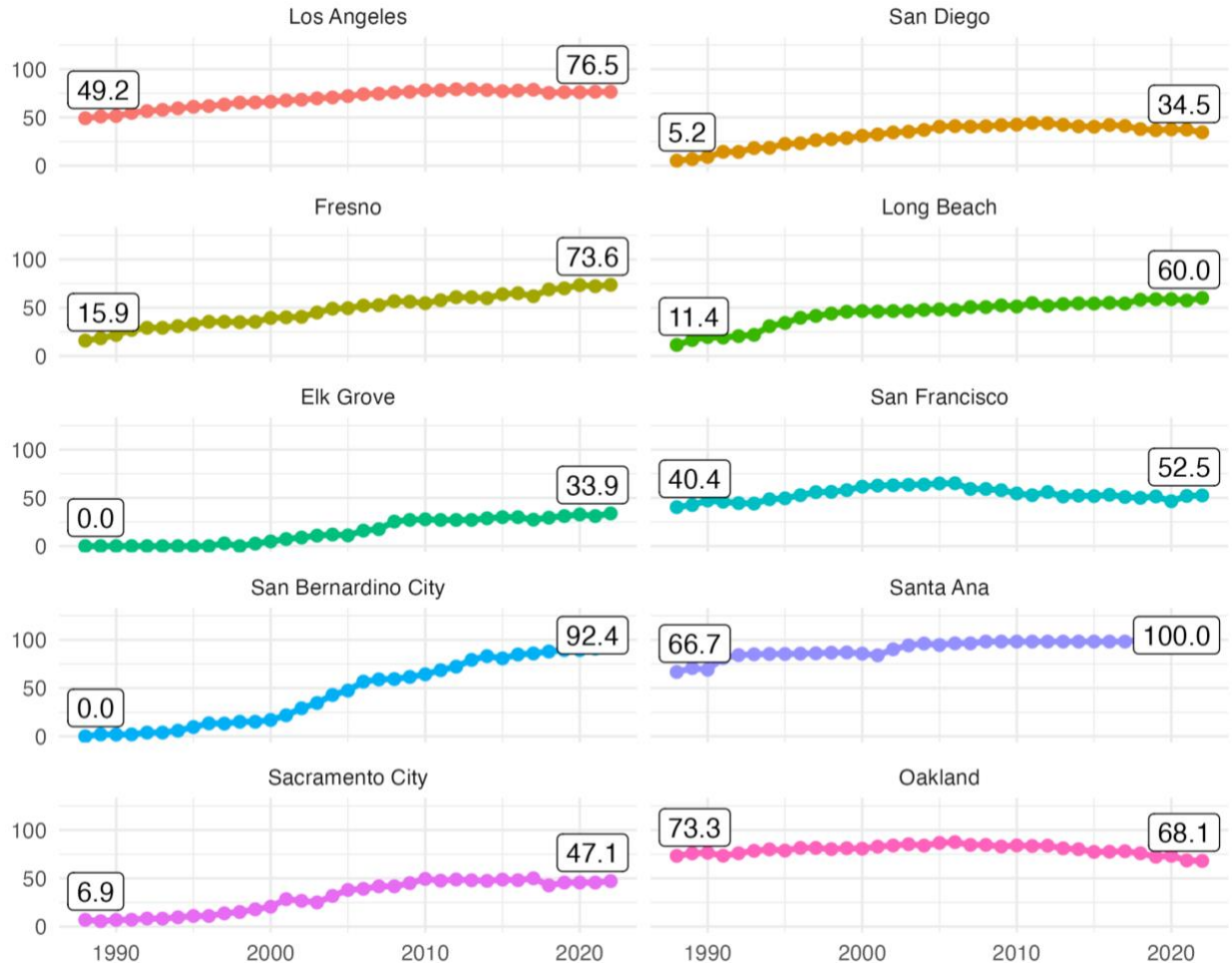


Source: The Common Core of Data.

The basic message of these findings is clear. California's problem of extreme segregation is not self-curing. The dominant trend is towards more extreme racial isolation over time, especially for Latino students.

Most of the 10 largest California districts saw an increase in their proportion of schools that were intensely segregated between the late 1980s to 2022 (Figure 4). All schools in Santa Ana Unified were intensely segregated by 2018. The proportion of San Bernadino City schools that were intensely segregated went up dramatically, from 0% to 92%. Among the largest districts Oakland, which was the most intensely segregated in 1990, experienced a decline in this percentage, possibly reflecting the intense gentrification of what had been a low-income city. San Francisco and Los Angeles experienced massive gentrification, as did all the major cities in the state with differing impacts on school segregation.

Figure 4: Percent of Intensely Segregated Schools, California's Largest Districts, 1988–2022

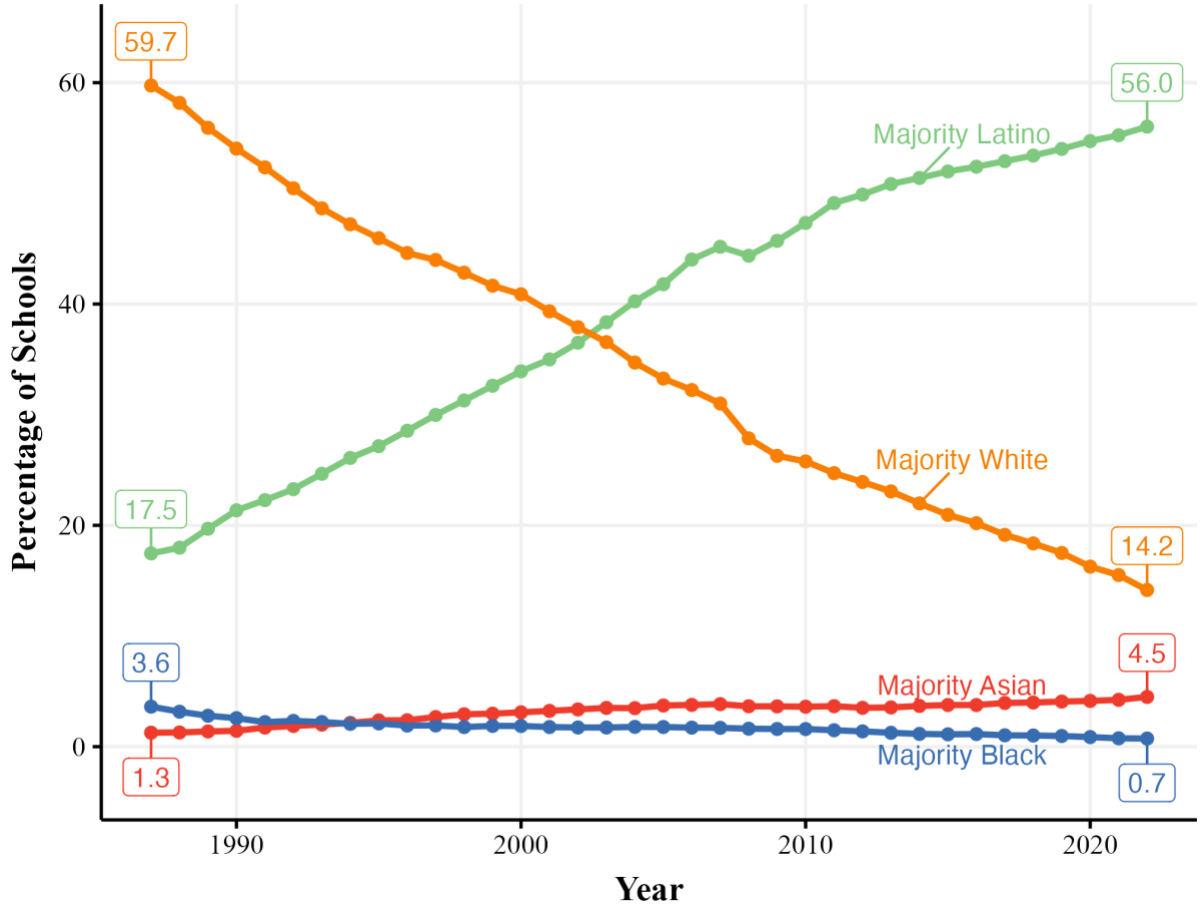


Source: The Common Core of Data.

Single-race Schools in a Multicultural California

In the 34 years between 1988 and 2022, the share of California schools with a majority of White students plummeted from 60% to 14%, while the share of schools that were majority Latino grew from one-sixth to more than half (Figure 5). As of 2022, less than a twentieth of the schools had a majority of Asians, and there were few majority-Black schools, less than 1% of the state's schools. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Black Power movement featured Black control of all-Black schools as a major solution (Hoover, 1992; Rickford, 2016). Now, however, most of California's Black students attend schools with a large Latino majority and a small share of Black students.

Figure 5: Share of Schools That Are Majority Single Race, 1988–2022



Source: The Common Core of Data.

There were, of course, well-known historically Black schools, but the massive international migrations of the last half century brought very large numbers of Latinos into previously Black neighborhoods, and there was significant Black suburbanization and movement to other states (Kaplan, 2022). Only 4.7% of Black students in California attended schools in 2022 where more than 50% of the student population was Black. Far more Black students attended schools where a majority of students were Latinx. In 2022, 58.7% of Black students in California attended schools where more than 50% of the student population was Latinx. Asians and Latinos were the only groups increasingly attending schools where their group was the majority. There has been very little research or policy attention to the impact on Black students of their isolation in high-poverty Latino

schools or on the need for training of teachers and staff to foster positive race relations in such schools.

Unequal Opportunities by Race and Social Class: Double Segregation

Economically powerful families disproportionately obtain positive schooling and life outcomes. Given the highly unequal income and wealth distributions by race, the large majority of those economically advantaged families are Asian and White. Minoritized students disproportionately experience household poverty and attend school with students from poor households, which is associated with lower academic achievement, struggling peer groups, and more limited educational offerings. Indeed, much of the variation in test scores across race associated with racial segregation is related to differences in the socioeconomic characteristics of schools. In a recent study, Fahle et al. (2020) concluded, "racial segregation appears to be harmful because it concentrates minority students in high-poverty schools, which are, on average, less effective than lower-poverty schools" (p. 1). They must deal with the fewer opportunities and resources of families and neighborhoods of color. This section provides an updated high-level summary of double segregation by race and class (for a more thorough treatment see, e.g., Orfield et al., 2012).

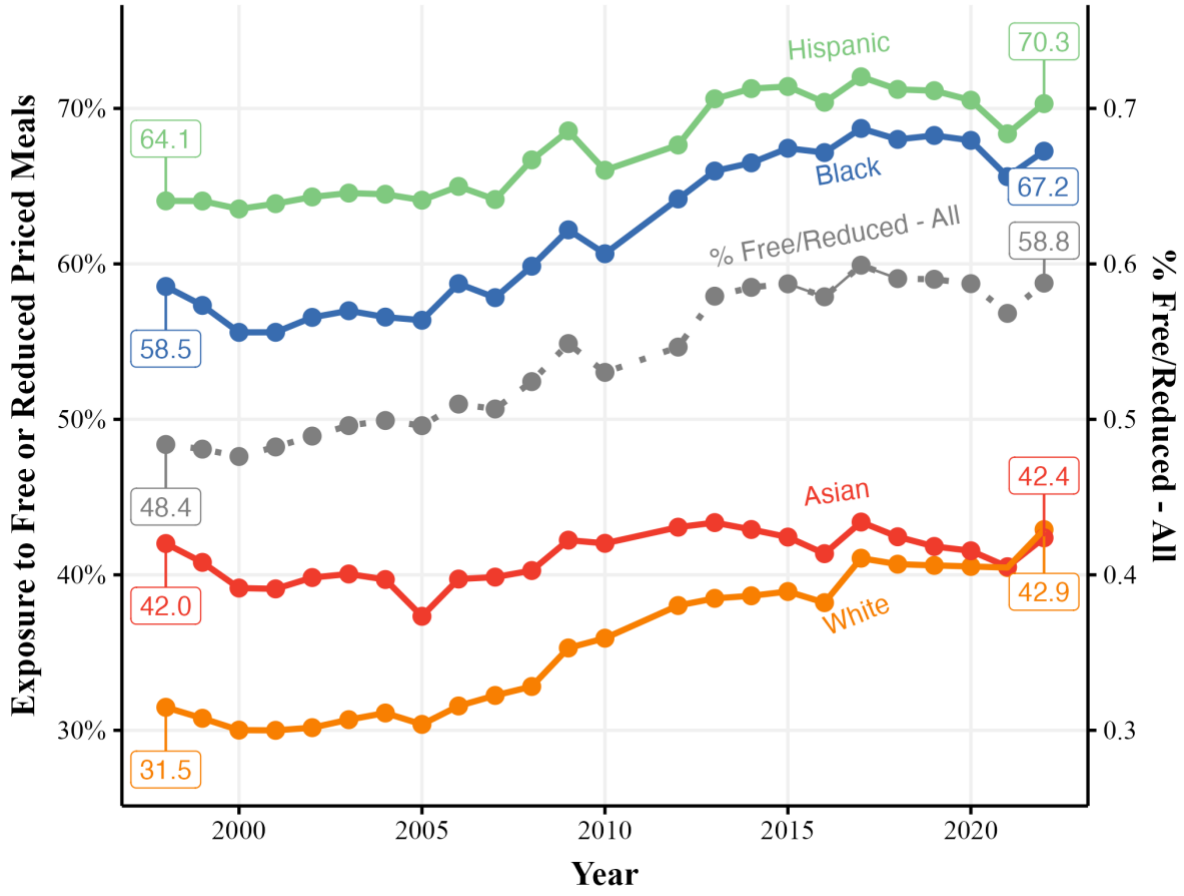
A racial structure by income and wealth in the United States has remained relatively steady for more than 70 years according to several studies (Kuhn et al., 2020; Reich, 2017), but clearly racial inequality in economic position has been a feature for centuries with slavery representing a nearly total economic imbalance. In 2023, both non-Hispanic White and Asian children under 18 had poverty rates of roughly 1 in 10, Latino and Black children had a rate of 22% and 25% respectively (more than 2 in 10), and American Indian/Alaska Native children had rates of 25% and 29% respectively (nearly 3 in 10; U.S. Census Bureau, 2024). This inequality is important because, in addition to measures of median income, measures of poverty consistently predict educational outcomes, including racial achievement gaps (Michelmore & Dynarski, 2017; Reardon, 2011, 2021;

Rothstein, 2004). These unequal racial-economic positions, combined with a multitude of studies concluding family resources significantly influence student and school outcomes, are thus important facets of school segregation. The association between test scores and the concentration of high-income and White and Asian students in schools is particularly noteworthy. High-poverty schools tend to have less experienced teachers.

We examined the proportion of a school that was qualified for free or reduced priced meals, which is often used as a measure of poverty.[7] A clear finding over time is the consistency of a society where race and class inequalities overlap: Whites and Asians at the top, and Latinos and Blacks at the bottom. The correlations between White/Asian and higher income enrollment were positive, while the Black plus Hispanic relationship to higher income enrollment was negative. Whites and Asians attended schools with higher income students. One notable change over time was the increasing Asian concentration in higher income schools over the 24 years studied, increasing the inequality. Schools that serve the professional-managerial systematically facilitate valuable parent-school relationships, offer more rigorous pre-collegiate coursework, and reinforce pipelines to higher education—advantages that sustain structural inequality and limit access for marginalized students (Handwerk et al., 2008; Lareau, 2011). These middle- and upper-class schools are strongly connected to networks of opportunity (Carter & Welner, 2012).

[7] Note that qualification for free and reduced priced meals is 1) an imprecise measure of poverty or low income and includes families up to 185% of the federal poverty guidelines; 2) categorical and thus obscures variation across many levels of income; 3) measured with noise, in part because of changes related to the Community Eligibility Provision; and 4) an incomplete measure of socioeconomic position because it does not include wealth, education, and other factors of economic position that are connected to schooling. Nonetheless, it is one of the only measures of economic position available over a long period of time and in many schools, so it is analyzed here.

Figure 6: Student Exposure to Poorer Students, 1998–2022



Source: The Common Core of Data.
Note. Higher income is defined here as not qualifying for free or reduced priced meals. No imputation was used to correct missing data. Extreme values for free + reduced priced lunch were excluded by using a conservative rubric of 4 times above or below the interquartile range within each school (i.e., outlier thresholds were determined individually for each school using the data within schools across years). Further, a large portion of FRPM data for California in the year 2011 was missing and thus 2011 was excluded. The *% Free/Reduced – All* dotted line is the sum of those qualifying for FRL divided by the sum of total enrollment.

Figure 6 presents long-term trends of exposure to poor students by race. The measure of poorer students is the proportion reported as below a commonly used measure of poverty in education research: free or reduced priced meal eligibility. White, Black, and Latino students saw increasing exposure to students in poverty while the typical Asian student saw almost no change from 1998 to 2022. Black and Latinx students were more likely to be in schools with poorer students than White and Asian students. In 2022, the average Latinx student attended a school that had

70.3% of students qualifying for free or reduced priced meals. Similarly, the average Black student attended a school with 67.2% poor students. The average Asian and White student both attended schools with two-fifths students in poverty.

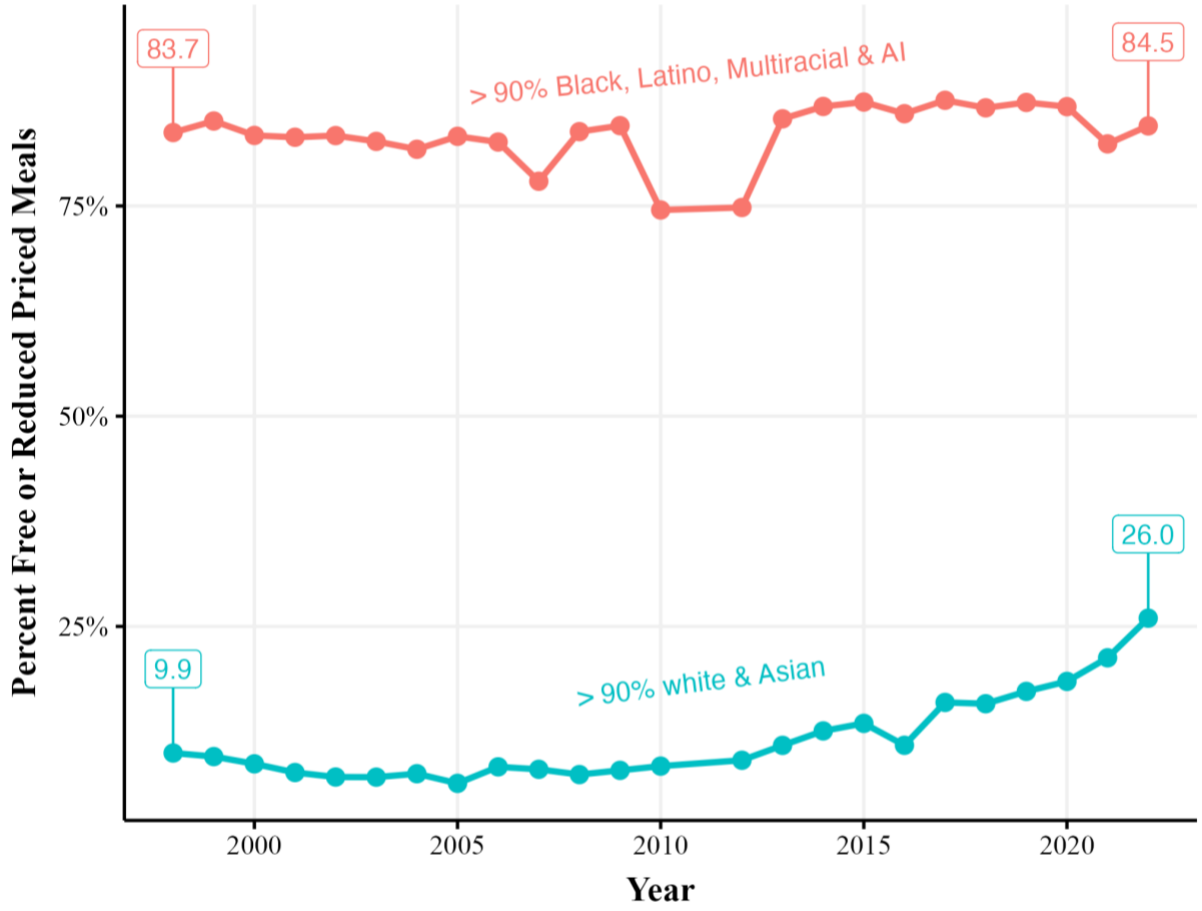
There was an increase in poverty rates over the period studied. From 1998 to 2022, the percent of all students who qualified for free or reduce priced meals (FRPM) increased 10.4 percentage points from 48.4% to 58.8% (see dotted line).[8] The correlation between racial concentration and poverty concentration increased more for Asian American students than other racial groups, but was virtually unchanged for Black students and fell slightly for Latino and White students (down 0.04 and 0.09, respectively, see Appendix). For all the years examined, the correlation among racial and higher income concentration was highest for Whites.

The poverty rate was far higher in schools with greater than 90% underrepresented minority students (Black, Latino, Multiracial & American Indian) than in schools that were greater than 90% White and Asian (Fig. 7). In 2022, 84.5% of students in high-URM schools were reported as qualifying for free or reduced priced meals. In schools with greater than 90% White and Asian students, the comparable statistic was 26.0% (compared to 31.3% nationally). The poverty rate in overwhelmingly URM schools was more than three times higher than in overwhelmingly White and Asian schools. The trend of significantly higher poverty in intensely segregated URM schools was evident in all years studied. However, the gap in poverty rates decreased over the last two decades, mostly due to an increase in low-income status in intensely Asian and White schools and partly due to a one-year drop in the poverty rate from 2020 to 2021 in high-URM schools when there were deep pandemic-era subsidies for poor families. Intensely segregated schools by race and class

[8] The system for categorizing FRPM changed over time, including with the introduction of the Community Eligibility Provision in 2014-15, which enabled many schools with significant low-income enrollment to provide *all* students free lunch and that is related to some of the increase in the observed rate (Koedel & Parsons, 2021).

enrolled, in 2022, about one-third of all Black students (31%) and an even higher proportion of Latino students (41%).

Figure 7: Comparing School Poverty in Intensely Segregated Schools, 1998–2022



Source: The Common Core of Data.
Note. American Indian is abbreviated AI. Further, a large portion of FRL data for California in the year 2011 was missing and thus 2011 was excluded. The multiracial category was sparsely reported before 2011 and not reported prior to 2008, so interpretation across this period should be done with caution.

Sharing Schools: Measures of Contact Across Race

In California, segregation took various forms. For example, our analysis found that 776 schools in 2022 enrolled less than 1% White students. In a very diverse society these are near apartheid levels of separation. Exposure statistics measure the amount of contact between racial

groups.[9] Figure 8 displays information about racial exposure in schools to various racial groups, in addition to the racial composition in California for comparison over the last three decades: 1990 to 2022.

Overall levels of segregation are high. Whites, Blacks, Latinos, and Asians were disproportionately exposed to their own group. For example, in 2022, the average White student attended a school with 39.7% White students, the average Black student attended a school with 14.7% Black students, and the average Latinx student attend a school with 69.8% Latinx students. Asians were in schools with equal shares of Asians and Latinos.

