

# VERÄNDERUNGEN IN DER REGIONALEN KLASSIFIKATION VON U.S. BILDUNGSDATEN UND IHRE IMPLIKATIONEN FÜR SCHULMERKMALE

Einreichung für den Momentum Kongress 2023: Hegemonie,  
Track Hegemonie in Bildung und Wissenschaft

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## 1. Introduction

There are still large inequalities within the U.S. public education system, which are strongly tied to place and vary greatly between and within regions. A system partially funded by local property taxes combined with high levels of residential segregation has resulted in a school system divided by region, race, ethnicity, income, and educational background (Clark, 1987; Baker & Corcoran, 2012; Baker, 2014a; Reardon & Owens, 2014; Baker et al., 2022).

In recent decades, increasing income inequality has led to even greater segregation between rich and poor families, and between white, and Asian, Black, Hispanic, and Native American families. As a result, segregated neighborhoods have led to an unequal distribution of educational resources across school districts (Owens, 2018a; Sosina & Weathers, 2019; Baker et al., 2022).

Formally, school segregation separates children from different backgrounds into different schools (School Desegregation, 2008). Evidence shows that inequitable school resources, the segregation of U.S. schools by race or income, and differences between urban, suburban, and rural areas contribute to socioeconomic achievement gaps (Logan et al., 2012; Reardon, 2016; Jackson et al., 2016; Owens, 2018b; Sosina & Weathers, 2019; Reardon et al., 2019).

Extensive research has shown that differences in average school funding and school quality are particularly problematic for poor Black, Hispanic, and Native American children, who are more likely to be placed in inferior urban schools, reducing their chances of upward social mobility (Orfield & Yun, 1999; Logan et al., 2012; Logan & Burdick-Will, 2017b; Sosina & Weathers, 2019; Baker et al., 2022).

Although most of the literature on school segregation emphasizes the urban and metropolitan context, this social and educational segregation extends well beyond urban boundaries, making structural differences between urban, suburban, and rural areas increasingly apparent since the 1960s (Massey & Denton, 1988; Logan & Burdick-Will, 2017a).

Furthermore, we still lack an understanding of how the intersection or accumulation of racial and income segregation, or ‘double segregation’ as introduced by Orfield et al. (2012), between schools and within school districts are affected by school district funding (Reardon & Owens, 2014). One reason is the difficulty of disentangling the cumulative disadvantages resulting from this intersection. Disentangling race and income is challenging, because these characteristics tend to overlap (Logan et al., 2012; Orfield et al., 2012; Fahle et al., 2020; Weathers & Sosina, 2022).

## 2. Historical context

Historically, white families moved from cities to suburbs in the wake of Civil Rights Movements and School Desegregation Laws and Policies to avoid integrating diverse populations into neighborhoods and schools ("white flight"). America's efforts to integrate racially segregated schools began after the U.S. Supreme Court's 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, which ended de jure racial segregation (Orfield & Lee, 2005; Reardon & Owens, 2014). The controversy over white flight and its effect on central city population composition grew out of an earlier controversy over the role of busing and its use to desegregate urban schools. Now, there is general agreement that white school enrollment losses do occur in school systems when there is mandatory busing for integration purposes, where there are large minority populations, accessible white suburbs, and when the busing program is district-wide. Although there is general agreement on the existence of white flight, there is less agreement on the temporal nature of that flight. The recent debate is related to conflicting models of white flight (Clark, 1987; Baker & Corcoran, 2012; Baker, 2014a). Since the Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, researchers and policy makers have paid close attention to trends in school segregation.

However, the Supreme Court's 2007 ruling on *Parents Involved in Community Schools* set back integration plans by limiting the consideration of race in education funding policies. Most equalizing measures now consider only economic inequalities among districts and do not address the disadvantages due to racial disparities or the intersection of race and income.

