

## Segregation and Exposure to High-Poverty Schools in Large Metropolitan Areas: 2008-09

### Key Findings

**For public, primary schools in the 100 largest metro areas:**

- Enrollment is already “majority-minority” nationally but differs greatly across regions, with the West almost 2/3rds minority (Table 1.)
- Residential segregation and school assignment plans lead to high levels of school segregation, particularly for blacks. Black segregation is highest in Chicago, Milwaukee, and New York. Hispanic segregation is highest in LA, Springfield, MA and New York (Table 3.)
- Highest school poverty rates are concentrated in California and in the Deep South (Map 5.)
- 43% of black and Hispanic students attend schools with poverty rates over 80%, compared to just 4% of whites (Figure 3.)
- Even within the same metro areas, black and Hispanic students attend schools with dramatically higher poverty rates than whites or Asians. Bridgeport and Hartford, CT have the highest disparities (Table 7.)
- Policies must address high levels of residential segregation, reduce concentrated poverty in high-minority areas, and allow students to cross district boundaries to achieve equity.

### Summary

Schools are a key environment influencing child development, and research has documented the negative effects of concentrated-poverty schools as well as the advantages of racially/ethnically diverse learning environments. Yet, minority children continue to attend high-poverty, high-minority schools, separate from the vast majority of white children. This report describes patterns of school segregation and poverty concentration of 30,989 public primary schools in the 100 largest metropolitan areas for the 2008-09 school year. In these schools overall, enrollment is already “majority minority,” with Hispanics comprising over a quarter and blacks almost a fifth of enrollment, but racial/ethnic school composition differs greatly across the country. School composition also differs within metropolitan areas. High levels of neighborhood segregation fuel high levels of school segregation. As a result, white students attend schools that are disproportionately white and low-poverty, and black and Hispanic students attend schools that are disproportionately minority and high-poverty.

Children in high-poverty schools face enormous challenges, with classmates who are generally less prepared, have lower aspirations and graduation rates and have greater absences; parents who are less involved, with less political and financial clout; and teachers who tend to be less experienced and more commonly teach outside their fields of concentration. Black and Latino students attend not only higher-poverty schools than whites on average, but in many metro areas there exists very little overlap between the schools that these different groups attend. For example, close to half (43%) of white students attend schools with poverty rates of 20% or less, compared with just 7% of black and Hispanic students. In contrast, 43% of black and Hispanic students attend schools with poverty rates over 80%, compared to 4% of whites.

Residential segregation and the routine assignment of students to schools based on geographic proximity are the underlying causes of school segregation and differential exposure to high-poverty schools. Thus, measures which attack residential

segregation, such as enforcement of fair housing laws, situating of affordable housing in higher opportunity areas, reducing zoning restrictions, and aiding in geographic mobility are all useful tools in reducing racial and economic segregation in schools as well. Policies to boost school and neighborhood quality in lower-income minority areas, such as the new Promise Neighborhood Initiative, could also help by reducing poverty in those schools/neighborhoods and attracting more mixed income and white families, producing more middle-income and diverse schools. At the same time, school mobility and assignment programs should not be overlooked. More should be done to allow students in failing schools to transfer to better schools, even if they are outside school district boundaries. Innovative school assignment plans, which take into consideration the composition of students' neighborhoods as well as other factors, should continue to be explored, perfected and utilized to break down segregation. Magnet schools which provide high quality education and draw diverse students from diverse neighborhoods may be another important tool. Schools should prepare all students to excel. The fact that such gross levels of disparity continue must not be met with apathy or acceptance but be confronted to ensure that our children and our nation can thrive in an increasingly diverse and challenging world.

## Background

In previous work, diversitydata.org has documented that racial/ethnic minority children are more likely than non-Hispanic white children to experience disadvantaged environments which compromise their chances of achieving positive developmental and health outcomes. For example, black and Hispanic children are about 20 times more likely than white children to experience double jeopardy—to live in both poor families and concentrated poverty neighborhoods [1].

In addition to families and neighborhoods, schools are a key context influencing child development. Research has documented the negative effects of concentrated poverty schools[2] as well as the advantages of diverse learning environments[3, 4]. Yet, as we enter the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, racial/ethnic minority children continue to attend very different schools than white children. These schools differ not only in terms of their vastly different racial/ethnic compositions, but also in terms of their social environment such as the poverty rate of the student population.