Segregation is a fundamental dimension of U.S. educational history. In 2022, California students were highly isolated from White students: the typical black student attended a school with 14.1% White students and the typical Latino student enrolled in a school with 13.5% White students. In no other state did Latino and Black students have so little contact with White students (Orfield & Pfleger, 2024).

Asian students were more likely than Black and Latino students to attend school with White students averaging 19.2%, not far from the statewide White proportion. The typical White student attended a school with 39.7% White students, nearly double the share of Whites in California schools.

Over the last 30 years segregation changed significantly. The typical Black student in 2022 attended a school with about half as many White students than in 1990 (14.1% White in 2022 vs. 27.5% White in 1990). The typical White student attended a school with more Latino students in 2022 than 30 years earlier but not with more Black students. Asian students over this period had half as many White fellow students (38.0% to 19.2%). The typical Latino moved from a school with

[9] Perhaps it would be more accurate to describe exposure statistics as *potential* contact, because students who attend the same school do not necessarily spend time together.

Figure 8: Racial Composition of Schools Attended by the Typical Student of Each Race: 1990 and 2022

Source: The Common Core of Data.
Note. Percentages do not sum to 100 due to the exclusion of American Indian and multiracial students for comparisons, although these racial groups are included in the t_i term (see Appendix).

27.6% White students in 1990 to a school with 13.5% White students in 2022. As White schoolmates declined for all groups between 1990 and 2022, contact with Latinos rose for all, as the Latino share of total enrollment grew from 34.4% to 55.9%. The typical experience of White students in 1990 was to attend a majority-White school, whereas in 2022 White students attended school with a majority of non-White classmates. This was a period of fundamental change in the composition of California schools.

Exposure statistics by themselves based on school-level data tell us little specific about the quality of interactions or experiences that students have with other racial groups. The benefits of interracial learning that come from integration, such as prejudice reduction, have been found where racial groups share the same schools. A basic goal of the desegregation struggle was to provide richer opportunities for groups that had been excluded from White schools with their better resources, opportunities, reputations, and connections. Children have more opportunity to learn how to live and work across racial lines in diverse schools. In California, children often cannot reap the benefits of integration.

White and Asian students disproportionately attended school together as did Latinx and Black students (Figure 9). In 2022, the typical student of the combined White and Asian group attended a school with 52.3% White and Asian students. However, the typical student of the combined Black and Latino group attended a school with just 21.6% White and Asian.

If we look at California's 25 largest districts, only four now have at least a third of White students and most have less than an eighth. There are limited possibilities for integrated student experiences with White classmates in most of these systems. To have any significant educational experience attending well-resourced schools with White, Asian, or middle-class children, Black and Latino students in such districts would often have to cross district boundaries.

Figure 9: Racial Composition of Schools Attended by the Typical Student of Combined Racial Groups: 1990 and 2022

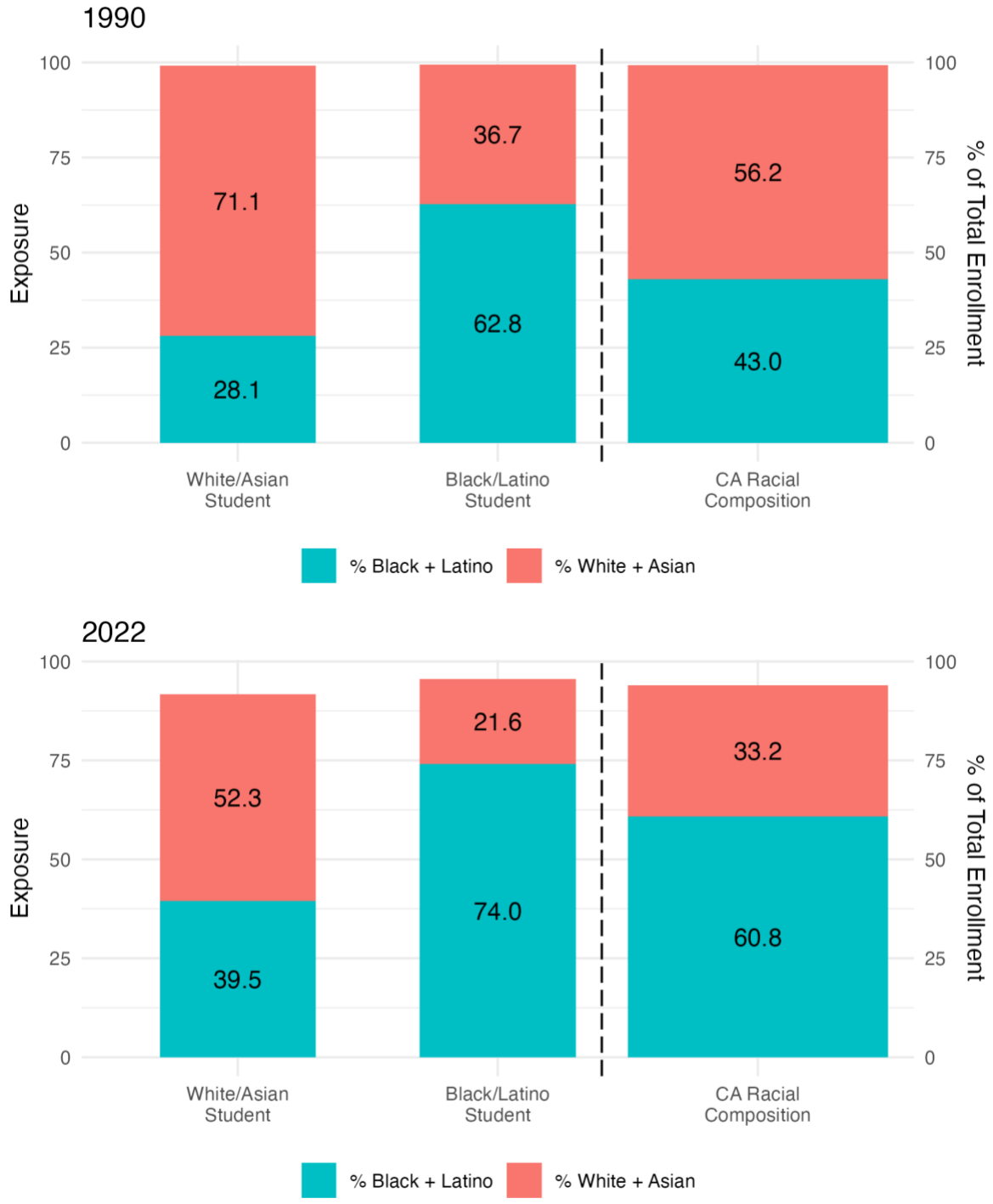


Table 2: Lowest Black plus Latino Exposure to White plus Asian, 25 Largest Districts 2022

Rank	District	Black + Latino Exposure to White + Asian Students	District Percentage of White + Asian Students
1	Montebello	1.7	1.9
2	Santa Ana	3.0	3.1
3	San Bernardino City	6.0	6.2
4	Fontana	6.7	7.1
5	Moreno Valley	8.7	8.9
6	Los Angeles	10.3	15.7
7	Stockton	15.4	17.3
8	Kern High	16.3	21.3
9	Oakland	16.9	23.3
10	Fresno	18.3	19.2
11	Riverside	19.5	22.3
12	Long Beach	20.3	23.5
13	Sweetwater Union High	21.4	23.6
14	Mt. Diablo	27.3	36.6
15	San Diego	28.6	39.0
16	Corona-Norco	33.4	37.2
17	Garden Grove	33.8	43.4
18	Sacramento City	36.1	39.0
19	San Francisco	37.2	51.9
20	Clovis	49.5	52.0
21	Elk Grove	50.1	52.8
22	Capistrano	53.1	61.1
23	San Juan	55.1	59.0
24	Poway	63.9	68.8
25	Fremont	69.5	78.3

Source: CCD.

Contextualizing Exposure to White and Asian Students in California

California overall, in 2021–22, was the state with the lowest Black exposure to White statistic: 14.6 (Orfield & Pfleger, 2024). However, California also had one of the smallest proportions of White students (21.2%), so low Black-White exposure is partly due to a low

proportion of White students. Ranking the 25 largest school districts by the lowest Black/Latino exposure to White/Asian students (Table 2) tells us which districts are least likely to have Black and Latino students in contact with White and Asian students. School segregation is often higher among districts within a metro than within a single district. A statistic that considers the quantity of White and Asian students attending schools with Black and Latino students, is the difference between the share of that racial pairing and the exposure statistic.[10] California ranks less extreme on this difference statistic.

Within California, there was significant variation in exposure to White and Asian students. For example, in Montebello the typical Black/Latino student was in a school that was 1.7% White/Asian. Yet in Fremont Black and Latino students were typically in a school that was 69.5% White and Asian. These exposure statistics generally follow the proportion of enrollment that was White and Asian ($r = 0.988$), suggesting that much of the exposure variation—and segregation—was between districts.

Variation in Segregation Across Cities, Suburbs, Towns, and Rural Areas

The largest number of schools in California are in the suburbs (3,660) and, though the population is overwhelmingly metropolitan, there are thousands of schools in smaller cities, towns, and rural communities. The vast areas of Latino and Black residential segregation developed historically in the large older cities. It is in the schools outside the cities that there is the most racial diversity and interracial contact. Both Black and Latino students have the most contact with Whites in towns and rural areas, though, even there, the average share of Whites is only about 25–30%. Rural California is the only region where there are three-tenths White students.

[10] More complex approaches are also available for interpreting segregation trends over time that are accompanied by compositional changes (e.g., Fiel, 2013)

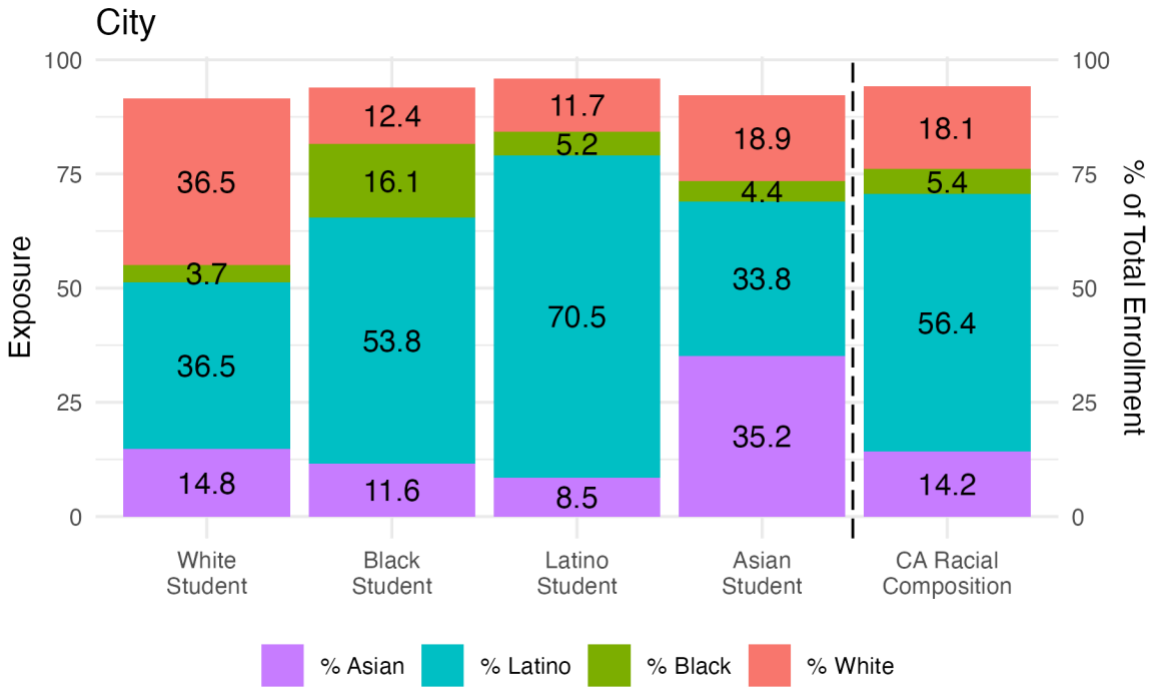
Table 3: Schools by Locale Type in California, 2022–23

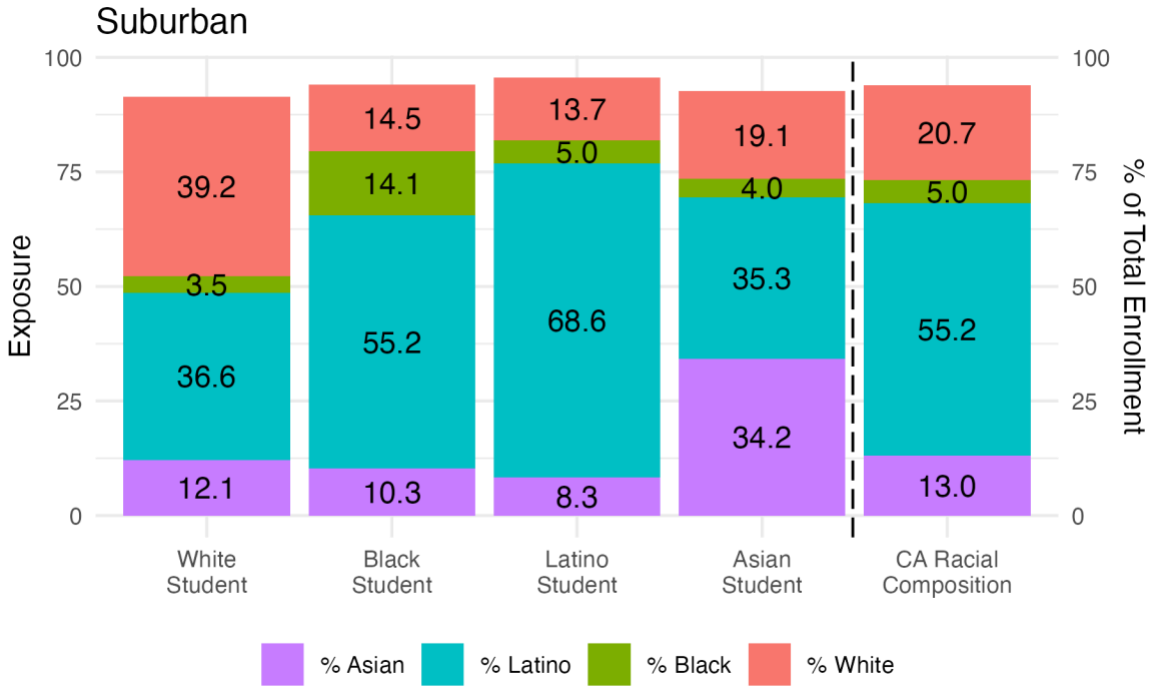
Locale Type	Number of Schools	Frequency
Suburban	3,660	0.41
City	3,541	0.40
Rural	1,013	0.11
Town	637	0.07

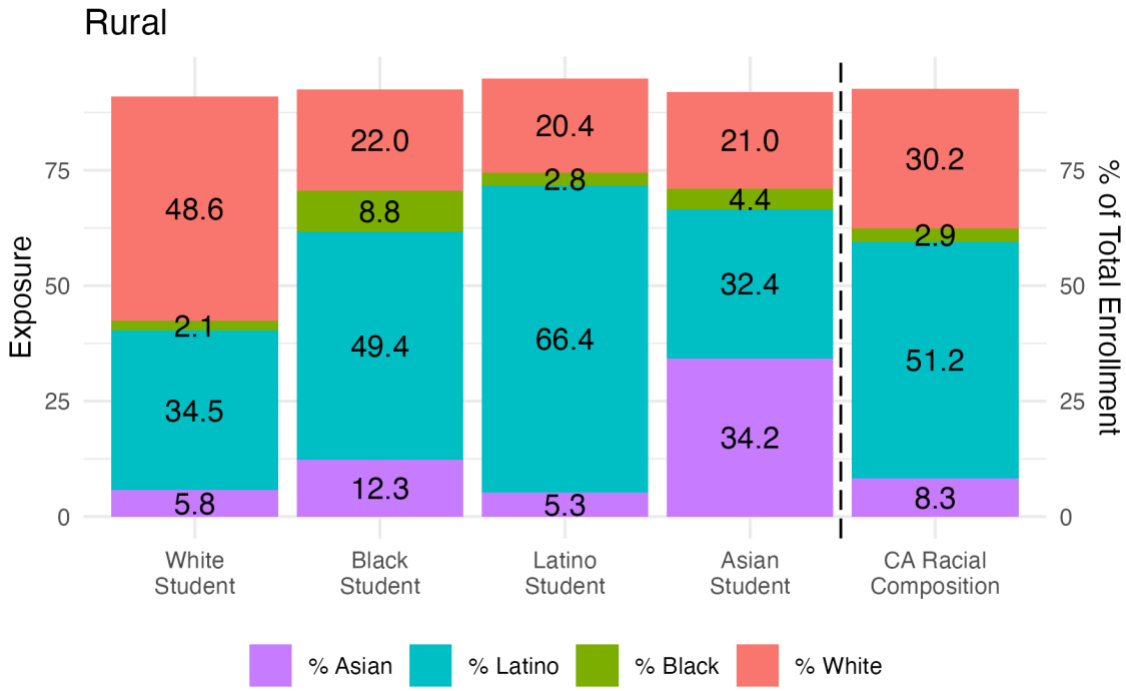
Sources: The Common Core of Data and EDGE.
Note. See National Center for Education Statistics (2022) for locale definitions. Explore variation in locales in California with an interactive map.

Using the 2022–23 locale designation for each school found in the EDGE data provided by NCES, schools were designated as one of four locale types: city, suburban, town, and rural. These locale types vary from urbanized cities with large populations to remote rural places that are more than 25 miles from an urbanized area (more details here). The number and proportion of schools by these locale types is provided in Table 3 and exposure statistics by locale are provided in Figure 10.

Figure 10: Racial Composition of Schools Attended by the Typical Student of Each Race, by Locale, 2022




Suburban
Exposure
% of Total Enrollment
100
75
50
25
0
39.2
3.5
36.6
12.1
14.5
14.1
55.2
10.3
13.7
5.0
68.6
8.3
19.1
4.0
35.3
34.2
20.7
5.0
55.2
13.0
White Student
Black Student
Latino Student
Asian Student
CA Racial Composition
% Asian
% Latino
% Black
% White


Rural
Exposure
% of Total Enrollment
75
50
25
0
48.6
2.1
34.5
5.8
22.0
8.8
49.4
12.3
20.4
2.8
66.4
5.3
21.0
4.4
32.4
34.2
30.2
2.9
51.2
8.3
White Student
Black Student
Latino Student
Asian Student
CA Racial Composition
% Asian
% Latino
% Black
% White

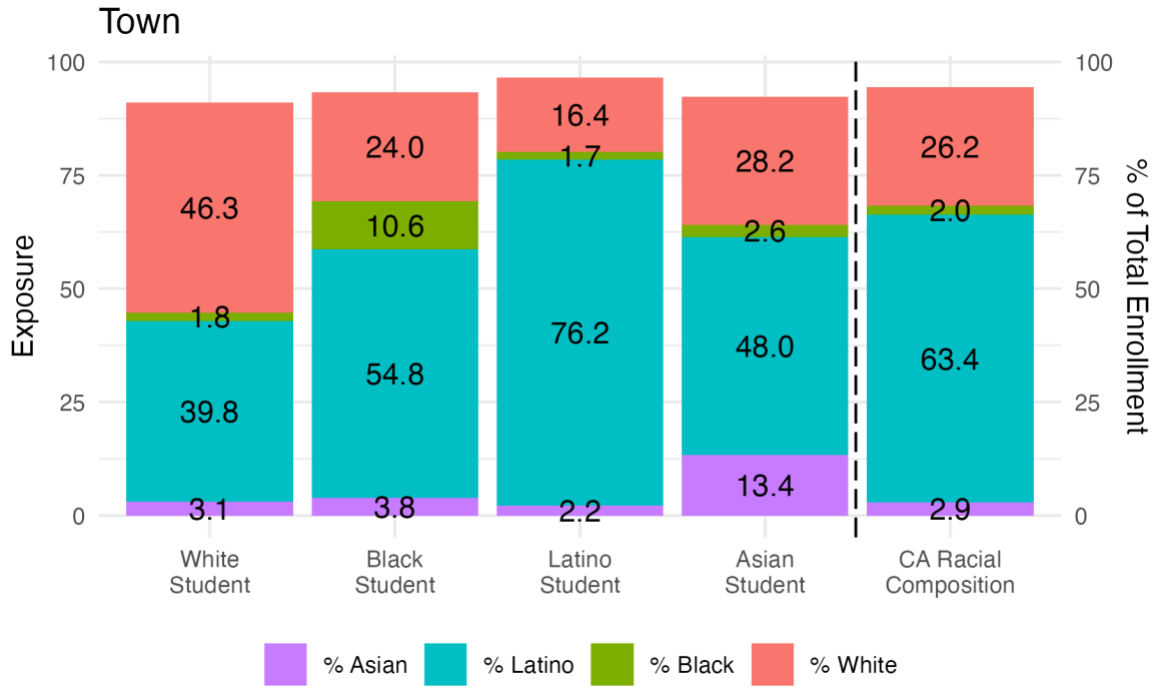
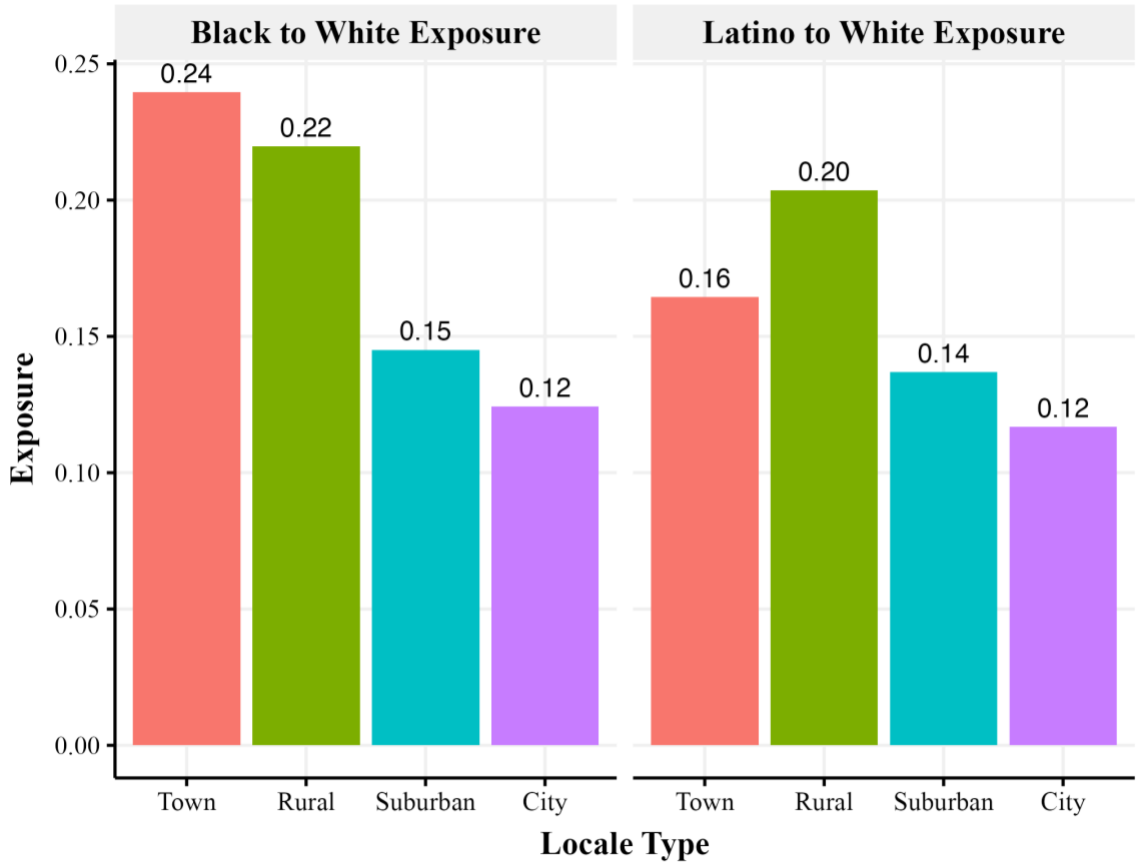


