

School Segregation is Increasing in New York's Cities and Suburbs

Recent articles in the [New York Times](#) and [The Nation](#) have focused on efforts to re-segregate schools in the South, by carving new predominantly white school districts out of larger county-wide school districts that are predominantly black and Hispanic. The articles examined a recent federal court decision that permitted the creation of the Gardendale School District near Birmingham, Alabama. The new district is 75% white, in a county school district that has a majority of black and Hispanic students.

In 1954, the United States Supreme Court, in [Brown vs. Board of Education](#), outlawed the creation of segregated school systems by law. While first efforts to combat segregation focused on legally created barriers to integration in the South, later, courts ordered busing to combat segregation in northern school districts, like Boston. These efforts were met with fierce resistance from parents who did not want their children to be bused to schools that had large minority student populations outside their neighborhoods .

Resistance to school integration has been widespread. While legally created separate schools in the same school system for white and black students have been eliminated, opposition to efforts to combat segregation based on residential patterns has been widespread and largely successful. Today, the schools attended by black and Hispanic students typically have far higher concentrations of minority students than those attended by white students. While segregation in the South was the result of laws that created separate school systems for white and black students, today much of the segregation results from the concentration of

black and Hispanic students in cities with majority black and Hispanic populations.

[In an earlier post, I examined the growth of segregation of black and Hispanic students in metropolitan areas in New York State.](#) In this post, I compare the concentration of black and Hispanic students with white students in schools in cities and suburbs in New York metropolitan areas.

Changes in School Enrollment

School Enrollments - 1990-91 vs 2014-15			
Black or Hispanic vs. White			
Upstate Metropolitan Areas	1990-1991	2014-2015	Change
Black or Hispanic	83,681	137,025	53,344
White	534,191	409,210	(124,981)
Total	664,122	616,954	(71,637)
NYC Suburbs			
Black & Hispanic	117,820	258,480	140,660
White	446,268	377,622	(68,646)
Total	584,787	683,836	99,049
New York City			
Black & Hispanic	680,649	635,866	(44,783)
White	178,357	149,012	(29,345)
Total	944,113	964,116	26,035

In upstate metropolitan areas, and in the suburbs in the New York metropolitan area, enrollments of black and Hispanic students have increased substantially between 1990-91 and 2014-15 – by more than 50,000 upstate and by 140,000 in the New York suburbs.

- Black student enrollments increased in upstate metropolitan areas grew by 23,000, while Hispanic enrollments grew by 32,000.
- In Westchester, Orange and Rockland counties in the New York metropolitan area, black student enrollments grew by 15,000 and Hispanic enrollments grew by 45,000.

- In New York City, black student enrollments decreased by 113,000 while Hispanic enrollments increased by 68,000.

White student enrollments decreased significantly both upstate (by 125,000) and in the New York metropolitan area (by 113,000). Nationally, enrollments of black and Hispanic students increased by 7.4 million, between 1994 and 2014 (1990 data is not available) while white student enrollments decreased by 4.2 million.

Overall, school enrollments increased in New York City and its suburbs between 1990-91 and 2014-15, while they decreased in upstate metropolitan areas. Nationally, enrollments increased 12.6% between 1995 and 2014.

School Enrollments - 1990-91 vs 2014-15			
Black or Hispanic vs. White			
Upstate Metropolitan Areas	1990-1991	2014-2015	Change
Black or Hispanic	12.6%	22.2%	9.6%
White	80.4%	66.3%	-14.1%
NYC Suburbs			
Black & Hispanic	20.1%	37.8%	17.7%
White	76.3%	55.2%	-21.1%
New York City			
Black & Hispanic	72.1%	66.0%	-6.1%
White	18.9%	15.5%	-3.4%

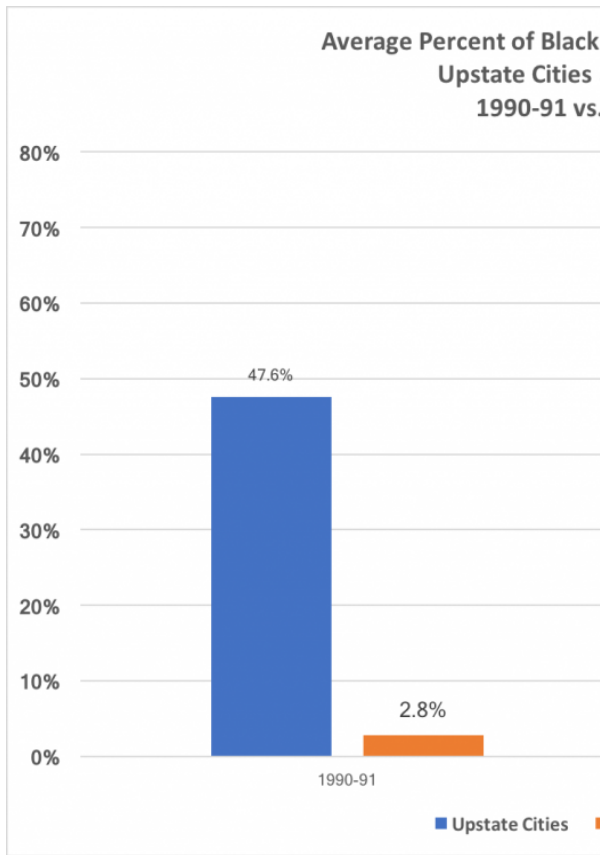
In percentage terms, school enrollments nationally were 49.2% white and 42.1% black and Hispanic in 2014-15.