School district funding policies based solely on income are less beneficial for school districts with majority Black, Hispanic, and Native American poor children than for school districts with majority white poor children because they face additional challenges. This means that these policies systematically overlook the disadvantages that result from racial segregation and the intersection of race and income in school districts, widening the gap for Black, Hispanic, and Native American children (Orfield et al., 2012; Potter et al., 2016; Baker et al., 2022; Weathers & Sosina, 2022).

As a result, there are still significant differences between regions and between urban, suburban, and rural school districts in the U.S., exacerbated by enrollment and funding policies (Orfield et al., 2012; Potter et al., 2016; Logan et al., 2017; Baker et al., 2022; Owens & Rich, 2023).

## 3. Research gap

The once clear-cut demographic composition of white, middle-class suburbs; diverse, poor cities; and white, poor rural areas proposed by academics and popular media, has changed dramatically in recent decades. Not only have demographics changed due to regional migration and immigration, but the differences between these broad regional categories have also received more attention in the social sciences (Fischer, 2008; Logan et al., 2012; Greenough & Nelson, 2015; Burdick-Will & Logan, 2017a; Thier et al., 2020; Drescher et al., 2022; Mordechay & Terbeck, 2023).

With the increased availability of regional public data and the use of geographic information system (GIS)-based software tools, it is now possible to distinguish between different types of regions and to include space in the analysis. However, only a small percentage of studies of education in the United States account for region type, and even fewer precisely define urban, suburban, and rural (Thier & Beach, 2019; Thier et al., 2020). Moreover, the few studies that do differentiate by geographic location typically find significant differences in contextual education variables, such as student composition, between and even within region types (Logan et al., 2012; Greenough & Nelson, 2015; Burdick-Will & Logan, 2017a; Puryear & Kettler, 2017; Thier & Beach, 2019; Thier et al., 2020; Drescher et al., 2022).

#### 4. Research goal

The purpose of this paper and the subsequent conference presentation is to emphasize the importance of accounting for more detailed regional variation in studies of education and inequality, but also more generally in the broader social sciences. This is particularly relevant in the case of education research, as the U.S. National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) has been providing highly disaggregated data on public education for more than a decade (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). This study describes the variation in the relationship between school segregation and school district funding for different types of regions defined by the NCES to shed light on regional differences and their implications for educational research. This suggestion is not limited to education research or U.S. data but applies to all social sciences and countries with publicly available regional data.

#### 5. Literature review

##### a. Inequalities in Public School District Funding

In recent decades, funding inequalities between school districts have become a sharper focus in social sciences. Studies have shown that unequal resources for different racial and income groups lead to widening achievement gaps, less thorough curricula, inadequate educational

facilities, and less qualified teachers to the detriment of disadvantaged groups (Orfield & Eaton, 1996; Butler & Hamnett, 2007; Jackson et al., 2016; Lafortune et al., 2018; Sosina & Weathers, 2019; Baker et al., 2022; Weathers & Sosina, 2022).

U.S. public schools receive funding from three different government sources: local, state, and federal. For the 2019-2020 school year, the average local, state, and federal shares are approximately 45%, 47%, and 8%, respectively (Cornman et al., 2020). The primary cause of inequitable funding is the wide variation in local property taxes across U.S. school districts. Property taxes are levied by the boards of education within school district boundaries and account for the majority of the local revenue for school districts. Inequalities arise because taxable wealth in low-income school districts is much lower than in wealthy districts. State school finance formulas often contribute to funding inequalities, even though one of their objectives is to account for economic differences between school districts. In fact, many affluent school districts that theoretically do not depend on state support still receive substantial amounts of statewide taxes. Consequently, the combined state and local education funding is systematically lower in high-poverty districts (Baker & Corcoran, 2012; Baker, 2014b). This is all the more troubling because low-income districts generally need more funding than high-income districts to grant equal educational opportunities to disadvantaged students (Duncombe et al., 2015; Bischoff & Owens, 2019). However, convergence is not in sight, as recent trends show that the wealthiest school districts have much higher school funding and faster tax revenue growth, and thus educational resources (Kelly, 2020).