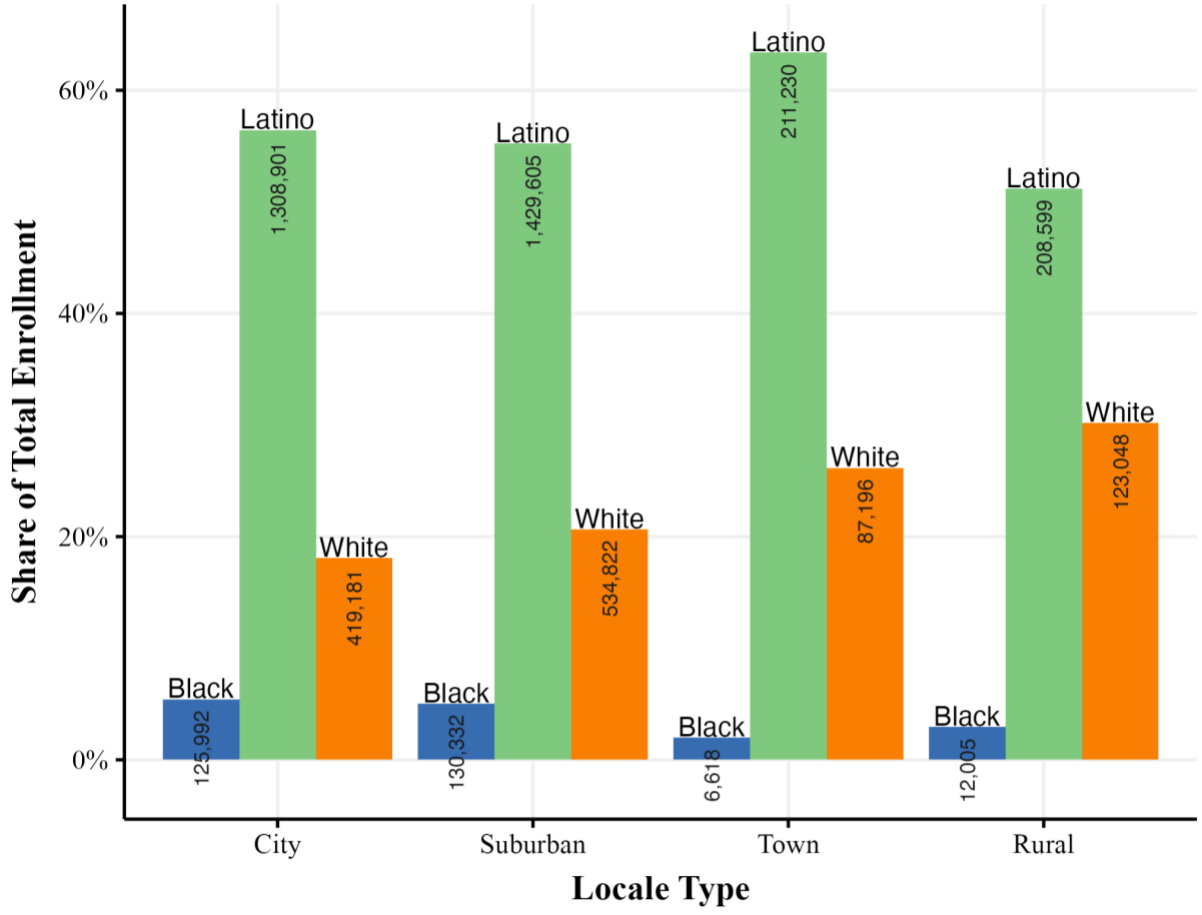
Figure 11: Exposure to White Students, by Locale Type, 2022–23



Sources: The Common Core of Data and EDGE.

Black students have the highest exposure to White students in schools in towns and the lowest in cities (Figure 11). Latinx students are most exposed to White students in rural schools and least in cities. In rural schools, the average Black student was in a school with about 25% White students, whereas in city schools the average Black student's school was approximately 13% White. For Latinx students, the comparable statistics are in a more compressed range: 21% in rural schools and 12% in city schools. Thus, although similar in some regards (less exposed to Whites in suburbs and cities, and more exposed in towns and cities), Latino and Black exposure to Whites did not follow the exact same trend across locale types. Notably, Latino exposure to White students is highest in rural areas of California.

Figure 12: Racial Composition by Locale, 2022–23



Sources: The Common Core of Data and EDGE.
Note. Within-locale proportions do not sum to 100 because denominators include all racial groups.

Rural areas have the highest proportion of White students (Figure 12). Another explanation of the differences is that measuring segregation via exposure statistics does not fully capture the kinds and scale of racial separation that varies across location types. Without legal mandates and plans pushing toward integration, schools default to reflecting residential segregation, and the nature of residential segregation has changed with multiracial immigration, Black movement from central cities, and fair housing laws.[11] Large-scale gentrification in all of California's major cities is the latest demographic change that could affect these patterns over time. Approximately 81% of California's public schools in 2022 were in cities and suburbs (Table 4).

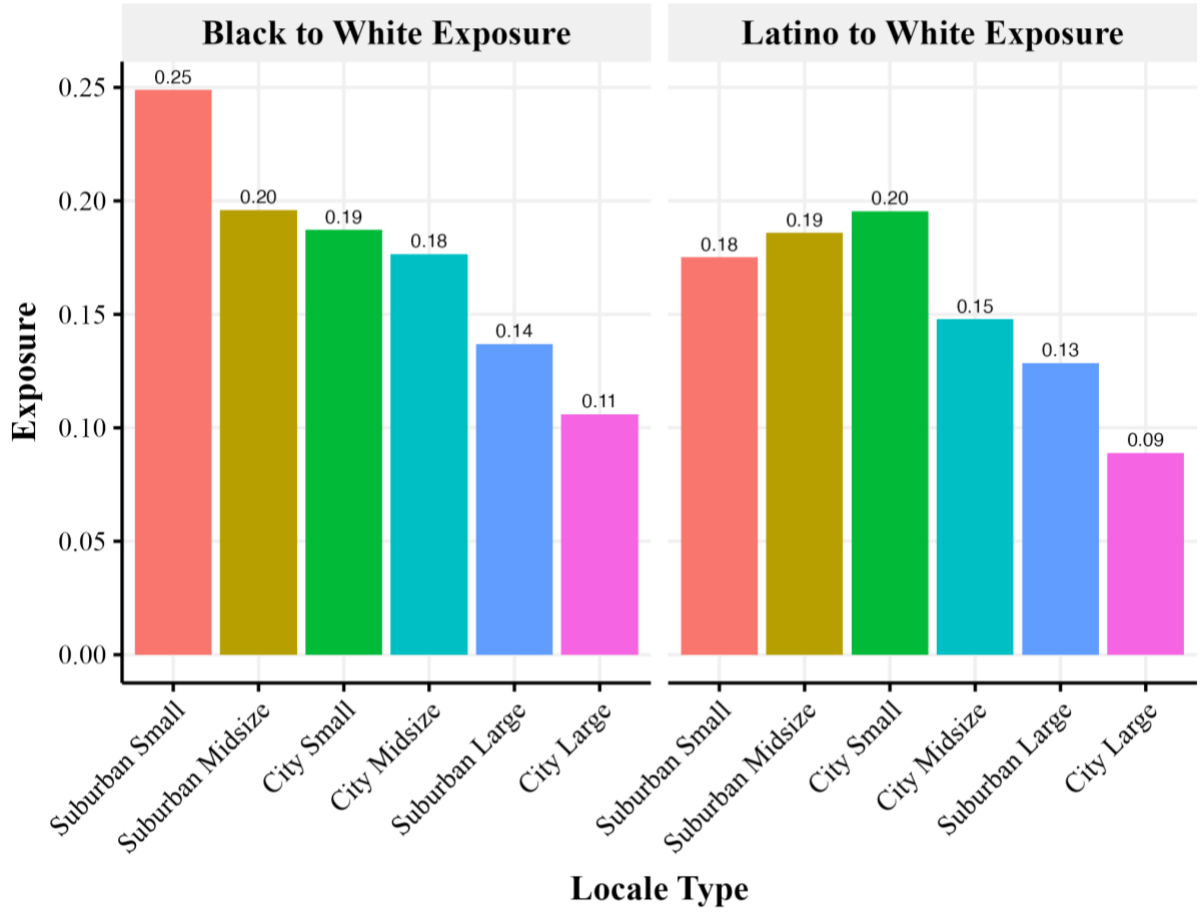
Table 4: Cities and Suburbs, Descriptive Statistics, 2022–23

Locale Type	Number of Schools	Frequency
Suburban Small	269	0.03
Suburban Midsize	317	0.04
Suburban Large	3,074	0.35
City Small	561	0.06
City Midsize	745	0.08
City Large	2,235	0.25

Sources: The Common Core of Data and EDGE.
Note. Locale definitions depend on population (small < 100k; midsize > 100k and <= 250k; large >250k) and urbanization designation. Complete definitions of the locale frame are available from the NCES (National Center for Education Statistics). Frequencies are derived out of all 12 locale types so do not sum to 1 here (as there are only 6 of 12 types). See the Appendix for additional analysis.

[11] See Orfield & Frankenberg (2008) for an expanded treatment of this argument.

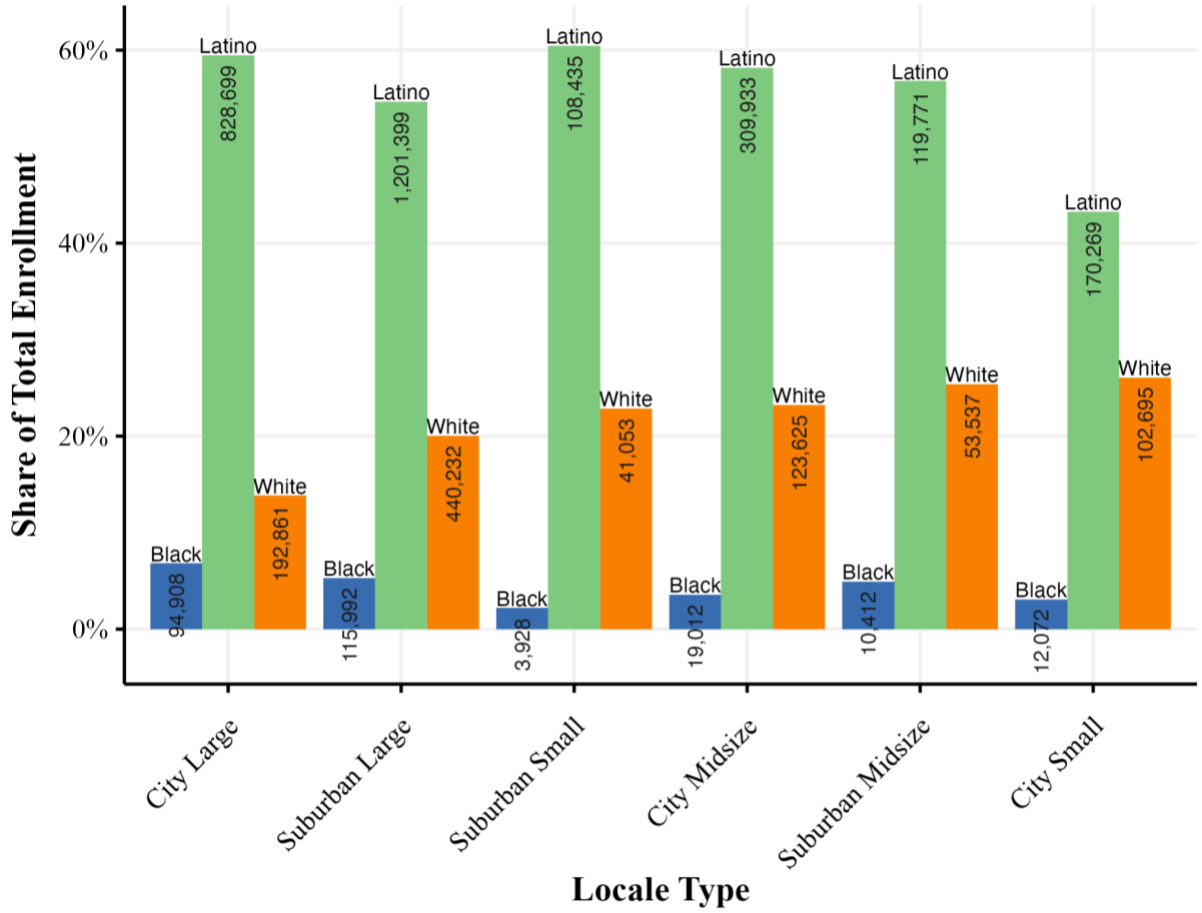
Figure 13: Exposure to White Students, in Cities and Suburbs, 2022–23



Sources: The Common Core of Data and EDGE.

There was variation not just across locale types, but across different sizes of those locales (Figure 13). Black and Latino exposure to White students was higher in the small suburbs than in large suburbs. Cities had a similar trend across locale size. The midsize locales fell in between. This trend across locale size was similar to the trend in the U.S. (Orfield & Pfleger, 2024).

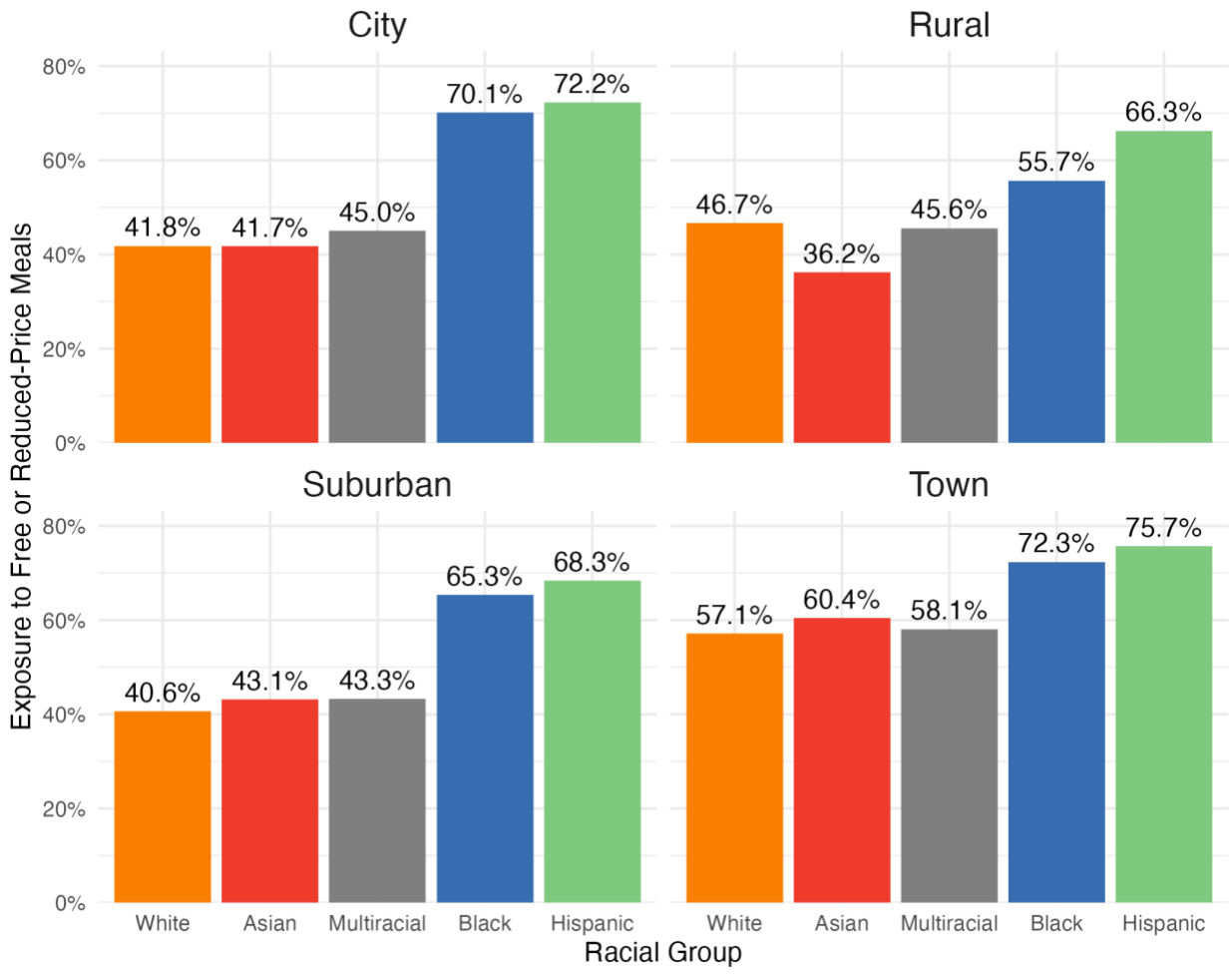
Figure 14: Racial Composition by Large City and Suburb, 2022–23



Sources: The Common Core of Data and EDGE.
Note. Within-locale proportions do not sum to 100 because denominators include all racial groups.

Part of the variation in exposure to White students is related to differences in the proportion of White students in each locale (Figure 14). The Latinx share was similar across most of the different sized communities in cities and suburbs, with small cities as a bit of an outlier.

Figure 15: Student Exposure to Poorer Students, by Locale, 2022



Sources: The Common Core of Data and EDGE.

The typical students of each race presented in Figure 15 attended schools with more students in poverty in towns than in the three other geographic areas studied. The typical Latinx and the typical Black student were exposed to higher poverty in schools in towns and cities than in rural and suburban areas. What these charts show is that the level of segregation differs significantly by the size and composition of the metro or town populations. Integration plans and policies must take those differences into consideration and big city students are likely to be very highly segregated in the absence of city–suburban collaboration.

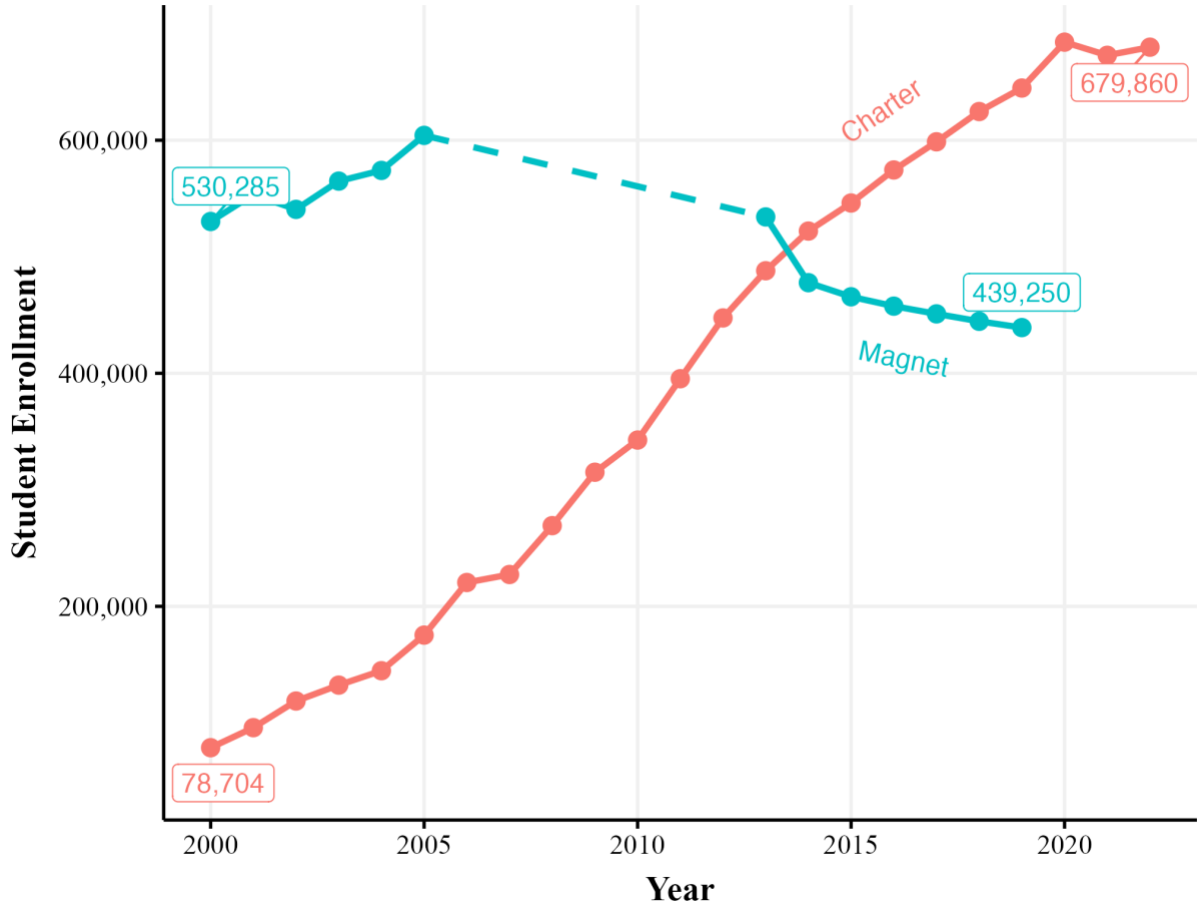
Has Choice Made a Difference? Magnet and Charter School Segregation

Schools of choice were rare before the 1970s. Magnet schools emerged as a major alternative in the '70s, often created as part of desegregation plans to provide special programs and recruitment to promote voluntary integration. Most of the desegregation plans were dissolved in the 1990s after the U.S. Supreme Court's *Board of Ed. of Oklahoma City v. Dowell* decision ended long-standing desegregation requirements. The Supreme Court blocked voluntary plans using race conscious admissions to create lasting diversity in magnet schools, in 2007, so many have lost their original plans (*Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1*, 2007). Charters emerged in the 1990s, not connected to desegregation and hoping that autonomous schools with public funding would offer superior education. Magnet schools received significant federal funding in the 1970s when there was a federal desegregation assistance program. Charter schools were heavily funded and promoted by both Bush administrations and the Clinton and Obama administrations. Our analysis shows that both magnets and charters are becoming more racially isolated. A switch in California dropping state school integration enforcement in the 1980s and the termination of federal court orders contributed to more segregation. California is one of the states where some magnet schools have shifted away from the primary original mission of integration sometimes serving students who score high on tests and have above-average school histories. For example, Los Angeles Unified has 56 magnet programs that are "gifted" or "highly gifted," some of which have admission requirements, such as a 99.9 percentile rank on an "Intellectual Ability" assessment (Los Angeles Unified School District a & b, n.d.). Another example is California Academy of Math and Science in Long Beach, which lists academic requirements such as minimum GPAs in middle school along with (unspecified) standardized test scores (Long Beach Unified, n.d.). This high school enrolled approx. 42% Asian students in a district that had less than 12% Asian students.[12] These "exam" schools with

[12] Note that this school lists a catchment area that includes several districts and some schools in LAUSD. Asian students make up just 13% of those districts, excluding the schools in LAUSD.

selective admission requirements may be less likely to address segregation and may indeed be associated with resegregation. In other cases, schools that were originally planned to be integrated magnets just came to reflect neighborhood racial composition.[13]

Figure 16: Charter and Magnet School Enrollment, 2000–2022



Source: Common Core of Data.
Note: The CCD is an authoritative source of data on public schools, but as others have noted (Wang & Herman, 2017), the magnet designations in these data are incomplete. Magnet enrollment in 2006, 2009, 2020, and 2021 is missing because no schools with magnet designations were reported in California for these years. Furthermore, the reported magnet enrollment in between 2005 and 2013 fluctuated downwards significantly in an anomalous fashion and these data were removed from this chart.