Currently, much media and policy attention is devoted to charter schools, despite the fact that charters only enroll about 2 percent of primary and secondary school students. [5, 6] The debate focusing on the charter school versus traditional public school models means that the issues of persistent high racial/ethnic segregation and high exposure of minority children to economic disadvantage at the school level remain largely unaddressed. Indeed, a recent statement of the National Coalition on School Diversity urged the nation to pursue racial integration and poverty deconcentration in order to ensure equal opportunity in schooling. [7]

This diversitydata.org report describes patterns of school segregation and poverty concentration in 30,989 public primary schools<sup>a</sup> in the 100 largest metropolitan areas for the 2008-09 school year, drawing on the National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data[8]. We focus on primary schools because participation in the free or reduced lunch program, our proxy for poverty status, has been found to be lower in upper grade levels, at least in part because of older students' fear of stigma [9]. Therefore school poverty is better measured in lower grades. We first examine overall racial composition at the national, regional and metro

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<sup>a</sup> Primary schools are defined according to the NCES as those with lowest grade of "Pre-K" through 3 and highest grade of "Pre-K" through 8. This report does not distinguish between traditional public schools and public charter schools. For a discussion of relative degrees of segregation between these types of schools and student exposure to high-poverty schools, see: "Choice without Equity: Charter School Segregation and the Need for Civil Rights Standards," by E. Frankenberg, G. Siegel-Hawley, and J. Wang. The Civil Rights Project/Derechos Civiles at UCLA. February 10, 2010.

area levels. Racial/ethnic groups include Hispanics, who may be of any race, and non-Hispanic members of the following racial groups: whites, blacks, Asians/Pacific Islanders, and American Indians/Alaskan Natives. The term “minorities/minority” is used for all racial/ethnic groups except non-Hispanic whites, even when those groups may represent the numeric “majority” of students in certain areas. We next analyze racial and ethnic school segregation of metro areas, using two commonly used measures, dissimilarity and isolation. We examine school poverty rates across metro areas as well as the relative exposure to high-poverty schools of students of different races/ethnicities. Lastly, we look within metro areas to further investigate the extent to which minority versus white children in the same metro areas attend schools of different poverty levels.

## Racial/Ethnic Composition of Public Primary Schools

The racial and ethnic composition of the student population has changed and will continue to change substantially over time, driven by immigration and varying birth rates of different racial and ethnic groups. As of the 2008-09 school year, public primary school enrollment in the 100 largest metro areas was “majority minority,” with Hispanics comprising over a quarter and blacks almost a fifth of enrollment (**Table 1**). These patterns differ greatly by region. While the Northeast and Midwest were less than half minority, the West was almost two-thirds minority, with Hispanic students in the West comprising a significantly larger share of enrollment than whites (43.5% versus 34.7%.)

These regional patterns can be seen more specifically in **Maps 1-4** which plot the 100 largest metro areas along with their racial/ethnic composition of public primary school enrollment<sup>b</sup>. Metro areas are divided into quartiles, with the top quartile (the 25% of metros with the highest share of the specified race/ethnicity) shown in dark red and the lowest quartile shown in tan. Metros with the highest white share of enrollment tend to be clustered in the Northeast and Midwest; those with the largest black shares are clustered in the Mid Atlantic, Midwest and South. Hispanic shares are highest in California and the Southwest as well as in some Florida metros, while Asians are most concentrated on the coasts as well as parts of Texas and the Midwest.

**Table 1**  
Racial/Ethnic Share of Public Primary School Enrollment: 2008-09

100 Largest Metro Areas, Percent					
	White	Hispanic	Black	Asian	American Indian
<b>Northeast</b>	54.1	20.0	18.2	7.0	0.3
<b>Midwest</b>	58.4	13.9	23.2	4.1	0.4
<b>South</b>	40.1	28.0	27.0	4.2	0.7
<b>West</b>	34.7	43.5	7.1	11.2	1.0
<b>All</b>	<b>44.9</b>	<b>28.0</b>	<b>19.1</b>	<b>6.7</b>	<b>0.7</b>

*Note: Excludes multi-racial data which was only reported in 5 states.  
Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data*