#### b. School Segregation by Income and Race

The patterns of socio-racial segregation vary between urban, suburban, and rural areas. Urban areas tend to have higher concentrations of Black and Hispanic children, while rural areas tend to have higher concentrations of Native American children (Logan et al., 2012; Burdick-Will & Logan, 2017b; Logan & Burdick-Will, 2017b; Baker et al., 2022). Because of residential segregation and a public education funding system based on local taxes, educational resources in U.S. school districts are closely tied to the socioeconomic and racial backgrounds of the student body (Baker & Corcoran, 2012; Owens, 2018b; Weathers & Sosina, 2022). In recent decades, ethnic and racial diversity in U.S. schools has increased. So has the proportion of students in high-poverty schools, as measured by the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL). The FRPL share is often used as a proxy for the income or wealth level of schools. In most U.S. regions, about 60 percent of students in high- or extreme-poverty schools are Black, Hispanic, or Native American (Fahle et al., 2020).

Most researchers agree that there is an overlap between racial composition and income distribution of the population. However, the intersection of race and income has only recently received more attention in the research on school segregation (Saporito & Sohoni, 2007; Logan et al., 2012; Orfield et al., 2012; Fahle et al., 2020). Logan et al. (2012) created clusters of similar schools based on the student composition by race and income to examine general patterns. One finding is that Black, Hispanic, and Native American students are disproportionately represented in high-poverty schools. In addition, Orfield et al. (2016) found that between 1993 and 2013, the increase in poor Black and Hispanic students was disproportionately higher than the increase in poor white students. Thus, for school districts that are already disadvantaged, double segregation can have an even greater impact on financial resources (Orfield et al., 2012; Fahle et al., 2020; Weathers & Sosina, 2022). Although not the same, a similar impact can be argued for school districts that are already disadvantaged.

#### c. Double Segregation and Public School District Funding

The focus on within-district double segregation and public school district funding is important because operational, legislative, and policy constraints are usually based on district-level factors (Reardon & Owens, 2014), which include school funding formulas, personnel contracts, policies, and salaries (Roza, 2010). Different types of segregation can affect both the total amount and distributional structure of resources, which are typically allocated by states and school districts. Some of these resources are mechanically correlated with student composition, such as race and socioeconomic background, while other resources are distributed by governments (Reardon & Owens, 2014). Reardon and Owens (2014) point to the need to better understand the impact of segregation on financial resources and, by extension, on students. However, little research has been conducted on how within-district double segregation affects per-pupil revenue in school districts, although the literature suggests that both between-district racial and income segregation independently affect school district funding (Bischoff & Owens, 2019; Weathers & Sosina, 2022; Baker et al., 2022).

First, the relationship between racial segregation and funding disparities may be determined not only by race, but also, in part, by the willingness to fund public education (Weathers & Sosina, 2022). People's willingness to contribute to public spending tends to decrease when they perceive that the benefits are extended to those outside their social group (Alesina et al., 1999). It is likely to be strongest at the local level and may be driven by teacher preferences and characteristics or the political influence of white parents through, for example, votes on tax levies or school boards (Alesina et al., 1999; Condron & Roscigno, 2003; Baker, 2016; Sosina

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& Weathers, 2019; Weathers & Sosina, 2022). In addition to influencing the distribution of local public funds, white parents can hoard opportunities by avoiding the local funding system while still generating funds for their children's schools through other means such as private donations (Fiel, 2013; Kelly, 2020; Weathers & Sosina, 2022). Thus, higher levels of racial segregation could reduce the average local and total public funding for the entire school district if local actors were to change the public funding levels. Aside from racial disparities in poverty, racial segregation should not affect state and federal funding because of the Parents Involved in Community Schools decision, which prohibits funding formulas that base the allocation of school resources on race (Sosina & Weathers, 2019; Weathers & Sosina, 2022).

d. Regional classifications in U.S. education data

The regional classification of school locations, such as urban, suburban, and rural, is an important factor in determining education policy and the different types of resources available to schools (Logan et al., 2012; Reardon, 2019; Thier et al., 2020; Drescher et al., 2022; Mordechay & Terbeck, 2023).