There were 475 magnet schools in 2019, enrolling 439,250 students (Figure 16). The number of magnet schools rose slightly, but enrollment declined: from 421 schools and 530,285 enrolled in

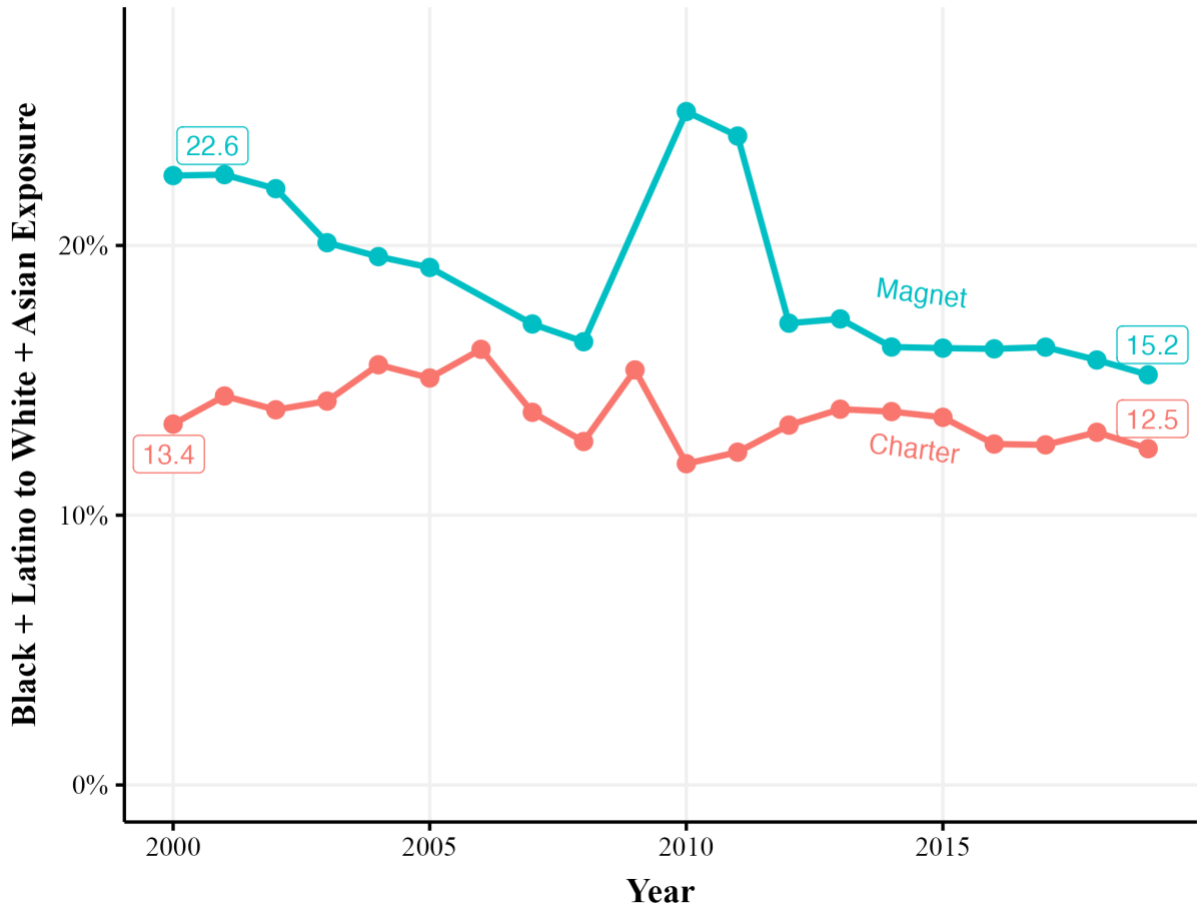
[13] There have been serious battles over admissions policies in Los Angeles in recent years (e.g., Plevin, 2024).

2000. Non-magnet and non-charter schools continued to dwarf choice-school enrollment, but charter school enrollment grew significantly. There were 1,258 charter schools in 2019, enrolling 644,798. Charter enrollment was up approximately 760% over 20 years: from 78,704 enrolled in 243 schools in 2000.

Charters physically reside inside the boundaries of a traditional school district but commonly operate independently and therefore are classified in the available data as distinct from the school district. The following analysis links charters and magnets with their geographic location to facilitate comparisons. See the Appendix for details about constructing the analytic sample, which is the basis for the subsequent magnet–charter analyses.

Magnet-Charter Results

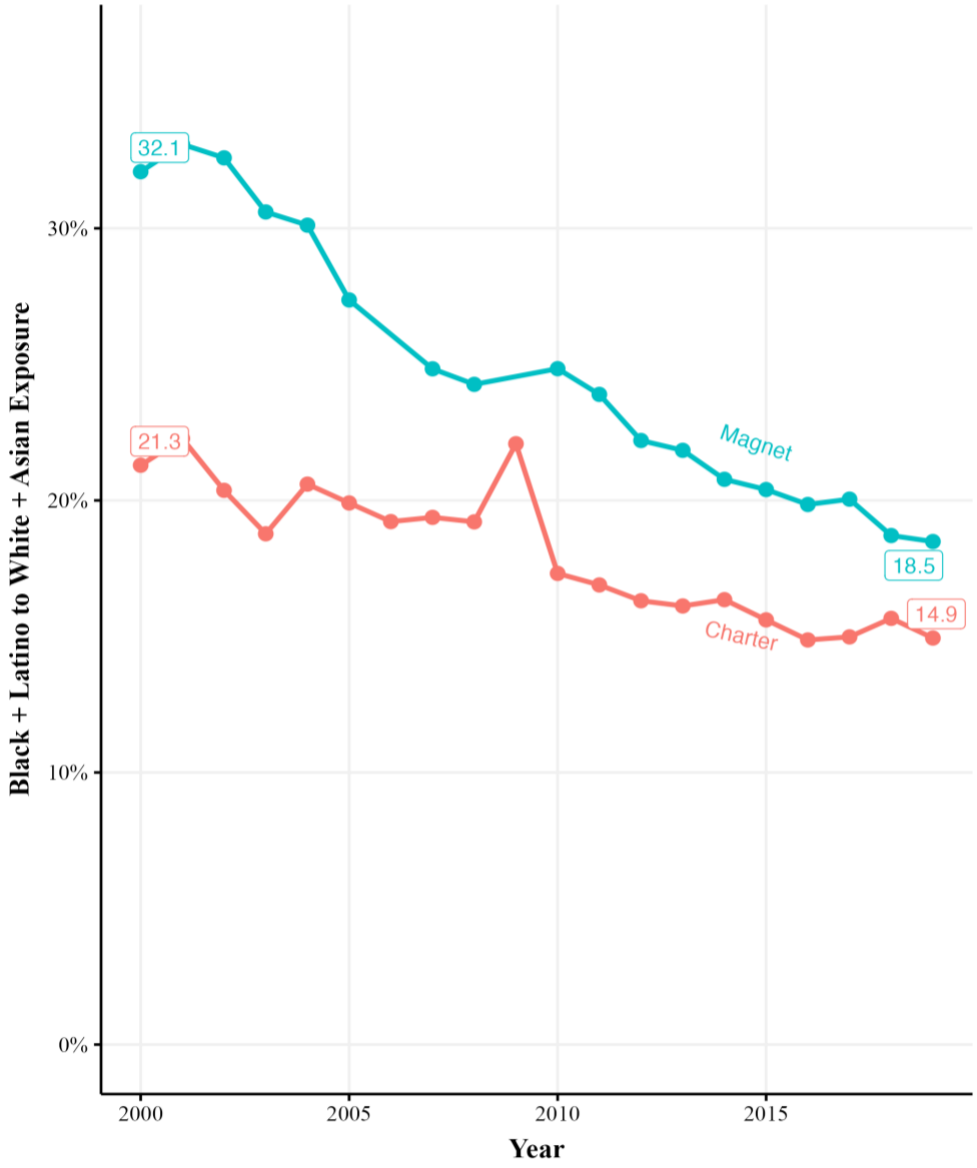
Figure 17: Exposure to White and Asian Students by Choice Type, 2000–2019



Source: The Common Core of Data.
Note: Analytic sample. Caution should be used in interpreting these trends. Peaks and valleys around 2009 may be an anomalous artifact of dirty data, especially from LAUSD. Magnet data was missing and thus excluded for some years.

The trends in Figure 17 indicate important differences in racial exposure between the two choice types. In magnet schools, the average Black and Latinx student was in a school that was 15.2% White and Asian in 2019. In charter schools, the comparable exposure statistic was slightly lower at 12.5%. Exposure to White and Asian students decreased in both choice types, but faster in magnet schools.

Figure 18: Exposure Trends in Choice Sector, Excluding Los Angeles Unified, 2000–2019



Source: The Common Core of Data.
Note: Analytic sample. Caution should be used in interpreting these trends. Peaks and valleys around 2009 may be an anomalous artifact of dirty data. There was missing magnet data for some years.

The trends in Figure 18 exclude Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). The LAUSD is a huge school district and very important for the state, but there were data problems associated with it.[14] Exposure to White and Asian students in both choice types were higher and

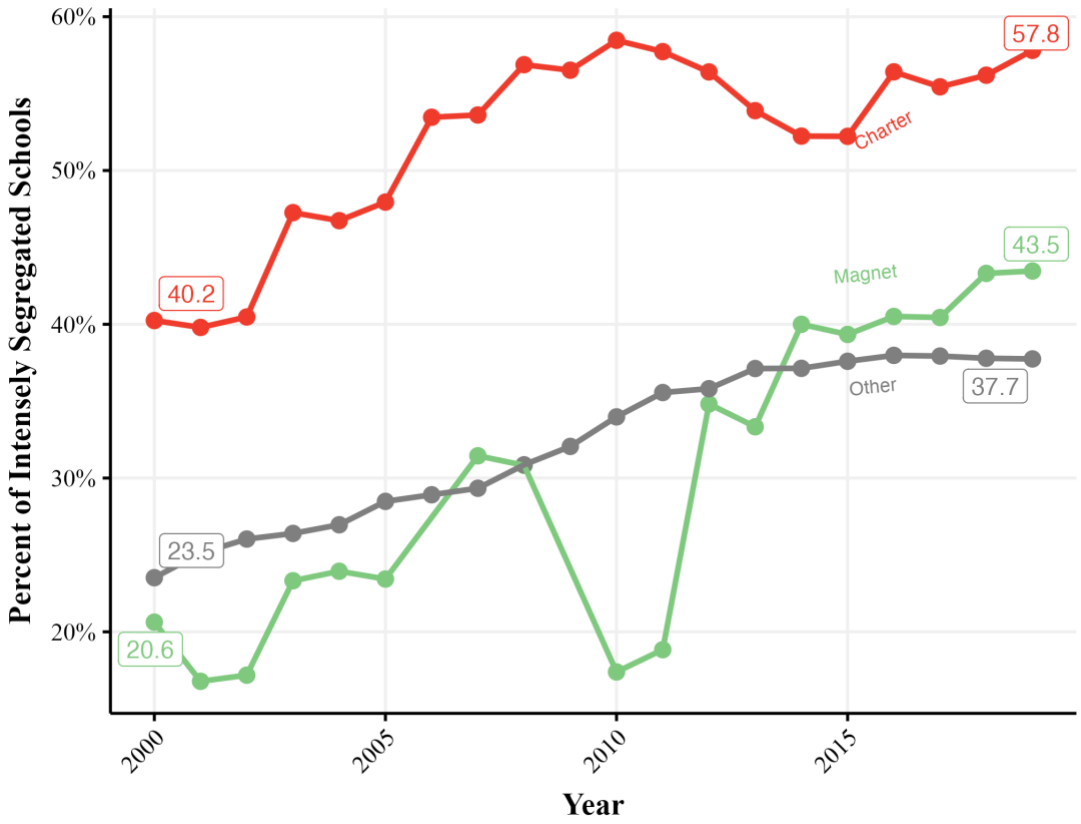
[14] For example, in 2009-2011, approximately 100 schools were not labeled as magnets although they were before and after these years.

trended downward faster over the period studied for the subset that excludes LAUSD. As with the full sample, magnet schools continued to have more exposure of Black and Latino students to White and Asian students as of 2019.

A comparison of racial compositions in magnet and charter schools is presented in Figure 29 (See Appendix). In both school types, the proportion of Black students decreased over time, but much more so in charters. This could be related to the increasing dominance of Latinos in central city districts and the large Black suburbanization. From 2000 to 2019, charter schools went from almost half Black to less than one-third black. The proportion Black in magnets decreased 3 percentage points over the same period. The proportion Latino nearly doubled in charters over 20 years, but did not change in magnet schools. White students made up a higher proportion in charters than magnets 20 years ago, but in recent years magnet schools saw a higher White enrollment.

The charter sector had the highest proportion of schools that were intensely segregated, as defined by schools that were greater than 90% Black, Latino, Multiracial, and American Indian (Figure 19). Over the last 20 years, charter schools became increasingly intensely segregated. As of 2019, 59% of charter schools in the analytic sample were intensely segregated. Magnet schools in these geographic districts were much less segregated, with 36% of them intensely segregated.

Figure 19: Percentage of Intensely Segregated Schools, Magnet vs. Charter, 2000–2019



Source: The Common Core of Data.
Note: Analytic sample. Magnet trends around 2010–11 are likely an anomalous artifact of missing magnet data.

Magnet-Charter Findings Robust to Alternative Inclusion Thresholds

The decision to focus on a subset of geographic districts with five each of charter and magnet schools was made because districts that have at least a modicum of each choice type can be considered districts that have reasonably tried each. Districts with fewer schools may not have had the opportunity to substantially implement both types of school choice. However, increasing this threshold to 10, for example, excludes several districts that are reasonable to compare but do not have that many of each type of school. Because five is largely arbitrary, we re-ran the analysis with both 2 and 10 as the minimums, which meant we expanded the number of districts to 325 and then restricted the number of districts down to 69. The basic findings held in these alternative scenarios:

Black to White exposure was higher in magnets, Latino to White exposure was higher in magnets by around 2010, and the share of magnets that were intensely segregated was lower and holding steady compared to charters, which rose for most of the last 20 years.

The basic reality is that although California has invested heavily in creating more than 1,700 publicly funded schools of choice, magnets and charters, choice has not operated in these school in recent decades to offset the state's very high level of racial segregation. Other research has shown that choice schools in various nations tend to produce high levels of segregation. Markets do not have a natural tendency toward equality or integration since families have unequal information, resources, connections, locations, and ability to provide transportation. The experiences of magnets in desegregation plans show that targeted recruitment, desegregation-serious goals, set asides, and free transportation were essential elements. Choice without equity standards is likely to further advantage the advantaged. In terms of diversity, private operators have no affirmative legal responsibility for diverse schools. Charters have no incentive to bear the added costs and complexities unless it happens to be part of the mission the charter has adopted.[15] In a society with many mechanisms and attitudes that perpetuate segregation, it takes a serious, conscious planning to change outcomes. California has made a massive investment in schools of choice in recent decades, but the real choices offered have left intense segregation largely untouched.

Unequal Routes to Graduation

Higher education is very important in preparing California's young for success in the communities of the state's future. Most students in the state try for success in college after finishing high school and employers often choose workers with college degrees. The vast majority of California's college students go to a public college in California. This is part of a huge public system

[15] For extensive discussion and data on these issues, see Fuller, Elmore, and Orfield (1996); Orfield, Frankenberg, & Associates (2013); and Domina et al. (2023).

that goes from preschool to a set of the world's strongest public research universities offering strong training in many professions at the top. The outcomes, however, are very unequal by race and class, tending to perpetuate intergenerational inequality. The Public Policy Institute of California recently reported:

> [A]mong young adults who were born in California, 58 percent of Asian Americans and 41 percent of Whites have at least a bachelor's degree, compared to 25 percent of African Americans and 20 percent of Latinos. Significant barriers with respect to college readiness, access to college, and college completion continue to lower underrepresented students' odds of obtaining college degrees…. At the same time, large shares across underrepresented groups say that a college degree is very important, according to a PPIC 2018 Statewide Survey—particularly Latinos (69%) and low-income Californians (63%). (Johnson, Rodriguez, & Cuellar Mejia, 2017).

One of the principal goals of desegregation is equalizing access to school opportunities. Where postsecondary education changes how students fare in a competitive labor market, preparation for access to the California's public colleges and universities matters. The vast majority of California students get their higher education in the three systems of public higher education: the University of California, which serves about an eighth of the students; the campuses of the California State University system, which serves about a third of the students in programs through the MA level; and the huge system of community colleges, which are widely distributed and have minimal requirements but a low percent of their students go on to a BA or higher degree. Access to BA-granting institutions is competitive both for general admissions and for special fields of study and has a prerequisite of completing the "A-G" requirements, a specified sequence of high school coursework.

Whereas the best jobs and positions of power used to be predicated on a high school diploma (Labaree, 1988), now a college diploma stands in its place: less than 10% of 17-year-olds were high school graduates in 1910 compared to nearly 90% in 2020 (U.S. Dept. of Education, n.d.).

Rates of diplomas awarded have shown a distinct racial pattern for as far back as data are available (e.g., Hauser et al., 2000; Murnane, 2013). Although Black and Latino high school graduation rates have increased faster than White graduation rates in recent years, large gaps remain (Murnane, 2013).

Racial inequalities in high school graduation, college participation, and college graduation (e.g., Zinshteyn, 2022) are persistent features of education in California. Unequal opportunities throughout the life course give rise to these unequal outcomes and this section gives a close look at the relationship between racial segregation in high schools and both graduation and completion of the prerequisites for a BA-granting public university. The primary measures are: 1) a basic high school diploma; and 2) completion of courses required for admission to California's two largest public universities.

California's Education Code sets minimum course-completion thresholds to receive a basic high school diploma, including multiple courses in English, math, science, physical education, and social studies. Additionally, students must complete at least one course in arts, world language, or career/technical education (California Department of Education, 2023c). The state minimum is 13 year-long courses, but many districts require nearly double that number to graduate. For example, San Francisco Unified's basic graduation plan requires 23 year-long courses (46 semesters/230 credits) across a broader range than the State's minimum requirements (San Francisco Unified, 2023).

The University of California and California State University campuses have different thresholds that students must meet to be admitted to those selective postsecondary institutions, but both require a set of A-G courses for entrance. Although the share of all high school students meeting the A-G course sequence requirement increased in recent years, a racial gap remains (Gao, 2021).[16]

[16] Note that some districts in the last decade have aligned their own graduation requirements to be mostly consistent with the A-G requirement (Yu et al., 2023; Yu, 2023). Although some research suggests this alignment may improve

Rates of graduation that are systematically related to the racial composition of schools is a particularly worrying trend. A relationship suggests that the opportunity to graduate is likely different depending on the race (and poverty) of students' fellow classmates. Evidence from prior research (e.g., Koedel et al., 2022) and our analysis shows a number of ways race and class composition is connected to high school graduation.

The following sections include comparisons of the most segregated regular high schools in California: the 10% of schools that enroll the highest shares of White and Asian students are compared to the 10% of schools that enroll the highest shares of underrepresented minority students.[17] Using a top 10% threshold is useful for illuminating comparisons between the most racially concentrated schools. We ran robustness checks with different thresholds to see if the basic trends favoring White and Asian schools remained apparent as we looked across different ranges of racial concentration. The basic trends continued to be observed across all measures of graduation and most measures of course taking. For example, 16 out of the 17 comparisons had the same direction of inequality when we used a 25% threshold (introductory courses per student was the exception). With an even more inclusive threshold of 50%, 14 of 17 comparisons also favored the most White and Asian schools (the exceptions included course-taking that did *not* meet A-G requirements, 9th grade English courses, and introductory courses).

Graduation Rates in the Most Segregated Schools

Schools with higher shares of Black or Latinx students had lower graduation rates.[18] The opposite trend was apparent in schools with more White and Asian students. The trends and

graduation outcomes (Yu, 2023), other research calls into question whether simply increasing graduation requirements improves learning or college outcomes (Montgomery & Allensworth, 2010).

[17] See the section titled "Graduation: Top 10% Method and Data" in the Appendix for a description of these sets of schools.

[18] The graduation analysis focuses only on high schools we call regular, and which were designated by California Dept. of Education as "K-12 Schools," "High Schools," and "High Schools in 1 School District." Excluding all but the three focal school types results in a smaller total cohort. Excluded schools had higher than average shares of URM students and lower than average graduation rates, with Alternative Schools of Choice being the largest exception. Note that the

correlations were expected but might appear less strong than they were decades ago. One aspect of this is a ceiling effect since graduation rates have increased and cannot exceed 100%. There were more than 100 CA schools with a reported graduation rate of 100% in 2021. Both U.S. and California graduation rates have increased in recent times (Sublett & Rumberger, 2017) and California and U.S. national graduation rates for Black and Latino students have increased faster than White students who were already completing at high rates in recent decades (Murnane, 2013; Sublett & Rumberger, 2018), although there are challenges to calculating meaningfully graduation rates (Sublett & Rumberger, 2018).

Table 5. Graduation Rates by Pronounced Racial Concentration, 2021–22

Segregation Type	Regular HS Diploma Grad Rate	Schools (n)
Top 10% URM	87.5	121
Top 10% White + Asian	96.3	121

Source: California Department of Education
Note. Excludes schools with less than 15 students in a graduating cohort. Includes "regular" high schools (School Ownership Codes 65-67) with 12th grade enrollment.

We can gain insights into educational segregation by closely examining two specific subsets of the schools in the analytic dataset: schools that fall within the top 10% highest Underrepresented Minority (URM) enrollment and those in the Top 10% White and Asian enrollment. The top 10% threshold for the percentage of URM in the academic year 2021-22 was 96.2, so these were significantly segregated schools. Similarly, the top 10% threshold for the percentage of White + Asian students for the same academic year is 68.2.

Table 5 addresses the question, how do graduation rates for all students vary across different types of segregated schools?[19] A different analysis that looks at specific racial groups within schools may be more informative. This could address questions of the form: Do Black graduation rates vary

graduation analyses use data for the 2021–22 academic year, which is the expected year of on-time, four-year graduation from high school.