- Upstate metropolitan areas (66.3% white) and New York City suburbs (55.2% white) had higher percentages of white student enrollments than the nation, while New York City had higher percentages of black and Hispanic students.
- National level data for 1990 showed a student population of 27.2% black and hispanic students, and 69.4% white

students.

By 2014-15 the composition of student populations in schools had changed significantly from the 1990's, nationally, in upstate New York metropolitan areas and in the New York metropolitan area, with large increases in the percentage of black and Hispanic students. New York City was the only exception – black and Hispanic students decreased as a percentage of the total.

Increasing Minority Student Concentrations in City Schools



		Percentage of Students who are Black or Hispanic Schools in New York Metropolitan Areas		
		1990-91	2014-15	Change
Albany-Schenectady-Troy				
Cities	72.4%	31.8%	62.2%	30.4%
Suburbs		2.2%	7.4%	5.2%
Binghamton				
City		12.0%	40.3%	28.3%
Suburbs		1.7%	7.3%	5.6%
Buffalo-Niagara Falls				
Cities		50.0%	64.0%	14.0%
Suburbs		2.5%	8.4%	5.9%
Rochester				
City		69.6%	86.6%	17.0%
Suburbs		5.4%	14.2%	8.8%
Syracuse				
City		9.2%	40.8%	31.6%
Suburbs		2.8%	5.9%	3.1%
Utica				
City	2014-15	18.7%	33.5%	14.8%
Suburbs		0.9%	3.5%	2.6%
Upstate Metropolitan Areas				
Cities		47.6%	72.4%	24.8%
Suburbs		2.8%	9.2%	6.4%
Westchester, Orange, Rockland				
City		59.6%	76.0%	16.4%
Suburbs		18.0%	34.7%	16.7%

In cities in upstate metropolitan areas, black and Hispanic student populations grew substantially as a percentage of the total – by nearly 25% on average. Black and Hispanic student populations as a percentage of the total grew in suburbs as well, but the growth was much smaller – only 6.4% on average. In the Orange-Rockland-Westchester portion of the New York City metropolitan area, the growth of black and Hispanic students as a percentage of the total was about equal in cities and suburbs – 16% on average.

Most upstate cities have student populations that are majority black and Hispanic, while most suburban areas in upstate metropolitan areas have student bodies that are less than 10% black and hispanic. On average, the gap in black and hispanic student percentages between upstate cities and suburbs grew from 44% to 63%.

Schools attended by Typical Black and Hispanic Students Differ

from those attended by Typical White Students

Percentage of Black and Hispanic Students per School			
For Typical Black & Hispanic and White Students			
New York Metropolitan Areas - 2014-2015			
Cities	Black & Hispanic	White	Difference
Albany-Schenectady-Troy	67.5%	50.1%	17.4%
Binghamton	38.5%	38.5%	0.0%
Buffalo-Niagara Falls	77.7%	46.0%	31.7%
Rochester	89.9%	84.0%	5.9%
Syracuse	65.8%	56.8%	9.0%
Utica-Rome	41.4%	21.3%	20.1%
Orange-Rockland-Westchester	84.2%	68.0%	16.2%
Suburbs			
Albany-Schenectady-Troy	8.7%	5.1%	3.6%
Binghamton	14.9%	4.3%	10.6%
Buffalo-Niagara Falls	14.7%	4.7%	10.0%
Rochester	23.9%	9.3%	14.6%
Syracuse	7.2%	4.7%	2.5%
Utica-Rome	4.5%	2.6%	1.9%
Orange-Rockland-Westchester	64.0%	18.5%	45.5%

This section compares the racial and ethnic composition of schools attended by typical black and Hispanic students with those attended by white students in 2014-15. It does so by finding the percentage of black/Hispanic students at schools for a median student in each racial/ethnic group. Computing the median involves sorting all the students in a group (black/Hispanic or white) in a metropolitan area by the percentage of minority students in the schools that they attend, and finding the percentage of black/Hispanic students in the school attended by a student who is at the exact middle of the sort. Half of the white or Hispanic/black students would be attending schools with an equal or higher percentage of Hispanic/black students, while half would have an equal or lower percentage.

The data shows that in both cities and suburbs upstate, black and Hispanic students typically attend schools with higher

concentrations of black and Hispanic students than do white students.