The U.S. National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) changed its locale classification in the 2006-2007 school year to reflect changes in population as well as urban and rural environments more accurately. Instead of the dichotomous urban-rural binary often used in U.S. Census data, schools are now classified into four upper categories (city, suburb, town, rural) and three additional subcategories, each based on distance and/or population density.

The exact definitions of the locale code are (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019):

<b>Locale Category</b>	<b>Subcategory</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Descriptor</b>
City	Large	11	Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with population of 250,000 or more.
	Midsized	12	Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with a population less than 250,000 and greater than or equal to 100,000.
	Small	13	Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with a population less than 100,000.
Suburb	Large	21	Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with population of 250,000 or more.

	Midsized	22	Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with a population less than 250,000 and greater than or equal to 100,000.
	Small	23	Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with a population less than 100,000.
Town	Fringe	31	Territory inside an urban cluster that is less than or equal to 10 miles from an urbanized area.
	Distant	32	Territory inside an urban cluster that is more than 10 miles and less than or equal to 35 miles from an urbanized area.
	Remote	33	Territory inside an urban cluster that is more than 35 miles from an urbanized area.
Rural	Fringe	41	Census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster.
	Distant	42	Census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster.
	Remote	43	Census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and is also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster.

Many studies find significant variation across regional types, such as between urban, suburban, and rural schools and school districts (Burdick-Will & Logan, 2017a; Logan et al., 2012; Logan & Burdick-Will, 2017a) and within regional types, such as between large suburban, midsize suburban, and small suburban schools and school districts (Fischer, 2008; Greenough & Nelson, 2015; Stroub & Richards, 2017; Reardon, 2019; Drescher et al., 2022; Mordechay & Terbeck, 2023; Owens & Rich, 2023).

For example, while suburbs were established in the second half of the twentieth century as relatively affluent, homogeneous white neighborhoods around a diverse, poor urban center, suburbanization and exurbanization in recent decades have been driven by the rapid growth of



Black, Hispanic, and Asian populations. While these patterns suggest an increase in racial/ethnic diversity in the suburbs, researchers have expressed concern that suburban public school students are becoming more segregated along racial/ethnic and income lines (Fischer, 2008; Stroub & Richards, 2017).

Moreover, as Greenough and Nelson (2015) and others note for the rural classification, an enormous variety of schools fall into this group, which can lead to problems in analyzing their aggregate data.

Nevertheless, most education studies use aggregate data that, at best, distinguish between urban, suburban, and rural schools. However, there is a large group of rural schools, the majority of which have characteristics of suburban schools, that could skew the averages for rural schools (Lichter, 2012; Greenough & Nelson, 2015; Puryear & Kettler, 2017; Kebede et al., 2021; Drescher et al., 2022). The characteristics are primarily data on the racial and income composition of schools, such as student eligibility for free and reduced-price meals, ethnic background, and test scores. At the school district level, funding and segregation patterns by regional sub-classification are also of interest (Logan et al., 2012; Owens, 2018a; Reardon, 2019; Drescher et al., 2022; Weathers & Sosina, 2022).

## 6. Research Objective

With the introduction of the more detailed regional classification, it is now possible to examine school characteristics for smaller and more homogeneous subtypes, which is also the aim of this paper. It can help uncover significant differences at a more granular level and reveal variations in otherwise average values of broader geographic categories. This study will provide an overview of the racial and income disparities that exist between schools and within school districts in different urban, suburban, and rural areas.

More specifically, I ask how the relationship between the intersection of within-district racial and income segregation and per-pupil public funding of school districts varies across and within region types to provide context to the national education data. This means that school segregation can have different effects in terms of significance and magnitude on public school district funding depending on the regional type of the school district. In my data, I observe significant differences between and within regional types. These results suggest that it is important for research and policy to take the location of school districts into account and to distinguish between the regional types on the most granular level possible.

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