[19] See also Figure 27 in the Appendix for scatterplots of graduation rates by school racial composition.

across different types of segregated schools? Our results suggest the answer is yes – Black graduation rates are higher in schools that with more White and Asian students.[20]

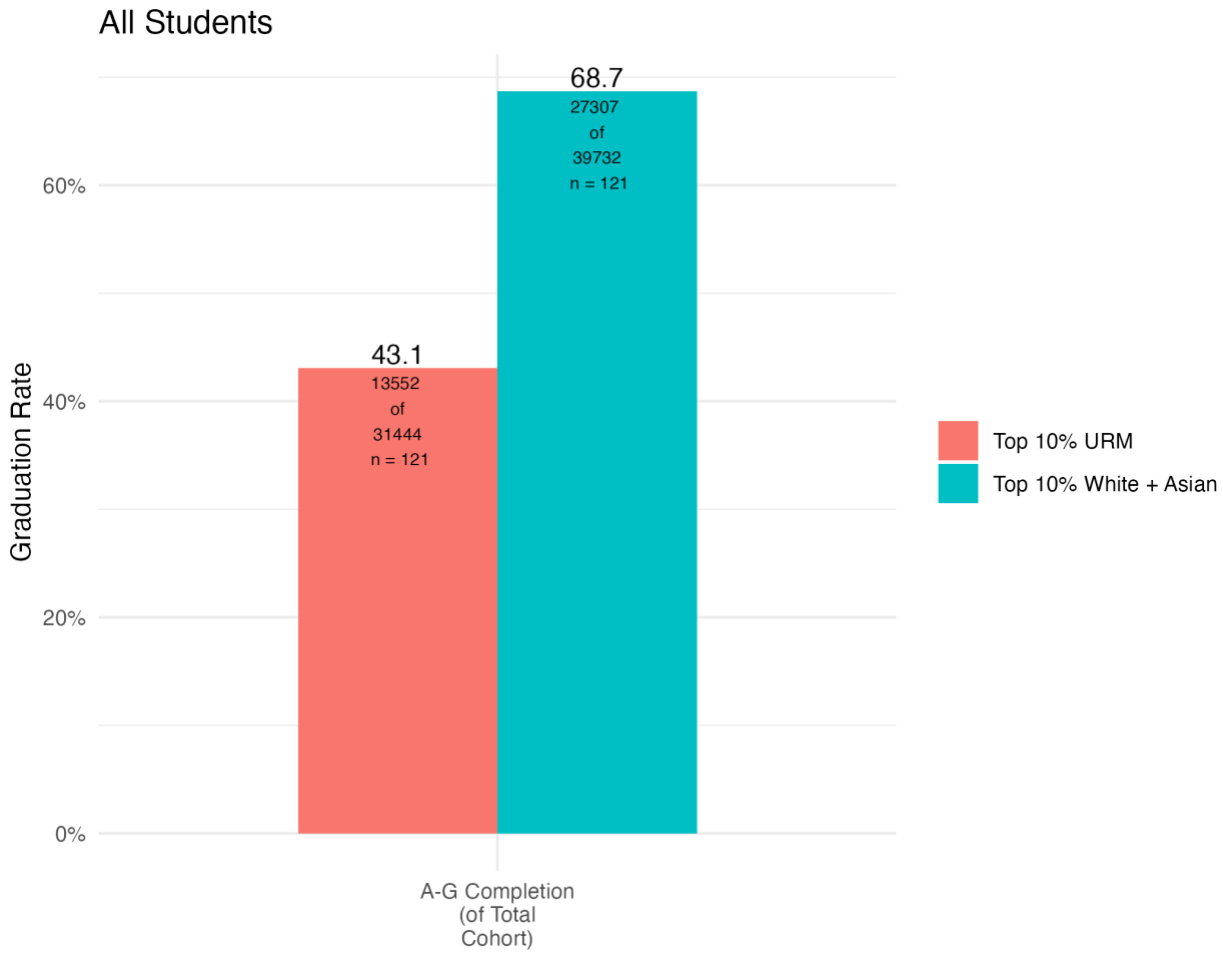
A-G Graduation Requirement Completion Rate (of Graduates)

It is very simple to enroll in a vast system of community colleges in California, but most of those who begin there do not receive college degrees or transfer to four-year colleges. California does not have a system of open access four-year colleges but a system including dozens of California State University campuses and the University of California system, both of which have admissions requirements. To get access to either system students need to have completed a set of course requirements, the A-G courses, so completion of those courses is a precondition to be considered for a four-year degree.

Students graduating and meeting the A-G course requirements varied significantly across the most segregated schools (Fig. 20). The most concentrated White and Asian schools had a higher proportion of their students graduating while meeting the A-G course requirements compared to the schools with the most underrepresented minorities (68.7% vs. 43.1%). In the intensely segregated schools, a substantial majority of the graduates did not meet the A-G requirements to be eligible for possible admissions to a four-year public campus.

[20] Note that there were many high schools that do not report Asian and Black graduation rates because there are no students in the cohorts after data suppression, so the estimates given here could be more precise.

Figure 20: Percent Meeting UC/CSU A-G Requirements, by Segregated Schools, 2021–22



Source: California Department of Education
Note. Excludes schools with less than 15 students in a graduating cohort. Includes "regular" high schools (School Ownership Codes 65-67) with 12th grade enrollment.

There was non-linearity in the relationship between share race and rate meeting A-G requirements. At the lower end of the share of each race, as that share increased there was a decrease in the graduation rate. For example, as schools increase from ~0% to 70% Latinx, the A-G graduation rate declines. However, above 70%, an increase in share Latinx is associated with higher school-level rates. These U-shaped trends are interesting and can be explored in future research. A-G completion rates are lower in the schools with the most under-represented minority students. One could surmise that this is a simple effect of higher rates for White and Asian students everywhere. However, when we disaggregate A-G completion rates for each racial group, we see

systematic variation *within* each racial group's graduation that is connected to segregated schools. The Latinx A-G completion rate was approximately 6 percentage points higher in the top White + Asian schools. This trend held for 7 of the 8 comparisons. The one exception was the A-G completion rate for Black students, which was approximately 4.6 percentage points higher in the schools with the highest URM share.[21] There are schools which make A-G completion an extremely high priority and there are special credit recovery and other courses often offered in the summer. Since there are no statewide standardized measures of learning for these courses, the meaning of completion may vary.

Course-Taking and Racial Segregation

The high school experience has long been divvied up into courses with some of the basic elements laid out in the deeply influential 1892 report of the Committee of Ten (Hertzberg, 1988), which shaped high school programs across the country. High school schedules have students taking a course with a teacher for a limited time in one part of the school building before moving on to another course with another teacher down the hall.[22] Many of these courses and the knowledge they are supposed to impart have been split by education reformers into sequenced levels. Inequalities can arise throughout these courses and within the sequences that colleges reward with admission and even future college credit. Racial divides in high graduation rates, test scores, and college matriculation may be partly explained by differences in course-taking. In considering these issues it

[21] The above graduation rates are estimates and exclude cohorts/schools curtailed because of CDE's data suppression policies. The suppression, combined with extreme segregation, results in gaps in our dataset. For example, in only three of the most URM-concentrated schools could we calculate an Asian graduation rate. Latinx students were the most consistently represented, appearing in 98 of the most URM schools and 76 of the most White and Asian schools. These limitations could be overcome with unsuppressed data or student-level records, offering a more complete understanding of the dynamics at play.

[22] The Carnegie Unit, established in 1906 as a basic measure of academic credit, is now often criticized for its narrow focus on time. Additionally, it is frequently bypassed for administrative purposes, such as assessing whether students meet graduation requirements (Silva, White & Toch, 2015).

is important to note that the course offerings aren't the same in all high schools. Students cannot take courses that are not offered or courses offered only at times that conflict with other courses they need. The quality of course offerings depend on the number and skills of teachers and the number of students ready and wishing to be enrolled, which determines decisions about the need for faculty. Segregated concentrated poverty schools often have fewer advanced course offerings and have difficulty obtaining qualified teachers, which disadvantages college preparation for students who wish to take them or need them for applications to competitive campuses.

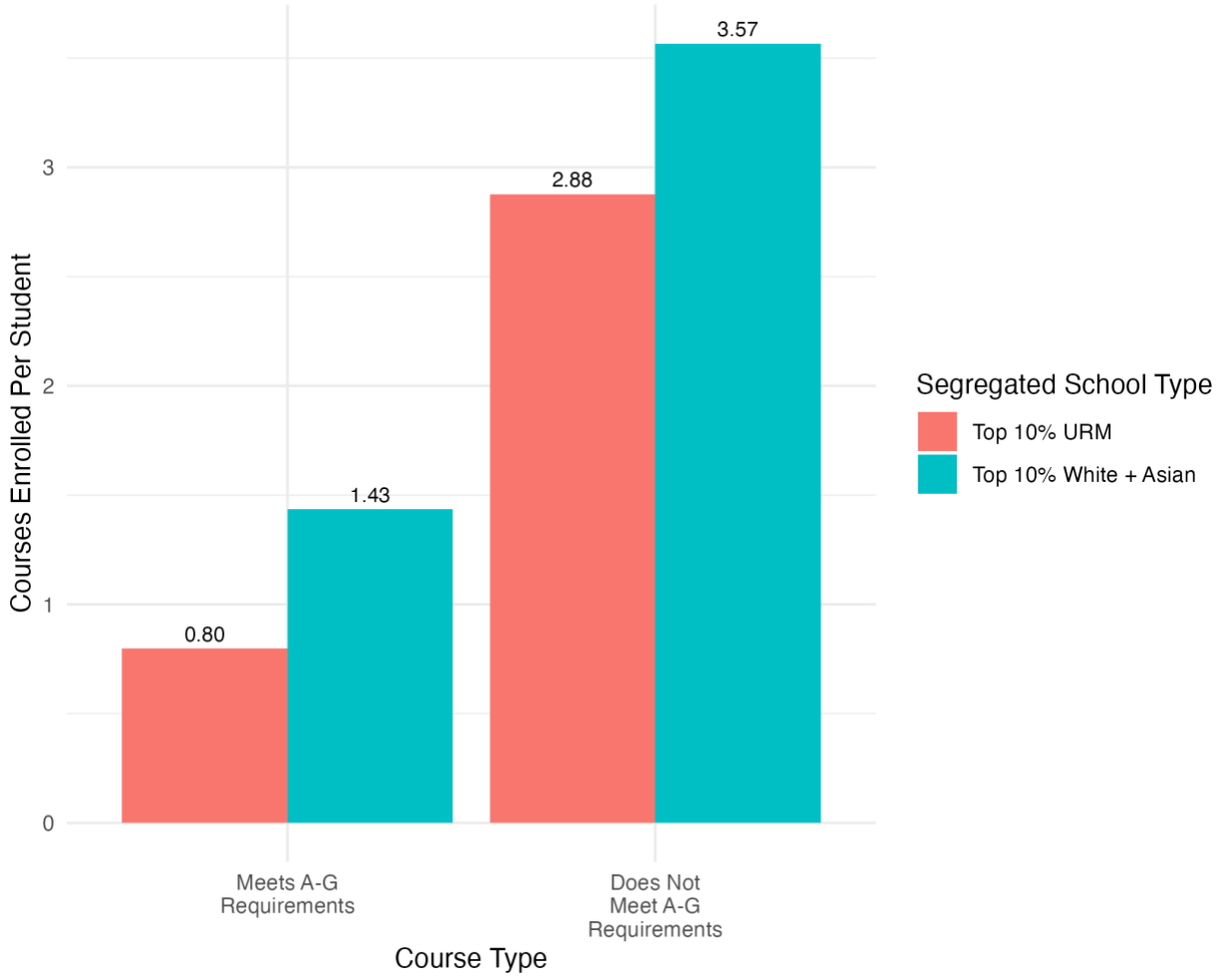
Course Enrollments in Segregated Schools

We examined courses enrolled per student, as of Census Day for the 2018–19 school year, to consider how course-taking varied across segregated schools.[23] Overall course enrollment per student was similar in schools with the most underrepresented minorities and in schools with the most White and Asian students, but there were substantial inequalities across segregated schools when considering the most advanced courses.

When schools that are the most White and Asian have higher courses enrolled per student, especially of advanced courses, the high school experience can widen both opportunity and achievement gaps. In the data analyzed we observed that the schools with the highest proportions of White and Asian students took more advanced courses. For example, in the schools that enrolled the most White and Asian students, A-G course enrollment per student was substantially higher (1.4 vs. 0.8, see Fig. 21). The schools with the highest proportion of underrepresented minorities had a higher number of basic and remedial courses enrolled per student.

[23] We used the latest course enrollment data available from CDE: the 2018-19 school year. Overall, the course-taking appeared low, which is in part due to many schools reporting zero course enrollment. Note that courses are separate from credits. We focus on course enrollment because of data accessibility and because course enrollment is a measure of opportunity to learn. Although the California Department of Education lists a state minimum of approximately 13 courses for a high school diploma and 15 for admission to a California public university, the average total Carnegie course completion units of high school graduates was approximately 28 in 2019 (NCES, n.d.). Note that school districts often set higher requirements.

Figure 21: Comparing A-G and non-A-G Courses by Segregation Level



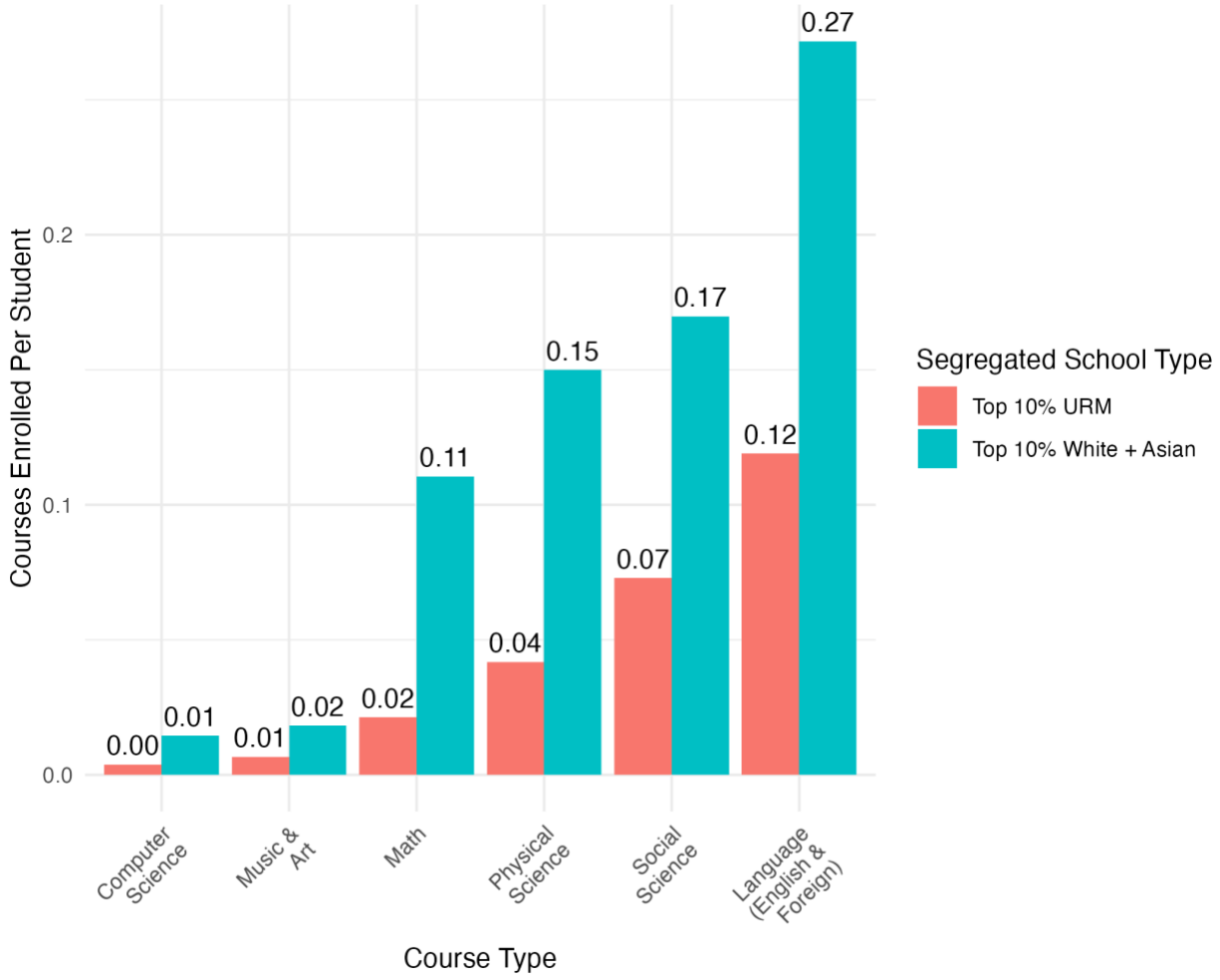
Source: Course Data (Courses Taught and Assignment), California Department of Education, Academic Year 2018-19. *Note.* The y-axis represents the sum enrolled in each course type divided by total enrollment. Subject categories provided by the CDE. Includes "regular" high schools (School Ownership Codes 65-67) with 12th grade enrollment. *Meets* = always or almost always approved as UC "a-g" course. *Does not meet*: 'cannot be approved as UC "a-g"' course OR 'sometimes approved as UC "a-g" course.'

Advanced vs. Basic Course-Taking

We analyzed "advanced courses" to complement the A-G course analysis. We reviewed course names and labeled them as advanced if they included AB, IB, or other advanced or college-level course labels (e.g., AP Calculus AB, Advanced physics, and AP Spanish Literature).[24] These advanced courses are likely the most exclusionary and can prevent equal access to college.

[24] The complete course categorizations we created are in the Appendix.

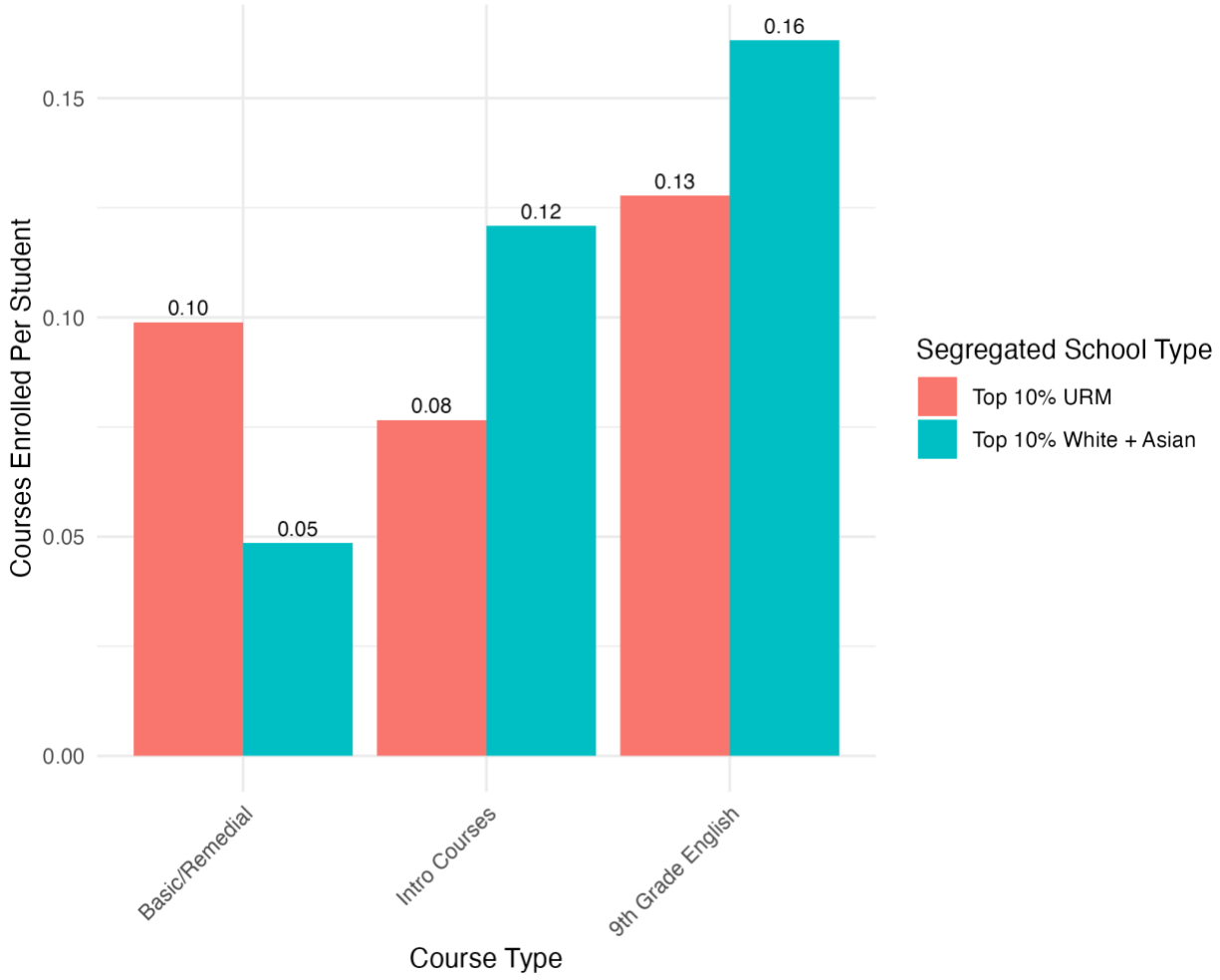
Figure 22: Advanced Course Enrollment



Source: Course Data (Courses Taught and Assignment), California Department of Education, Academic Year 2018-19. *Note.* The y-axis measure is the sum of students enrolled in each course type divided by total enrollment. Subject categories provided by the CDE. Only categories with greater than 5% enrolled in each segregated school type are included. Includes "regular" high schools (School Ownership Codes 65-67) with 12th grade enrollment. See Appendix for courses categorized as advanced.

The share of a school enrolled in advanced courses was unevenly distributed (Figure 22). In the 10% schools with the highest share of URM students, enrollment in each type of advanced course analyzed was lower than in schools with the highest share of White and Asian students. The gap was highest in advanced Language courses, where enrollment in the highest share of White and Asian schools was almost three times higher than in the most URM schools (0.27 vs. 0.12). The largest inequality in proportional terms was in math course enrollment, with five times more advanced math courses per student in the most White and Asian schools.

Figure 23: Intro, Basic, Remedial, and 9th Grade English Course-Taking



Source: Course Data (Courses Taught and Assignment), California Department of Education, Academic Year 2018-19.
Note. The y-axis measure is the sum enrolled in each course type divided by total enrollment. Includes "regular" high schools (School Ownership Codes 65-67) with 12th grade enrollment.

Examples of basic and remedial courses include "Reading improvement/developmental reading" and "Remedial math/proficiency development." The rate of course taking for these courses was twice as high in the top 10% URM compared to the top 10% White and Asian schools (Figure 23). However, intro and ninth grade English course-taking was higher in the most White and Asian schools, suggesting that even non-advanced course-taking were unequal in ways that advantaged White and Asian schools.

Advanced Placement Courses

Advanced Placement (AP) courses are meant to be selective, giving college-level instruction and, with successful passage of tests at a high level, college credit. The "advanced" in the name suggests that this route is not for all: courses and exams are meant to be challenging and the bar for passing is set in a way that, to borrow a phrase from David Labaree, "someone has to fail" (2010). Students who succeed in a number of these courses can enhance their class rank, college admission likelihood, and financial aid chances depending on campus and system policies and shorten the time to completion of a college degree. Taking AP courses is linked to attending more selective colleges (Wyatt et al., 2022).