- For example, in the Buffalo-Niagara Falls MSA, black and Hispanic students living in cities typically attend schools where 78% of the students are black or Hispanic.
- White students in those cities typically attend schools whose student bodies are 46% black – a difference of 32%.
- In other upstate Metropolitan areas, the concentration of black and Hispanic students in city schools ranges from no higher in the city of Binghamton to 20% higher in Utica-Rome.

Within suburban school districts in New York’s metropolitan areas, black and Hispanic students typically attend schools that have higher percentages of black and Hispanic students.

- In the Rochester metropolitan area, black and Hispanic students living outside Rochester typically attend schools with 24% black and Hispanic students, while white students typically attend schools with 9% black and Hispanic students.
- In other upstate metropolitan areas, the differences ranged from 2% to 11%.

Percentage of Black and Hispanic Students per School			
For Typical Black & Hispanic and White Students			
New York Metropolitan Areas - 2014-2015			
	Cities	Outside Cities	
	Black & Hispanic	White	Difference
Albany-Schenectady-Troy	67.5%	5.1%	62.4%
Binghamton	38.5%	4.3%	34.2%
Buffalo-Niagara Falls	77.7%	4.7%	73.0%
Rochester	89.9%	9.3%	80.6%
Syracuse	65.8%	4.7%	61.1%
Utica -Rome	41.4%	2.6%	38.8%
Orange-Rockland-Westchester	84.2%	18.5%	65.7%

Since most black and Hispanic students in metropolitan areas live in

cities, while most white students live outside them, it is useful to compare the percentage of black and Hispanic students in schools typically attended by black and Hispanic students in cities with the percentage of black and Hispanic students in schools attended by typical white students outside cities. Here, the contrast is stronger.

- For example, In the Albany-Schenectady-Troy metropolitan area, a typical black or Hispanic student living in a city would attend a school that had 67.5% black and Hispanic students.
- In contrast, typical white students living outside Albany, Schenectady and Troy attend schools that had 5.1% black and Hispanic students, a difference of 62.4%.

Differences were large in other upstate metropolitan areas, as well. The difference in the percentage of black and Hispanic students in city schools attended by typical black and Hispanic students and schools outside cities attended by typical white students was 80.6% in the Rochester MSA, and 73% in the Buffalo-Niagara Falls MSA.

Conclusions

Since the 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education Supreme Court decision, it has been illegal to maintain separate schools for minority students and white students in a school district.

But, efforts to create racial balance in schools in cities and metropolitan areas in New York state and elsewhere have largely been unsuccessful.

In fact, the data shows that over the past 25 years, changes in living patterns have seen large increases in black and Hispanic populations in central cities in New York state, but relatively little change in areas outside them. As a result, because school districts in New York State often follow city and town boundaries, black and Hispanic students are increasingly concentrated in city schools.

- School districts in cities in upstate metropolitan areas have seen substantial increases in the percentage of students who are black and Hispanic – from 47.6% to 72.4% between 1990-91 and 2014-15.
- In contrast outside Upstate cities, the average percentage of black and Hispanic students only grew from 2.8% to 9.2%.

The increasing concentration of black and Hispanic students within cities is not the full explanation of their increasing segregation. Within cities and outside them, black and Hispanic students are likely to attend schools with higher percentages of black and Hispanic students than are whites.

This is largely the result of residential [housing segregation within communities in our metropolitan areas](#). As a result, the difference between the racial and ethnic composition of schools typically attended by black and Hispanic students and white students has grown larger – in five of seven metropolitan areas typical black and Hispanic students attended schools that had 65% or more black and Hispanic students, while in five of seven metropolitan areas typical white students attended schools whose populations had 5.1% or less black and Hispanic students.

The growth of racial segregation in New York schools is paralleled by its growth nationwide: The [U. S. General Accounting Office found in 2016](#) that *“Over time, there has been a large increase in schools that are the most isolated by poverty and race. From school years 2000-01 to 2013-14 (most recent data available), both the percentage of K-12 public schools that were high poverty and comprised of mostly Black or Hispanic students (H/PBH) and the students attending these schools grew significantly. In these schools 75 to 100 percent of the students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, and 75 to 100 percent of the students were Black or Hispanic.”*

Although there are significant potential benefits from schools that are more representative of the diversity of the

population as a whole, the barriers to change are substantial.

While New York state has not seen the creation of white enclave school districts carved out of larger majority minority districts, the existing structure of local school districts has a similar effect.

There is no silver bullet that will remedy the growth of segregated schools in New York state, or elsewhere. Remedies tried in the past, like school busing, have been very unpopular, and have generally failed. [Historically, federal housing policies in the 20th century supported racial segregation.](#) Similarly, suburban zoning laws and resistance to low and moderate income multi-family housing continue to play a role in preventing minority residents from living in them. In the current political environment, with an administration in Washington, D. C. that is not supportive of federal intervention to promote integration, segregation in our schools is likely to continue to increase.

Note: For the Orange-Rockland-Westchester portion of the New York City Metropolitan Area, cities are: Mount Vernon, New Rochelle, White Plains and Yonkers.