Racial differences in participation, advanced learning, and college credit raise serious civil rights issues. Indeed, policy activists aimed in recent decades to decrease racial inequalities in AP courses. State and federal policies and organizations like the College Board, which administers the AP program, have worked for greater equity, across race and class (Rodriguez & McGuire, 2019). In 2015, UCLA administrators, advancing an equity argument, stopped factoring in AP courses in admissions procedures (N. Yu, 2015). Indeed, in a report on equal opportunity and segregation, the authors suggest that one way to remove the inequalities associated with advanced courses is for colleges in California to stop using them as gatekeeping devices in admissions (UCLA Institute for Democracy et al., 2007). But these courses often produce multiple advantages and stronger preparation for college work.

Racial inequalities in AP course availability, participation, and outcomes have been consistent features of American education for decades (Handwerk et al., 2008). Despite federal and local initiatives to address racial gaps in advanced course credits, the gap increased from 2000 to 2009: the Black-White gap increased from 8.2 to 15.1 percentage points and gaps with Asian Americans were even larger and growing faster (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019; Rodriguez & McGuire, 2019). They provide opportunities for teachers to work with classes of prepared and

motivated students. Black students often have the lowest opportunities and outcomes in AP courses, followed by Latino, White, and then Asian students.[25] Simply offering more AP courses in California through grants starting in 2000 did not increase AP participation rates, suggesting that availability alone does not close participation gaps across schools (Lang & Weinstein, 2011). Another study found that the minority AP participation gap is largely explained by economic status (Solórzano & Ornelas, 2004). Since economic status is strongly related to parent education and children of lower income families have less preparation for college, this is one of the intergenerational mechanisms that perpetuates unequal outcomes.

A recent study of AP courses in California provides evidence of racial and class inequalities "close to home" (Reed et al., 2023). For example, 71% of Asian students took at least one AP exam, while only 38% of Latinx students and 26% of Black students did the same according to the authors who analyzed the 2019 graduating cohort. A similar racial configuration was observed for passing AP exams: on average, Asian students passed 2.75 exams, compared to 0.25 exams for Black students. Course availability is intertwined with racial segregation, which is explored below with data from California.[26]

[25] This is not always the case. For example, in a study of Texas schools (Moore & Slate, 2008), African American students were found to have the lowest scores on AP tests, Latino students had the highest scores, and White students in the middle (Asian students were not analyzed in the study). However, a smaller share of Latino students took the AP tests compared to White students.

[26] The California Department of Education has discontinued some AP analyses in recent years, but recent data is available (California Department of Education, 2023a) and we analyzed data from 2021–2022.

Table 6: Mean AP Courses by Segregated School Type, High Schools, 2021–22

Segregated School Type	Mean Number of AP Courses	AP Courses Per 100 Students
Top 10% URM	13.0	1.3
Top 10% White + Asian	31.3	2.5

Source: California Department of Education, http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/sa/accessdata2122.asp, variable: ALLNAPC
Note. Total AP Courses Offered with at least one student enrolled (2021-22). Includes "regular" high schools (School Ownership Codes 65-67) with 12th grade enrollment.

The mean number of AP courses offered was higher in overwhelmingly White and Asian schools (Table 6). We examined courses per 100 high school students to account for differences in school size. Schools with high proportions of White and Asian students had more AP courses offered per 100 students enrolled—almost three AP courses offered compared to one in schools with the most underrepresented minority students.

Table 7: Mean Percent of Students in AP Courses, 2021–22

Segregated School Type	Mean Percent Enrolled in AP	# of Schools
Top 10% URM	20.9	145
Top 10% White + Asian	25.5	145

Source: California Department of Education, 2021-22, SARC; Percent of Students in AP Courses: PSIAPC
Note. Total AP Courses Offered with at least one student enrolled (2021-22). Includes "regular" high schools (School Ownership Codes 65-67) with 12th grade enrollment.

We examined the proportion of students that were enrolled in AP courses to gain a sense of whether AP participation was related to pronounced racial concentration. In the 145 most White and Asian high schools, approximately five percentage points more students were enrolled in AP courses, on average (Table 7).

This section highlights how racial segregation in high schools is connected to inequalities in course enrollment, particularly in advanced courses. Schools with more underrepresented minority students have less enrollment per student in advanced courses. White and Asian-majority schools enroll a higher share of students in advanced classes, widening opportunity gaps. Our analysis of Advanced Placement course enrollment shows persistent racial disparities, with White and Asian

students participating more than Black and Latinx students. Differences in advanced course enrollment indicate variation in course intensity and may signal lower academic intensity and quality that could contribute to racial inequality in school outcomes. Unequal participation in advanced courses reinforces academic prestige and disproportionate access to higher education for White and Asian schools, while limiting opportunities for students in Black and Latinx schools, thereby perpetuating systemic inequalities and deepening social stratification within the education system.

Conclusion and Recommendations

California's school enrollment is extraordinarily diverse, but students are separated in schools. In fact, Latino and Black students are more isolated from White students than in any other state. Regions many Californians think are backward, including poor Southern states, have more diverse schools for Black and Latino students than California. California's segregated schools usually must cope with concentrated poverty, multiplying the inequalities in a rich state with deep economic disparity and millions in poverty. By the 1970s, millions were living in virtually all-White suburbs as city schools became largely non-White, whether or not the city had desegregation plans. However, little noticed was the beginning of a massive departure to the suburbs of Black and Latino middle-class families. As many cities were largely written off by White families with children, a massive movement of families of color to sectors of suburbia took hold. In our predominantly suburban society, there have been no significant efforts to lower spreading school segregation for a half century. The state has just let things drift as segregation spreads outward, with rising consequences. (One significant suburban case in the Marin County was investigated and settled by the state attorney general's office.) Segregation is basically ignored in policy discussions, tacitly accepted as normal or inevitable. The enactment of constitutional limits by referenda and the changes in the courts as well as the embrace of anti-integration policies and political strategies by the California

GOP, which controlled the state for long periods until 1998, brought integration efforts to a halt. School segregation remains a powerful force reinforcing racial and ethnic stratification in California.

School segregation is strongly related to housing segregation. If our zoning, land use planners, and housing agencies had authorized affordable and subsidized housing more equitably, we would have less segregated schools; but local power has been used to create a striking geographic separation by income as well as race, concentrating disproportionately poor families of color in areas with weak schools. There has never been systematic enforcement against housing and home finance discrimination. There is a vicious cycle. Areas with significant racial change tend not to be shown to White home buyers and renters, accelerating neighborhood resegregation. White and Asian families do not move into expanding Latino and Black sectors of the suburbs. Magnet and charter school practices can undermine integrated communities if they draw out more privileged groups. Although much less blatant than in the past, the system works to spread segregation and undermine lasting diversity.

Polarization and inequality are built into the system. White and Asian children start out, on average, in families with more educated parents, living in homes in the most desired communities with higher average income and vastly higher average family wealth. Then they get the schools with the more expert teachers, the stronger pre-collegiate courses, and classmates whose family backgrounds and institutional experiences align with the expectations of elite education, creating a far more advantageous set of opportunities. Their children do well on tests and college admissions, and they often assume that reflects personal hard work and a superior culture. Martin Luther King talked about how segregation makes those on the privileged side of the line feel that they are superior and the segregated groups inferior—a false consciousness ignoring the gaping differences in opportunities.

Integrated schools create interracial contact in what had been largely segregated lives though there are often forms of stratification within individual schools. It is an effective academic

intervention, but the results can go far beyond test scores. Research shows that these admittedly imperfect contacts usually lower racial stereotypes and create access to broader networks of opportunity. All students tend to gain skills for living and working in the multiracial future of the U.S. Positive contact creates better skills for governing together in institutions and communities for preparing leaders who can function across lines of difference.

We have limited tools to remedy our persisting racial inequalities in our society so bringing more Latinx and Black students into stronger schools does matter. The history is grim. California's students are among the most segregated in the country, most of the major desegregation plans have been shut down, and the state constitution includes prohibitions on some major K-12 and college integration policies as the result of ballot propositions. California has yet to overcome the continuing effects of its history on racial equity. The state has lacked serious policies for integration for more than forty years as its population has been transformed.

Sweeping demographic shifts complicate integration in California today. But even when integration was more feasible California policymakers reversed progress by establishing an extensive charter school system without robust diversity measures that diverted funds from an already troubled public education system. For decades, Latino immigrants, who are often marginalized and exploited as a source of low-wage labor, have arrived under conditions of profound socioeconomic exclusion, in contrast to many Asian families who typically bring higher educational credentials and more economic resources. Meanwhile, Latinos and Blacks continue to face persistent residential segregation, which reinforces severe school segregation even where integration is clearly possible. Despite evidence that integrated education can redress the sources and consequences of these inequalities, current education policy does very little of consequence; the passage of time and wishful thinking alone are not remedying these deep-seated structural problems.

There are possibilities that are being ignored. In a state dominated by its suburbs, the suburban rings are now diverse. After a generation in which the middle-class families abandoned

central cities, the housing crisis has triggered substantial gentrification in all major California schools. That is increasing the racial and class diversity of the young and creating possibilities that are being ignored. The profound statewide housing crisis creates the possibility of radical shifts in housing and land use policy which could change school population. Civil rights advocates are often told that it is too early or too late to take any action that could make a substantial difference; they should wait until attitudes change. When they wait until after the White population drops, they're told it's too late and nothing is feasible. The schools continue to offer radically different opportunities and outcomes, and there are many ways that broader choices could be opened for many families of color. On our present course, disadvantaged students are separated from the strong opportunities and offered no choice to access them. We can do better. With different policies a far larger number of currently excluded students could have much stronger educational opportunities.

Desegregation is also one of the only tools we have that could help increasingly diverse communities avoid resegregation and decline. Because the Latino and Black families moving out into suburban sectors are younger than the Whites who live there, rapid changes in elementary schools occur, which make it much more likely that housing will not be shown to young White families, and the neighborhood will resegregate as Whites are replaced by non-White families. Even when no one flees, this process produces rapid resegregation. To hold a diverse population there must be schools that provide what families with resources want—schools that successfully prepare students for college, citizenship, and the middle class where their child will not be isolated. That doesn't happen if everyone is left alone to try to find a path for their own child and exit becomes the dominant pattern, which converts schools first by race and then by class and can harm the community.

California has four major racial/ethnic groups and persisting gaps and stratification, which will continue into the future given the existing trends. It is one of the most unequal states economically. There are no substantial efforts to change an unworkable system. Political and legal policies blocking integration policies for schools and colleges have removed important tools.

The state moved to overcome its history of racial discrimination with positive action against segregation briefly in the civil rights era but abandoned the effort decades ago. Since data was first collected statewide in the 1960s, there has been a massive increase in segregation, particularly for the Latino majority as their population surged. Racial segregation is usually also segregation by poverty, a double separation. School poverty has grown substantially in a state with great wealth. California has a powerful but extremely selective system of higher education. The great majority of Latino and Black students are in public and charter schools that do not prepare students of color for accessing the postsecondary education that can make a difference for jobs and income. The result is inequality at all levels of education and inequality in lives. With low birthrates and net outmigration, the state is aging, has declining college enrollments, and will experience a serious shortage of educated workers if the existing trends continue. In this situation equalizing educational attainment is not a gift to the excluded but a necessity for the future.

Proposition 1 in 1979 eliminated the duty of educators to take feasible desegregation efforts. When the state initiated what became the nation's largest system of charter schools in the 1990s there were no provisions for diversity. The state Supreme Court basically withdrew from the issue in the Los Angeles case (*Crawford*). The state's magnet schools often lack key tools needed to create and sustain diversity. Although the state is now focused on the housing crisis, it has not adopted policies to prevent new low-income housing from clustering in areas marked by severe residential segregation and concentrated poverty—areas where schools often fail to provide a strong educational foundation for children. There is no strategy to avoid the massive resegregation going on in the state's vast suburban rings or to foster integrated schools in the gentrifying neighborhoods that are expanding in the state's major cities.

We could make substantial progress by filling the policy vacuum with positive policies which could create new patterns of opportunity, such as:

1) State leaders could declare integrated schools and communities to be a basic goal. Changing a deeply entrenched institutional structure requires a clear goal, well-defined strategies, and solid grounding in community ideals and pragmatic next steps.
2) There could be transfer policies that allow students in areas of concentrated segregation and poverty to voluntarily transfer to less segregated schools, with transportation provided to make this choice feasible for all.
3) Charter and magnet schools could be asked for plans, methods, and accountability to recruit students across lines of segregation and welcome them. Schools that fail to make a serious effort could lose charters or magnet funds.
4) Funding could be provided for regional collaboration in high-quality multi-district magnet and transfer plans. The state government should sponsor a series of high-quality magnets developed with universities and other leading institutions in each metro drawing students across district lines with recruitment to assure racial and geographic diversity.
5) The state and federal government could aid communities beginning to resegregate with strong fair housing enforcement and resources to recruit students and families from the populations that are leaving. There should be regular civil rights auditing of real estate and rental agents to prevent racial steering.
6) Low-income schools in gentrifying areas threatened with enrollment decline could be given resources to recruit and welcome newcomers and provide strengthened curriculum and teaching training to facilitate the advantages of diversity. Housing subsidies can be used to permit low-income longtime residents to remain in the neighborhood.
7) Policies could be adopted to place subsidized family housing in areas with successful schools which would increase race and class integration. Providing counseling and support to families making such moves could help.

8) Significantly expanding dual immersion language training schools that integrate native Spanish and English-speakers in integrated schools is possible. These schools could aim at preparing students for AP exams and the state Seal of Biliteracy on their diplomas. Immigrant students should be welcomed in these schools.
9) Regional planning agencies should be given special HUD and state funds to develop plans for distribution of subsidized and affordable family housing connected to school integration plans.
10) There should be state higher education system plans for increasing the preparation of non-White teachers and for educating all teacher candidates in equitable instruction and management of diverse classes.

California schools are extremely segregated by race and poverty, and polarization is harming the future of our state. Enormous diversity and deep inequality suggest a dire need to create good race relationships and equal opportunity. The public schools are a logical vehicle, the only public institution that reaches and helps socialize the great majority of each generation. There is powerful evidence from across the world for the contact hypothesis—that contact between groups, especially under positive conditions, lowers stereotypes and improves relationships. In terms of opportunity, we know that our schools are profoundly unequal in terms of both inputs and outcomes, and that integrated education has long-term educational and economic benefits for students of color and does no educational damage to privileged students. But California has had no significant positive efforts to address these issues for four decades. It changed its constitution and eliminated a state right to integration. It has funded the nation's largest charter school system with no requirements or tools for producing diverse schools. Its many magnet schools, originally designed to produce integration, are largely dismantled and segregated. Many of its suburban communities are resegregating as racial change continues with no positive policy or assistance. Although all its major cities are becoming somewhat more diverse though gentrification, there are no policies to bring the long-time residents and newcomers together in schools. Without an intent to desegregate and tools

to foster lasting diversity, segregation consolidates and spreads. California, without saying so, has bet its future on segregation and segregation has never worked to produce positive relationships or equal opportunity. It is time for state leaders to affirm the goal of integration and provide assistance and support to communities and school districts to support it. Our leaders who know about the inequality and bear responsibility for equity need to play a positive role.

References

Blalock-Moore, N. (2012). Piper v. Big Pine School District of Inyo County: Indigenous schooling and resistance in the early twentieth century. *Southern California Quarterly, 94*(3), 346–357.

Broughman, S. P., Kincel, B., Willinger, J., & Peterson, J. (2021). Characteristics of private schools in the United States: Results from the 2019-20 private school universe survey. First look. NCES 2021-061. *National Center for Education Statistics*.

California Department of Education. (2023a). *Advanced Placement exams data*. https://www.cde.ca.gov/re/pr/advplacementexamsdata.asp.

California Department of Education. (2023b). *Private schools - CalEdFacts*. https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/ps/cefprivinstr.asp

California Department of Education (2023c). *State minimum high school graduation requirements*. https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/gs/hs/hsgrmin.asp

California Department of Education. (2025). *California School Dashboard: Academic engagement – Graduation rate*. https://www.caschooldashboard.org/reports/ca/2022/academic-engagement#graduation-rate

California Department of Industrial Relations. (1964, May). *Californians of Spanish surname: Population, employment, income, education*.

California Secretary of State. (1972, November 7). *Proposed amendments to constitution: propositions and proposed laws together with arguments* [General Election] (pp. 33–34; 56–58).

Carter, D. T. (1996). *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich: Race in the conservative counterrevolution, 1963-1994*. LSU Press.

Carter, P. L., & Welner, K. G. (Eds.). (2013). *Closing the opportunity gap: What America must do to give every child an even chance*. Oxford University Press, USA.

Carter, T. P., & Segura, R. D. (1979). *Mexican Americans in school: A decade of change*. College Board.

Crain, R. (1978, November 14). Report on the Crawford remedy to the Honorable Paul Egly.

Crawford v. Los Angeles Board of Education (1976). 17 Cal.3d 280.

Crawford v. Los Angeles Board of Education (1982). 458 U.S. 527.

Daniels, R. (1962). *The politics of prejudice: The anti-Japanese movement in California and the struggle for Japanese exclusion*. University of California Press.

Dent, H. S. (1978). *The prodigal South returns to power*. John Wiley.

Domina, T., Carter J. III, Radsky, V., Carlson, D., Perera, R. M., & McEachin, A. (2023). *Can school choice support district-led efforts to foster diverse schools?* Brookings.

Ee, J., Orfield, G., & Teitell, J. (2018). *Private schools in American education: A small sector still lagging in diversity*. The Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles, UCLA. https://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/integration-and-diversity/private-schools-in-american-education-a-small-sector-still-lagging-in-diversity

Ee, J., Orfield, G., & Teitell, J. (2023). Private-sector schools: Limited scope and stratification. In K. Welner, G. Orfield, & L. A. Huerta (Eds.), *The school voucher illusion: Exposing the pretense of equity* (pp. 260–266). Teachers College Press.

Egly, P. (2008). *Mary Ellen Crawford v. Los Angeles Unified School District: An unfulfilled plea for racial equality* [Unpublished manuscript].

Ettinger, D. S. (2003, March). The quest to desegregate Los Angeles schools. *Los Angeles Lawyer*, 55–67.

Fahle, E. M., Reardon, S. F., Kalogrides, D., Weathers, E. S., & Jang, H. (2020). Racial segregation and school poverty in the United States, 1999–2016. *Race and Social Problems*, *12*, 42–56.

Farley, R. (1978, November 14). Report in response to the minute order No. C 822 854 to the Honorable Paul Egly.

Farrell, J. A. (2017). *Richard Nixon: The life*. Doubleday.

Fiel, J. E. (2013). Decomposing school resegregation: Social closure, racial imbalance, and racial isolation. *American Sociological Review*, *78*(5), 828–848.

Fuller, B., Elmore, R., & Orfield, G. (1996). *Who chooses, who loses?* Teachers College Press.

Gao, N. (2021). College readiness in California: A look at rigorous high school course-taking. In *Public Policy Institute of California*. https://www.ppic.org/publication/college-readiness-in-california-a-look-at-rigorous-high-school-course-taking/

Gifford, B. (1978, November 14). Toward a workable remedy. Report by Dr. Bernard Gifford to the Honorable Paul Egly.

Gitelson, A. (1975, December 30). Ordered busing on coast. *New York Times*, p. 49.

Grebler, L., Moore, J. W., & Guzman, R. C. (1970). *The Mexican American people: The nation's second largest minority*. Free Press.

Hahn, H. (1968). Northern referenda on fair housing: The response of White voters. In B. T. Downes (Ed.)*, Cities and Suburbs* (pp. 161–176).

Handwerk, P., Tognatta, N., Coley, R. J., & Gitomer, D. H. (2008). *Access to success: Patterns of advanced placement participation in U.S. High schools*. ETS, Policy Information Center. https://www.ets.org/Media/Research/pdf/PIC-ACCESS.pdf

Hauser, R. M., Simmons, S. J., & Pager, D. I. (2000). *High school dropout, race-ethnicity, and social background from the 1970s to the 1990s.*

Hertzberg, H. W. (1988). Foundations. The 1892 Committee of Ten. *Social Education*, *52*(2), 144–45.

Hoover, M. E. R. (1992). The Nairobi Day School: An African American independent school, 1966-1984. *Journal of Negro Education*, 201–210.

Jackson v. Pasadena City School District (1963). 59 Cal.2d 876.

Johnson, R. C. (2015). *Long-run impacts of school desegregation & school quality on adult attainments*. National Bureau of Economic Research.

Johnson, H., Rodriguez, O., Cuellar Mejia, M., (2017). *Higher education in California: Increasing equity and diversity*. Public Policy Institute of California.

Kaplan, E. A. (2022, November 1). Solidarity doesn't look like this: In L.A., Latinos and Black people have lived together but not often acted together. *The Atlantic*.

Keyes v. School District No. 1 (1973). Denver, Colorado, 413 U.S. 189.

Koedel, C., & Parsons, E. (2021). The effect of the community eligibility provision on the ability of free and reduced-price meal data to identify disadvantaged students. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, *43*(1), 3–31.

Koedel, C., Polikoff, M. S., Le, Q., & Hardaway, T. (2022). *Addressing inequities in college-preparatory course-taking*. Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE). https://edpolicyinca.org/publications/addressing-inequities-college-preparatory-course-taking

Kuhn, M., Schularick, M., & Steins, U. I. (2020). Income and wealth inequality in America, 1949–2016. *Journal of Political Economy*, *128*(9), 3469–3519.

Labaree, D. F. (1988). *The making of an American high school: The credentials market and the Central High School of Philadelphia, 1838-1939*. Yale University Press.

Labaree, D. F. (2010). *Someone has to fail: The zero-sum game of public schooling*. Harvard University Press.

Lang, K. M., & Weinstein, M. (2011). Does increasing access to advanced placement courses lead to greater participation? *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, *33*(3), 273–297.

Lareau, A. (2011). *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life* (2nd ed.). University of California Press.

Lichter, D. T., Thiede, B. C., & Brooks, M. M. (2023). Racial diversity and segregation: Comparing principal cities, inner-ring suburbs, outlying suburbs, and the suburban fringe. *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences, 9*(1)*,* 26–51. https://doi.org/10.7758/RSF.2023.9.1.02

Long Beach Unified. (n.d.). *Admissions information*. https://cams.lbschools.net/our-school/admissions-information.

Los Angeles Times Staff. (2022, March 14). Why it's been so hard to kill Article 34, California's "racist" barrier to affordable housing. *Los Angeles Times*.

Los Angeles Unified a. (n.d.). *About magnets*. https://www.lausd.org/Page/2015#spn-content.

Los Angeles Unified b. (n.d.). *Magnet gifted/highly gifted criteria*. https://echoices.lausd.net/magnet/MagnetGiftedCriteria#gsc.tab=0.

Mathews, T. J., & Hamilton, B. E. (2019). *Total fertility rates by state and race and Hispanic origin: United States, 2017* (National Vital Statistics Reports, Vol. 68, No. 1). Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/index.htm

Mendez v. Westminster School Dist. of Orange County (1946). 64 F. Supp. 544 (S.D. Cal. 1946), aff'd, 161 F.2d 774 (9th Cir. 1947).

Michelmore, K., & Dynarski, S. (2017). The gap within the gap: Using longitudinal data to understand income differences in educational outcomes. *AERA Open*, *3*(1), 2332858417692958.

Migration Policy Institute. (2015). *Age distribution of immigrants to U.S., 1870-present.* https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/age-profile-immigrants-over-time.

Montgomery, N., & Allensworth, E. M. (2010). *Passing through science: The effects of raising graduation requirements in science on course-taking and academic achievement in Chicago.* ERIC.

Moore, G. W., & Slate, J. R. (2008). Who's taking the advanced placement courses and how are they doing: A statewide two-year study. *The High School Journal*, 56–67.

Murnane, R. J. (2013). U.S. high school graduation rates: Patterns and explanations. *Journal of Economic Literature*, *51*(2), 370–422.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2019). *Table 225.60. Number and percentage of public high school graduates taking dual credit, advanced placement (AP), and international baccalaureate (IB) courses in high school and average credits earned, by selected student and school characteristics: 2000, 2005, and 2009.* https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19_225.60.asp

National Center for Education Statistics. (2022, February 25). NCES locale classifications and criteria. U.S. Department of Education. https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/annualreports/topical-studies/locale/definitions

National Center for Education Statistics (n.d.). *NAEP high school transcript study (HSTS) – Coursetaking.* https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/hstsreport/#coursetaking.

Newton, J. (2006). *Justice for all: Earl Warren and the nation he made*. Riverhead Books.

Orfield, G. (1978, November 14). Desegregation principles for Los Angeles: Report to the Honorable Paul Egly.

Orfield, G. (1978). *Must we bus? Segregated schools and national policy*. Brookings Institution.

Orfield, G. (1983). *Public school desegregation in the United States, 1968–1980*. Joint Center for Political Studies (pp. 17–19).

Orfield, G. (1984). Lessons of the Los Angeles desegregation case. *Education and Urban Society, 16*(3), 338–353. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124584016003007

Orfield, G., & Frankenberg, E. (2008). The last have become first: Rural and small town America lead the way on desegregation. *Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles*.

Orfield, G., Frankenberg, E., & Associates. (2013). *Educational delusions? Why choice can deepen inequality and how to make schools fair*. University of California Press.

Orfield, G., & Gándara, P. (2009, May 23). Interview with Judge Paul Egly [Personal communication].

Orfield, G., Kucsera, J., & Siegel-Hawley, G. (2012). *E pluribus... Separation: Deepening double segregation for more students. Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles*.

Orfield, G., & Pfleger, R. (2024). The unfinished battle for integration in a multiracial America–from Brown to now. *Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles*.

Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1 (2007). 551 U.S. 701.

Perez, C. A., Mejia, M. C., & Johnson, H. (2023). *Immigrants in California*. Public Policy Institute of California; https://www.ppic.org/publication/immigrants-in-california/.

Pettigrew, T. F. (1978, February 7). Report in response to the minute order to the Honorable Paul Egly.

Pfleger, R., & Orfield, G. (2024a). Segregated by Teacher Experience in California. A Policy Brief. *Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles*.

Pfleger, R., & Orfield, G. (2024b). Segregated choices: Magnet and charter schools. *Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles*.

Pitt, L. (1970). *The Decline of the Californios: A Social History of Spanish Speaking Californians, 1846-1890*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press.

Plevin, R. (2024, November). LAUSD abruptly ends new admissions rules for gifted students amid parent fury over standards. *Los Angeles Times*.

Reardon, S. F. (2011). The widening academic achievement gap between the rich and the poor: New evidence and possible explanations. *Whither Opportunity*, *1*(1), 91–116.

Reardon, S. F. (2021). The economic achievement gap in the US, 1960-2020: Reconciling recent empirical findings. CEPA working paper no. 21-09. *Stanford Center for Education Policy Analysis*.

Reardon, S. F., & Yun, J. T. (2002). *Private school racial enrollments and segregation*. Civil Rights Project.

Reed, S., Hurtt, A., Kurlaender, M., Luu, J., & Merritt, C. (2023). *Inequality in academic preparation for college*. https://edpolicyinca.org/publications/addressing-inequities-college-preparatory-course-taking

Reich, M. (2017). *Racial inequality: A political-economic analysis* (Vol. 5156). Princeton University Press.

Reitman v. Mulkey, 387 U.S. 369 (1967).

Richards, M. P., & Stroub, K. J. (2020). Measuring segregation in a multiracial era: The impact of federal racial reporting changes on estimates of public school segregation. *Teachers College Record*, *122*(5), 1–42.

Rickford, R. (2016). *We are an African people: Independent education, black power, and the radical imagination*. Oxford University Press.

Rodriguez, A., & McGuire, K. M. (2019). More classes, more access? Understanding the effects of course offerings on black-White gaps in advanced placement course-taking. *The Review of Higher Education*, *42*(2), 641–679. https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2019.0010

Roosevelt, T. (1906, December 4). Annual message to Congress. https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/december-3-1906-sixth-annual-message

Rothstein, R. (2004). *Class and schools: Using social, economic, and educational reform to close the black–White achievement gap*. Teachers College Press.

San Francisco Unified. (2023). *4.5.2 credits and course requirements*. https://www.sfusd.edu/services/know-your-rights/student-family-handbook/chapter-4-student-academic-expectations/45-high-school-graduation-requirements-and-diploma-alternatives/452-credits-and-course-requirements

Silva, E., White, T., & Toch, T. (2015). *The Carnegie unit: A century-old standard in a changing education landscape*. Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Solórzano, D. G., & Ornelas, A. (2004). Examining the AP participation gap for underrepresented minority students. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, *3*(2), 81–96.

Sublett, C. M., & Rumberger, R. W. (2017). Accounting for delayed high school graduates in California (Report No. 22). California Dropout Research Project. https://www.cdrp.ucsb.edu

Sublett, C. M., & Rumberger, R. W. (2018). What is California's High School Graduation Rate? California Dropout Research Project. https://edpolicyinca.org/publications/what-californias-high-school-graduation-rate

Sullivan, N. V., & Stewart, E. S. (1969). *Now is the Time: Integration in the Berkeley Schools*. Indiana University Press.

Tinsley v. Palo Alto Unified School District, 91 Cal. App.3d 871 (Cal. Ct. App. 1979).

Tucker-Smith, A., & Cano, R. (2022, August 15). What California's achievement gap looks like – and what's being done to close it. CalMatters. https://calmatters.org/explainers/achievement-gap-california-explainer-schools-education-disparities-explained/

UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education, & Access, & University of California All Campus Consortium on Research for Diversity (2007). *California educational opportunity report 2007*.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2024, September 10). *Poverty in the United States: 2023* (Report No. P60-283). Table A- 3. https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2024/09/poverty-in-the-united-states-2023.html

U.S. Dept. of Education. (n.d.). *Table 219.10. High school graduates, by sex and control of school; public high school averaged freshman graduation rate (AFGR); and total graduates as a ratio of 17-year-old population: Selected years, 1869-70 through 2029-30*. National Center for Education Statistics.

Valencia, R. (2005). Mendez v. Westminster: Helping to pave the way for Brown v. the Board of Education. *Teacher's College Record, 107*(3).

Van Hook, J., Bélanger, A., Sabourin, P., & Patoine Hamel, N. (2023). *The changing racial and ethnic composition of the school-age population in the U.S.* The Civil Rights Project at UCLA. https://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/demographic-studies/the-changing-racial-and-ethnic-composition-of-the-school-age-population-in-the-u.s

Wang, J., & Herman, J. (2017). Magnet schools: History, description, and effects. *The Wiley Handbook of School Choice*, 158–179.

Weinberg, M. (1997). *Asian-American education: Historical background and current realities*. Lawrence Erlbaum.

Welner, K., Orfield, G., & Huerta, L. A. (Eds.). (2023). *The school voucher illusion: Exposing the pretense of equity*. Teachers College Press.

Wollenberg, C. M. (Ed.). (1970). *Ethnic conflict in California history*. Tinnon Brown.

Wollenberg, C. M. (1976). *All deliberate speed: Segregation and exclusion in California schools, 1855–1975*. University of California Press.

Woo, E. (1989, March 28). Court action ends 26-year L.A. desegregation case. *Los Angeles Times*.

Wyatt, J. N., Wiley, A., & Camara, W. (2022). *The relationship between advanced placement course-taking and selective college attendance*. Educational Testing Service. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED621342.pdf

Wysinger v. Crookshank (1890). 82 Cal. 588. California Supreme Court.

Yu, J. (2023). *A Longitudinal Analysis on the Outcomes and Implementation of College-Ready Graduation Policy in San Francisco*. https://www.aera.net/Publications/Online-Paper-Repository/AERA-Online-Paper-Repository-Viewer/ID/1577061

Yu, J., Sanderson, B., Fong, J., & Wentworth, L. (2023). *Can college-ready graduation requirements close the opportunity gap?* https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/can-college-ready-graduation-requirements-close-the-opportunity-gap

Yu, N. (2015). AP, IB credit no longer to be factored in enrollment priority at UCLA. *Daily Bruin*. https://dailybruin.com/2015/10/26/ap-ib-credit-no-longer-to-be-factored-in-enrollment-priority-at-ucla

Zinshteyn, M. (2022). Cal State's Black students are falling behind other groups – and poor graduation data obscures the crisis. In *CalMatters*. https://calmatters.org/education/higher-education/2022/07/black-students-graduation-csu/

Appendix

Terms

Throughout this report, we use the terms *racial* and *race* as shorthand for a complex, multifaceted construct that involves various conceptual ambiguities and challenges in data collection over time. It is important to note the inclusion of Hispanic/Latinx/Latino—which are often understood as ethnic, rather than racial, categories—and the evolution of racial data collection over time, exemplified by the introduction of a multiracial (or "two or more races") category around 2009. The terms Hispanic, Latinx, and Latino are used interchangeably in this report, but refer to the same data sources. The Latinx category is defined as a student of any race; for example, if a student reported Black and Latinx, the student was classified as solely Latinx for the purposes of this report. See Richards and Stroub (2020) for a summary of classification scheme changes over time and what those changes suggest for the interpretation of segregation statistics.

Data and Measures

Data for this report come from publicly available datasets provided by the U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Census, and the California Department of Education. Much data used in this report is from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Common Core of Data (CCD), and Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey Data.

The CCD is a comprehensive listing of public elementary and secondary schools in the United States. The data cover school years 1986–87 through 2022–23. In this report, when a single year is reported it references the beginning of the school year (e.g., *2022* means school year *2022–23*). Student race has been reported since 1987. The analysis includes "regular" schools that were not marked as closed, inactive, or future (note that "regular" status varied somewhat irregularly). "Regular" schools do not include schools that focused mainly on vocational, special, or alternative

education. Schools in U.S. territories and that were missing basic location data were excluded. After these exclusions, 8,851 schools remained in the analytic dataset for the 2022–23 school year.

Race data were incomplete for many records in the early years of the CCD, so interpreting early trends should be approached with caution. The small subset of students whose race was reported as "unknown" or "not reported" were recoded as multiracial (otherwise known as two or more races). Importantly, the categories for reporting race changed over time. Given these changes, Asian, after approximately 2008 (depending on the state), as used in this report, is a sum of Asian and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander. The introduction of the multiracial category (where people could choose more than one race) makes interpreting longitudinal analyses less than straightforward. The introduction of Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander can be made mostly comparable with earlier data because both before and after the introduction of the new category the group would likely be included in the Asian category (see Richards & Stroub, 2020).

Free and reduced meal eligible student counts were created by summing students reported as qualifying for free or reduced priced meals (FRPM). To create the proportion of FRPM, this sum was divided by total enrollment. Some schools reported a subset of years of FRPM counts that were far different than the trend in other years. These academic year FRPM counts were set to missing and excluded from the analysis if they were extreme outliers (i.e., more than 4 times the interquartile range of the school for the other years available).

Calculating Exposure

The following formula was used to calculate exposure:

$$P_{AB} = \sum_{i=1}^{n} \left(\frac{a_i}{A}\right)\left(\frac{b_i}{t_i}\right)$$

where

- P_{AB} denotes the exposure index between racial groups A and B
- n is the number of small units (e.g., schools) in a larger unit (e.g., a district or state)
- a_i is the number of students in racial group A in the small unit i (school i)
- b_i is the number of students in racial group B[27] in the small unit i (school i)
- A is the total number of students in racial group A in the larger unit (district or state)
- t_i is the total number of students in all racial groups in the small unit i (school i).[28]

Values lie between 0 and 1, with smaller values indicating less exposure of group A to B.

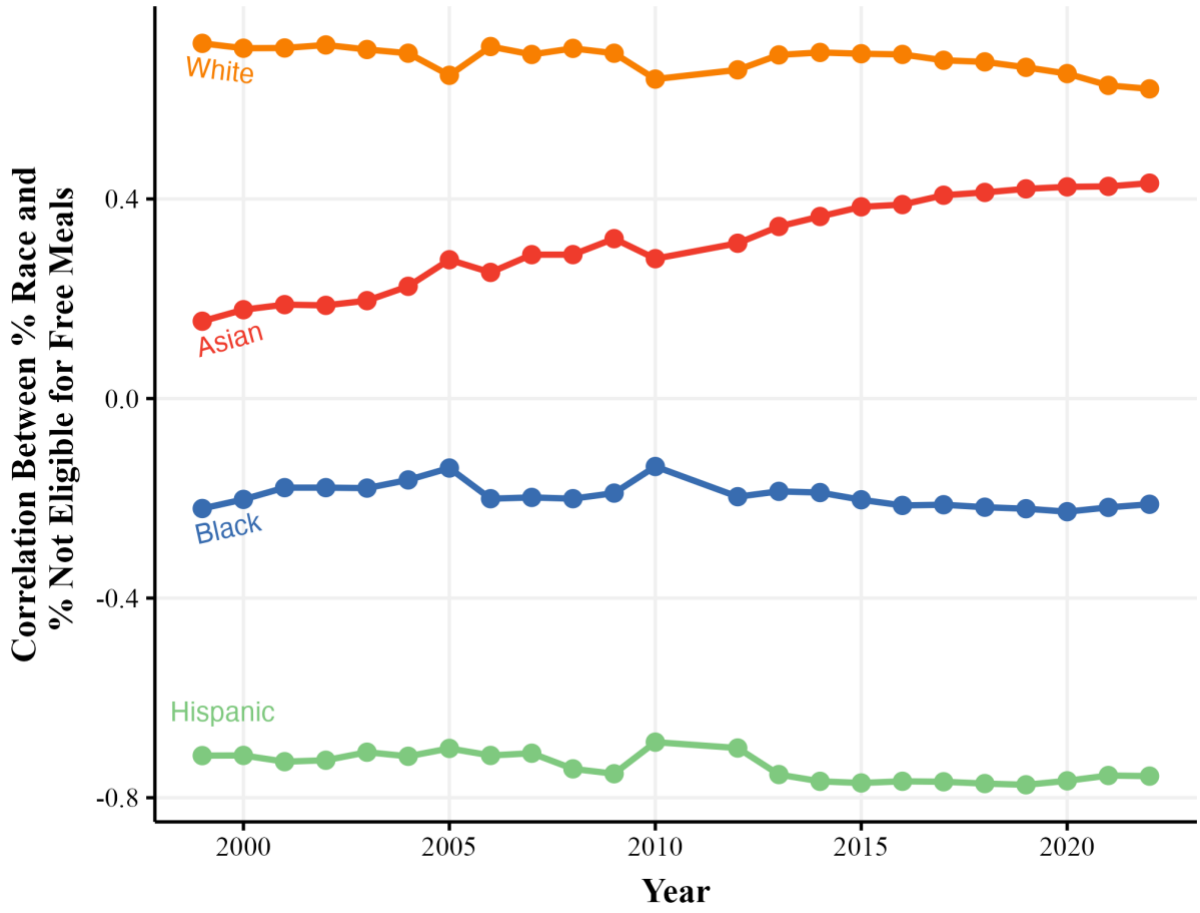
Missing and Imputed Data for Los Angeles in 2022–23.

Enrollment by race data was missing in the 2022–23 CCD for Los Angeles Unified. We used last observation carried forward imputation, assigning the 2021–22 enrollment by race data to 2022–23 in this district. As Los Angeles Unified enrolls a significant portion of the state's students, this imputation introduces some uncertainty into the analysis for the latest year.

[27] Note that for the exposure measures of racial groups to students in poverty (or qualifying for free and reduced priced meals), B represents students in poverty.

[28] Multiracial students were included in the total.

Figure 24: Correlations Between Race and Higher Income Enrollment, 1999–2022



Source: The Common Core of Data.
Note. Data for California in the year 2011 was anomalous and thus excluded.

Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to assess the relationship between economic position (as measured by non-participation in the free or reduced priced meal program) and four racial groups (Figure 24). The findings suggest meaningful differences across race in the socioeconomic makeup of schools. These differences are persistent over time. There were positive relationships between percent higher-income for percent White and percent Asian. There were negative relationships between percent higher-income and percent Black and percent Latino. The correlation with the largest change over time was for income and Asian—Asian students were increasingly more likely to go to higher-income schools over the last two decades.

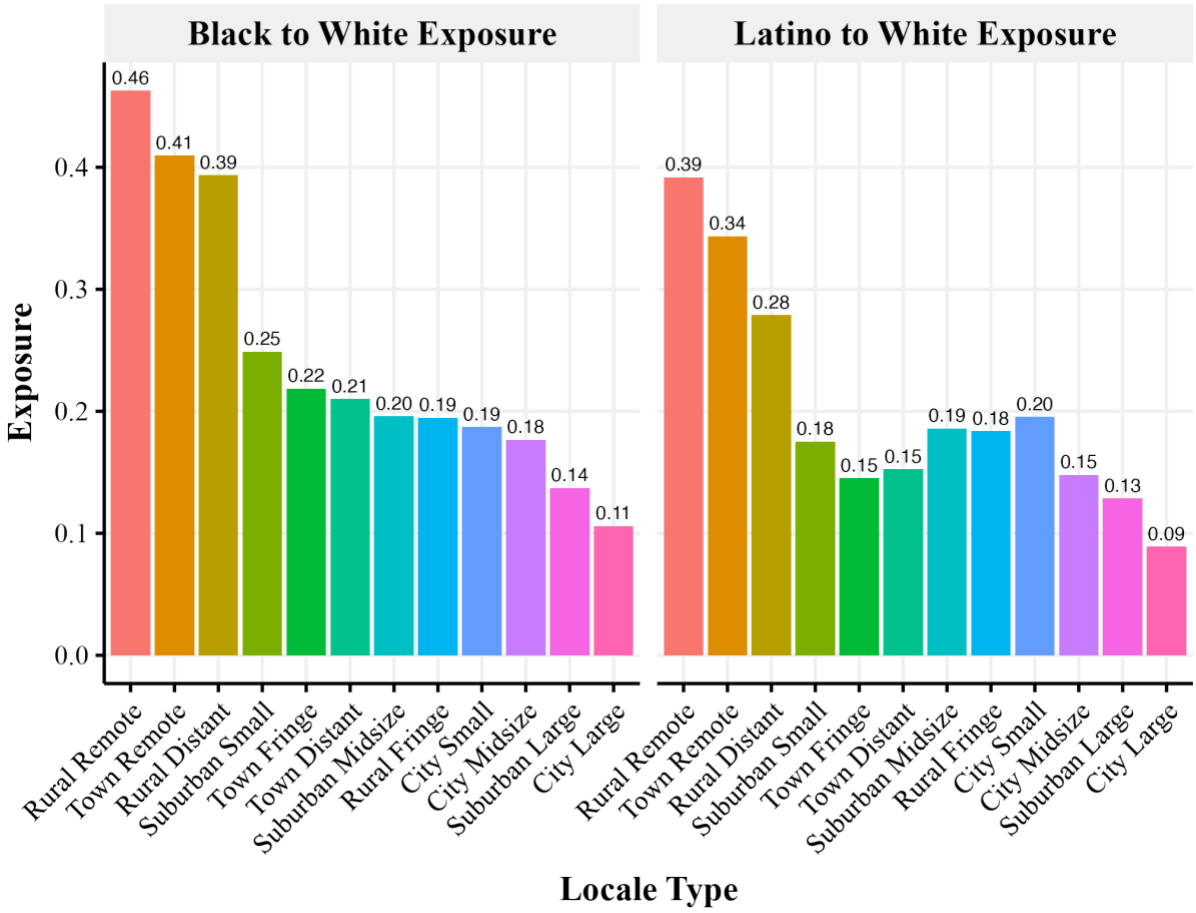
Table 8: Distribution of Schools by Locale, 2022–23

Locale Type	Number of Schools	Frequency
Town Remote	115	0.01
Town Fringe	249	0.03
Town Distant	273	0.03
Suburban Small	269	0.03
Suburban Midsize	317	0.04
Suburban Large	3,074	0.35
Rural Remote	147	0.02
Rural Fringe	565	0.06
Rural Distant	301	0.03
City Small	561	0.06
City Midsize	745	0.08
City Large	2,235	0.25

Sources: The Common Core of Data and EDGE.

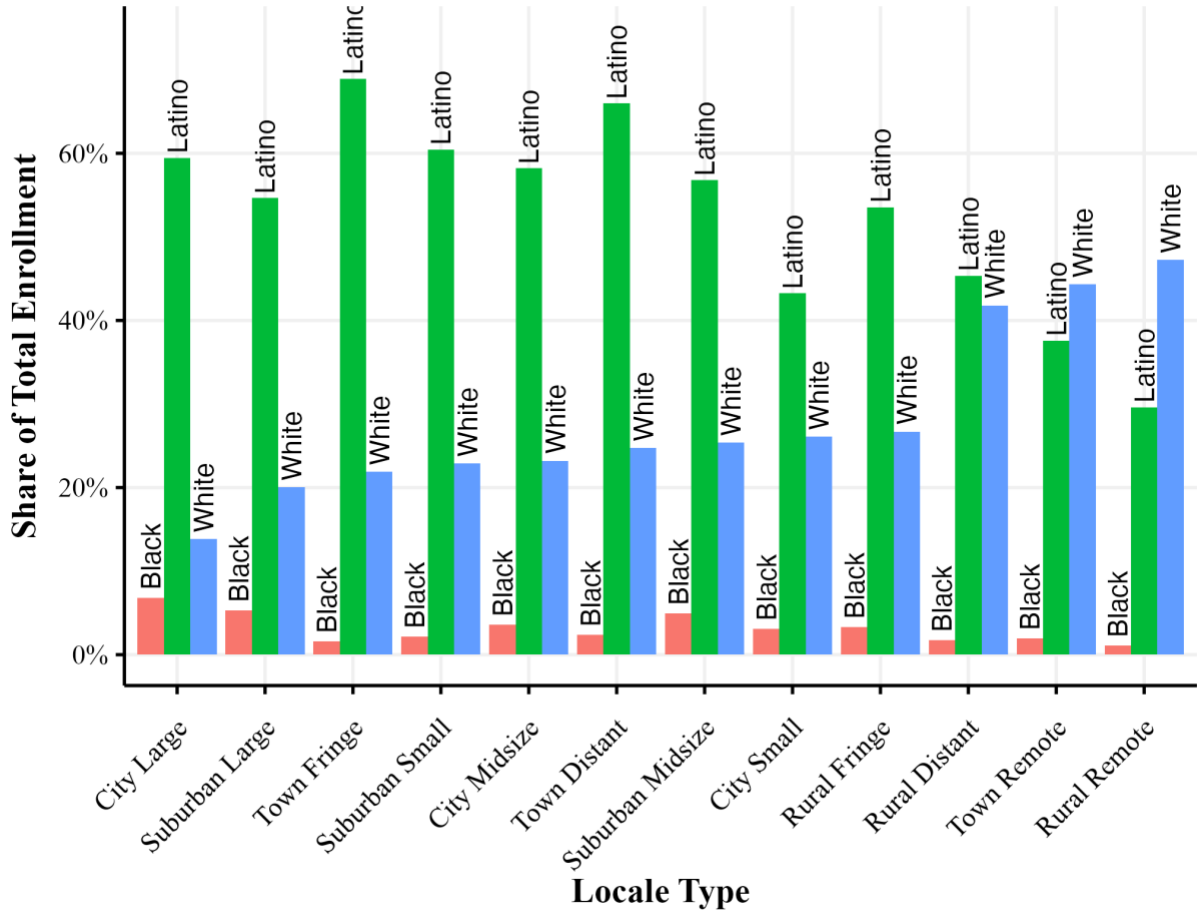
Table 8 shows the distribution of schools in 2022 by the 12 locale types available in the EDGE data. Large suburban is the locale type with the most schools, followed by large cities.

Figure 25: Exposure to White Students, in All Locales, 2022–23



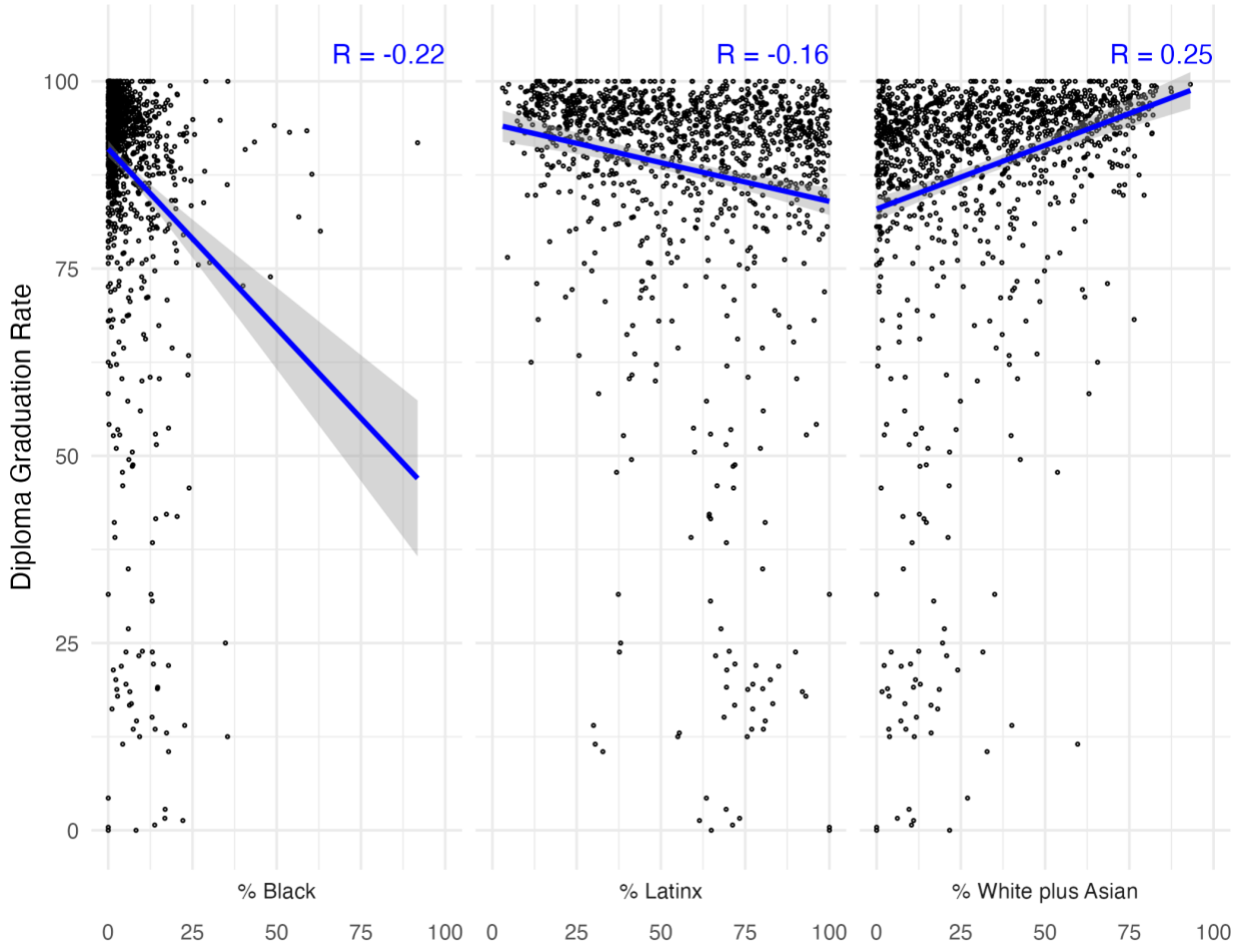
Exposure of Black and Latinx students to White students is found in Figure 25 for 12 locale types. They are ordered by Black-to-White exposure to facilitate comparisons across locale types. For example, exposure to White students is highest for both Black and Latinx students in rural remote areas (.50 and .40, respectively).

Figure 26: Racial Composition, All Locales, 2022–23



The racial composition of schools in 12 locale types is provided in Figure 26. The figure is ordered by increasing percent White, which helps show that the lowest concentrations of White students are in cities and suburbs and the highest concentrations are in towns and rural areas. Schools in large cities have the least concentration of White students (~19%) and schools in distant rural areas, which are the rural regions furthest from urbanized areas, have the highest concentration of White students (~75%).

Figure 27: Graduation Rates by School Racial Composition, 2021–22



Source: California Department of Education
Note. Excludes schools with less than 15 students in a graduating cohort. Includes "regular" high schools (School Ownership Codes 65-67) with 12th grade enrollment.

Course Types

Below are course names by course category and type used in this report.

Advanced Courses by Type

Course Type: Advanced Math

- Calculus
- AP Calculus AB
- AP Calculus BC
- AP Statistics
- IB Mathematics higher level

- Integrated Mathematics IV (college preparatory)
- College Credit Course - Mathematics

Course Type: Advanced Physical Science

- Advanced biology
- Advanced chemistry
- Advanced physics
- College Credit Course - Science
- AP Biology
- AP Chemistry
- AP Physics C
- AP Environmental science
- AP Physics 1: Algebra-based
- AP Physics 2: Algebra-based

Course Type: Advanced Computer Science

- IB Computer science
- IB Information technology in a global society
- AP Computer Science Principles
- AP Computer science AB
- AP Computer science A

Course Type: Advanced Language (English & Foreign)

- IB Language A: Language and Literature (non-English)
- IB Language A: Literature (non-English)
- AP Japanese Language and Culture
- AP Chinese Language and Culture
- AP Italian Language and Culture
- AP Spanish language
- AP German language
- AP French language
- IB Classical languages
- IB Language B
- AP Latin-Vergil
- German (advanced)
- Italian (advanced)
- Filipino (advanced)
- Vietnamese (advanced)
- Portuguese (advanced)
- Japanese (advanced)
- Chinese (advanced)
- Korean (advanced)
- Latin (advanced)

- Russian (advanced)
- Spanish (advanced)
- French (advanced)
- Advanced composition
- AP Spanish literature
- College Credit Course - English Language Arts
- College Credit Course - Foreign Languages
- AP English Literature
- AP English Language

Course Type: Advanced Social Science

- AP World History
- AP Human Geography
- AP Psychology
- AP United States history
- AP European history
- AP U.S. govt & politics
- AP Comparative govt & politics
- IB Global Politics
- IB Economics
- IB Geography
- College Credit Course - History/Social Science

Course Type: Advanced Music & Art

- AP Studio Art: Three Dimensional
- AP Studio Art: Two Dimensional
- AP Studio Art: Drawing
- IB Music
- AP Music theory
- AP Art History
- IB Theatre
- College Credit Course - Visual or Performing Arts

Intro Course Names by Type

Course Type: Basic/Remedial

- Reading improvement/developmental reading
- Basic English/Language Art (Proficiency Level.)
- General math/basic math/vocational math
- Remedial math/proficiency development
- English Language Development

Course Type: Intro Courses

- General/exploratory/introduction to music (sec)

- Introduction to Agriculture and Natural Resources
- Introduction to Agricultural Business
- Introduction to Agricultural Mechanics
- Introduction to Agriscience
- Introduction to Sustainable Agriculture
- Introduction to Animal Science
- Introduction to Forestry and Natural Resources
- Introduction to Ornamental Horticulture
- Introduction to Floral Design
- Introduction to Plant Science
- Introduction to Arts, Media, and Entertainment
- Introduction to Graphic Design
- Introduction to Animation
- Introduction to Visual/Commercial Art
- Introduction to Media Arts
- Introduction to Dance/Choreography
- Introduction to Professional Music
- Introduction to Professional Theatre
- Introduction to Stage Technology
- Introduction to Film/Video Production
- Introduction to Multimedia Production
- Introduction to Game Design
- Introduction to Building and Construction Trades
- Introduction to Cabinetry, Millwork, and Woodworking
- Introduction to Engineering and Heavy Construction
- Introduction to Mechanical Systems Installation and Repair
- Introduction to Residential and Commercial Construction
- Introduction to Business and Finance
- Introduction to Education, Child Development, and Family Services
- Introduction to Energy, Environment, and Utilities
- Introduction to Environmental Resources
- Introduction to Energy and Power Technology
- Introduction to Telecommunications
- Introduction to Engineering and Architecture
- Introduction to Fashion and Interior Design
- Introduction to Barbering
- Introduction to Cosmetology
- Introduction to Health Science and Medical Technology
- Introduction to Biotechnology
- Introduction to Patient Care
- Introduction to Healthcare Administrative Services
- Introduction to Healthcare Operational Support Services
- Introduction to Public and Community Health

- Introduction to Mental and Behavioral Health
- Introduction to Hospitality, Tourism, and Recreation
- Introduction to Information and Communication Technologies
- Introduction to Information Support Services
- Introduction to Networking
- Introduction to Systems Programming
- Introduction to Web and Social Media Programming and Design
- Introduction to Games and Simulation
- Introduction to Manufacturing and Product Development
- Introduction to Marketing, Sales, and Service
- Introduction to Public Services
- Introduction to Public Safety (Introduction)
- Introduction to Emergency Response (Introduction)
- Introduction to Legal Practices (Introduction)
- Introduction to Transportation
- Introduction to Operations
- Introduction to Structural Repair and Refinishing
- Introduction to Systems Diagnostics, Service, and Repair

Course Type: 9th Grade English

- English 9

The Analytic Sample for the Magnet-Charter Analysis

We used the Composite School District Boundaries file for 2022 provided by NCES/EDGE to geocode schools. We exclude a small number of schools listed as both magnet and charter. When we refer to "districts" in the following analysis we mean the traditional school district even though the district does not control the charters.

We only include districts with at least five magnets and five charter schools in one of the study years (2000–2022), including only districts that had enough of each type to facilitate comparisons. Note that many schools with "magnet" in the school's name are not designated in the magnet field of the CCD—this could be a sign of an undercount of magnets or that former magnet schools continue to use the name. Our comparisons are meaningful for a large number of students across a large range of districts and states, and the districts include a large share of the total student enrollment in both types of publicly funded choice schools.

The analytic sample includes 18 geographic school districts and approximately 2,500 schools (as of 2019, see Table 9). Approximately 45% of all California charter students and 66% of all magnet students were included in the sample as of 2019. Magnets had larger average enrollments than charters (1,277 vs. 448). The sample includes schools in Los Angeles, Oakland, and San Francisco.

Magnet-Charter Data and Measures

There were significant data quality problems with magnet designations. Spikes in magnet designations and significant anomalies were identified. For example, California reported nearly 500 magnet schools in each year for more than five years leading up to 2019, but then 0 magnet schools for 2020 and 2021.

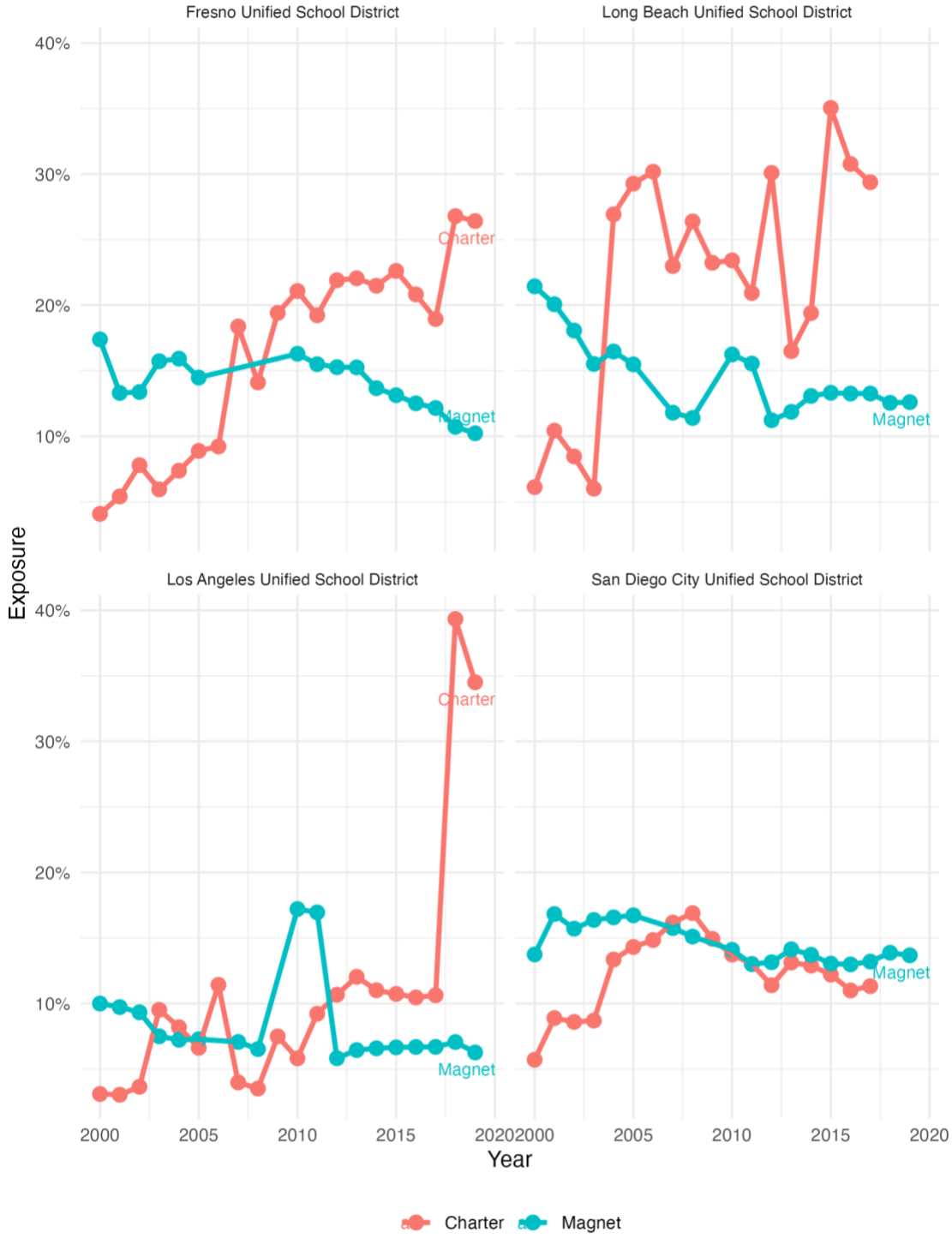
Table 9: Districts in Analytic Sample, 2019

Criteria	Year	Number of Schools	Percent Black	Percent Latino	Percent White	Percent Asian
Excluded from Sample	2000	6,897	5.8%	39.4%	43.1%	10.9%
Excluded from Sample	2019	9,077	3.9%	52.1%	25.8%	12.5%
Included in Sample	2000	1,822	13.5%	55.4%	17.7%	12.8%
Included in Sample	2019	2,581	8.0%	64.2%	12.9%	10.5%

The list below contains the names of the school districts whose geographic boundaries constituted the main sample.

Antelope Valley Union Joint High; Chaffey Joint Union High; Chula Vista Elementary; East Side Union High; Fresno Unified; Kern High; Long Beach Unified; Los Angeles Unified; Oakland Unified; Pasadena Unified; Sacramento City Unified; San Bernardino City Unified; San Diego City Unified; San Francisco Unified; San Jose Unified; Sequoia Union High; Stockton Unified; and Sweetwater Union High.

Figure 28: Black Exposure to White, Charter & Magnet Schools, Select Districts

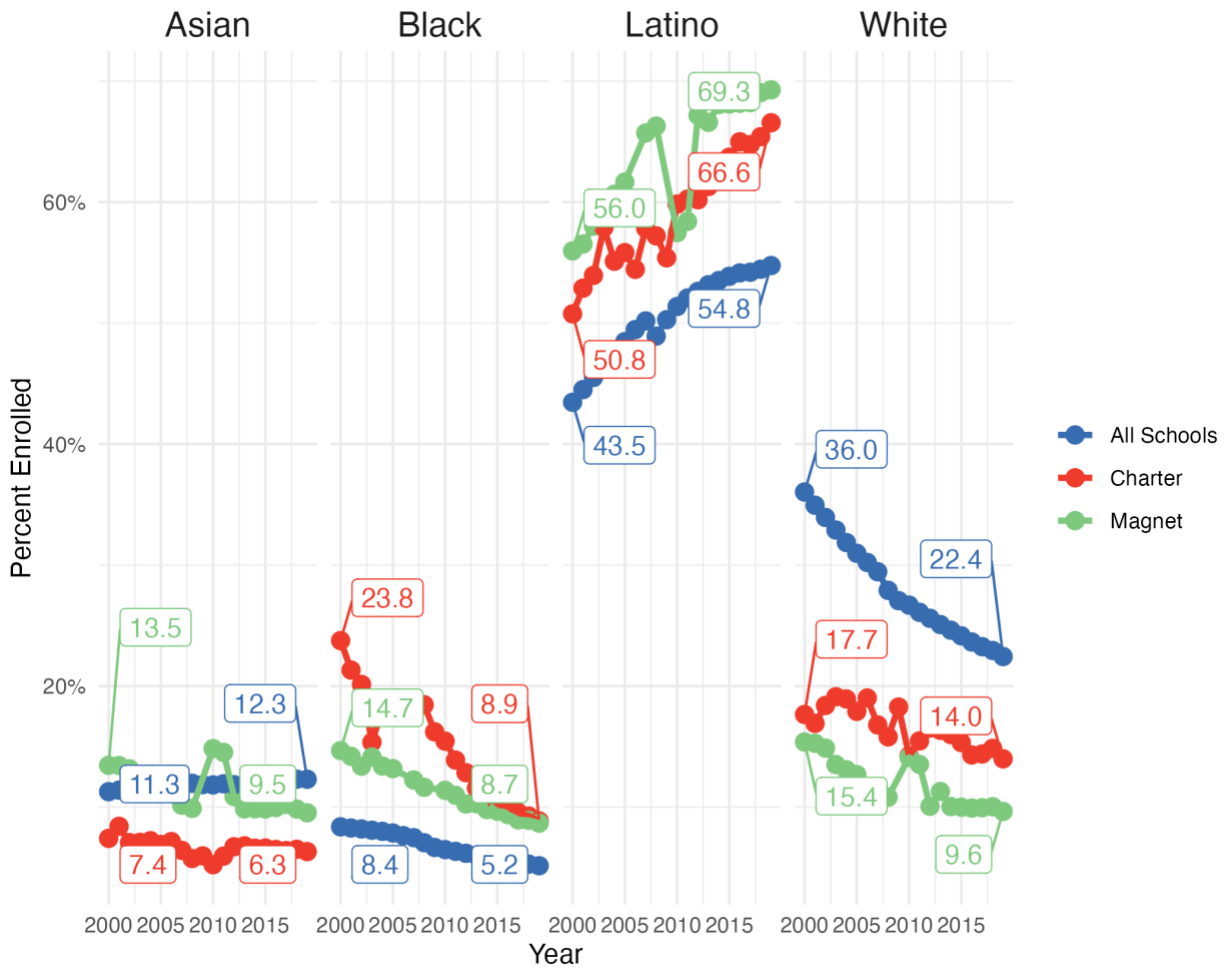


Source: The Common Core of Data.

Trends of Black to White exposure in some of the largest districts in California (Figure 28) were generally increasing in charters and decreasing in magnets, but the data were quite noisy over the 20-year period studied. This was inconsistent with national trends of magnet and charter

segregation in cities and suburbs where Black to White exposure increased slightly in magnets and fell slightly in charters and the trends were much less erratic (Pfleger & Orfield, 2024b).

Figure 29: Racial Composition of Magnet and Charter Schools, 2000–2019



Source: The Common Core of Data.
Note: Charter and magnet composition is for schools in the analytic sample.

Graduation: Top 10% Method and Data

Depending on the analysis, the 10% refers to the most racially concentrated schools and is either all schools in the state, or a smaller subset, such as the top 10% of *high schools*. These schools have significantly disproportionate high shares of certain racial groups, which make them the most segregated. In 2022–23, the 10% of schools with the most White and Asian students had greater than 68.1% White and Asian students. The comparable measure for URM students was 97.0%. The

threshold for White and Asian is lower because the share of students in California that are White and Asian is lower (see Table 10).

Table 10: Share of Enrollment by Racial Grouping, 2012–2022

Year	% White + Asian	% Underrepresented Minority
2012-13	36.6	62.7
2013-14	36.1	63.3
2014-15	35.8	63.6
2015-16	35.5	63.9
2016-17	35.0	64.2
2017-18	34.8	64.3
2018-19	34.6	64.6
2019-20	34.1	65.0
2020-21	33.6	65.5
2021-22	32.9	66.1
2022-23	31.8	66.0

Note. Percent URM includes Hispanic/Latinx, African American, American Indian, Pacific Islander, and Two or More races. The source for this table is the California Department of Education, while the source for some of the earlier analyses are from the U.S. Department of Education, CCD. The different sources occasionally lead to slight differences. Does not always add to 100% because of an unreported race category.

For the graduation analysis we included only schools with more than 15 total students in a cohort and that had at least one 12th grade student. These choices were made to deal with imperfect source data. Merging in race data and filtering to schools with larger than 15 students in the cohort results in a smaller total cohort. CDE suppresses data on data points with small cell sizes. In particular, cohorts (of total enrollment or each race) with less than 11 are not available. This could have significant implications for when looking at small racial groups within segregated schools. For example, if a school has just 10 Black students, but 100 White students, we cannot calculate the Black graduation rate. But if the school was slightly less segregated, and had 11 Black students, we could calculate the Black graduation rate.

Graduation cohorts by race are not normally distributed, in part because of suppression in the source data. This truncation looks somewhat different across racial groups. Linear relationships are thus difficult to identify and interpret. The state government reported a graduation rate of 87.4% for 2022 out of total cohort of 512,524 students (California Department of Education, 2025). Our aggregate analysis of the publicly available data resulted in nearly the same graduation rate (87.7%), but with a smaller cohort (n = 414,350) in part due to suppression in the available data.