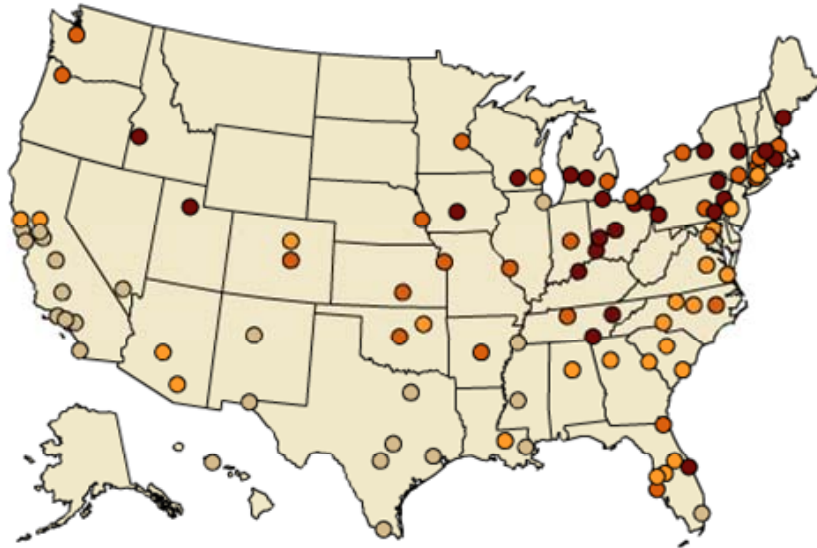
**Table 2** lists the ten metro areas with the largest absolute number and largest share of each major race/ethnicity. Many of the metro areas with the highest shares of particular racial/ethnic groups, with the exception of Asians, tend to be medium to smaller-sized. Thus, even though Portland, ME has 91% white enrollment, it has only about one-eighteenth the number of white primary students as the New York metro, which has 39% white enrollment. And while Jackson, MS has 63% black enrollment, it has only a tenth the number of black primary students as the New York metro, which has 20% black enrollment.

<sup>b</sup> Because American Indians/Alaskan Natives make up a very small share of most metro areas, they are not shown in maps.

Map 1

### Non-Hispanic White Share of Enrollment: 2008-09

Public Primary School Students in 100 Largest Metros



Key:

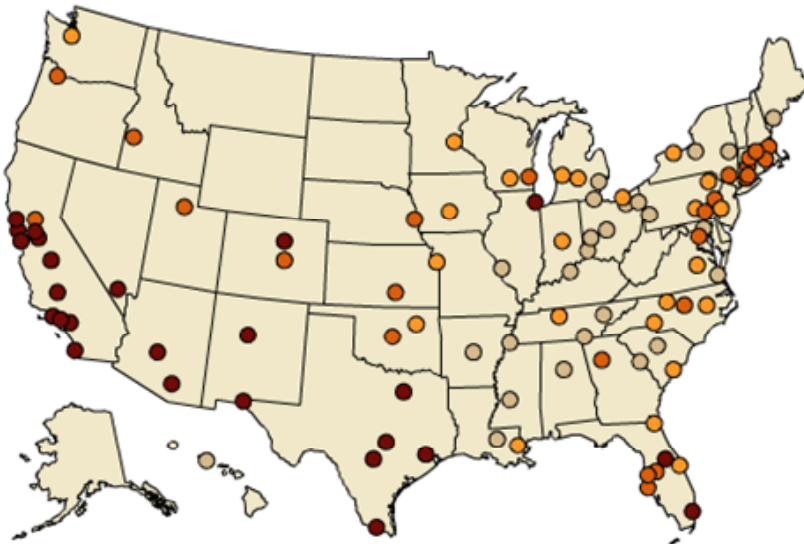


Source: Diversitydata.org analysis of NCES Common Core of Data, 2008-09.

Map 2

### Hispanic Share of Enrollment: 2008-09

Public Primary School Students in 100 Largest Metros



Key:

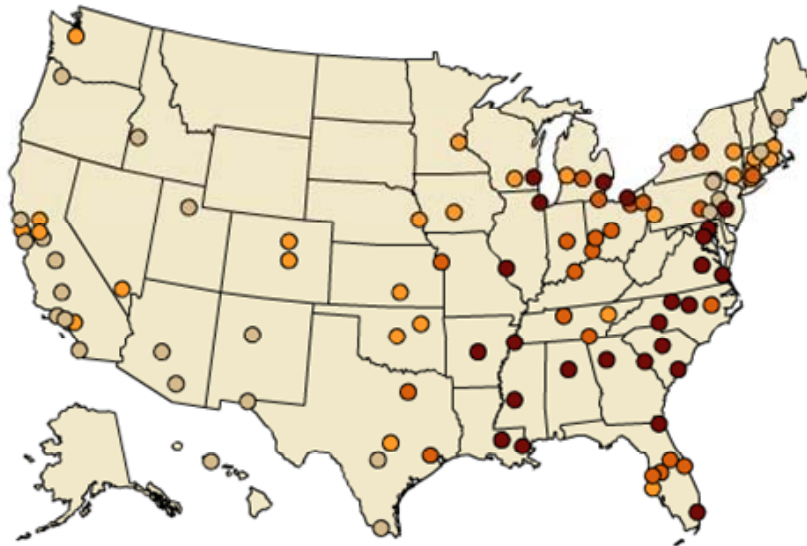


Source: Diversitydata.org analysis of NCES Common Core of Data, 2008-09.

Map 3

### Non-Hispanic Black Share of Enrollment: 2008-09

Public Primary School Students in 100 Largest Metros



Key:

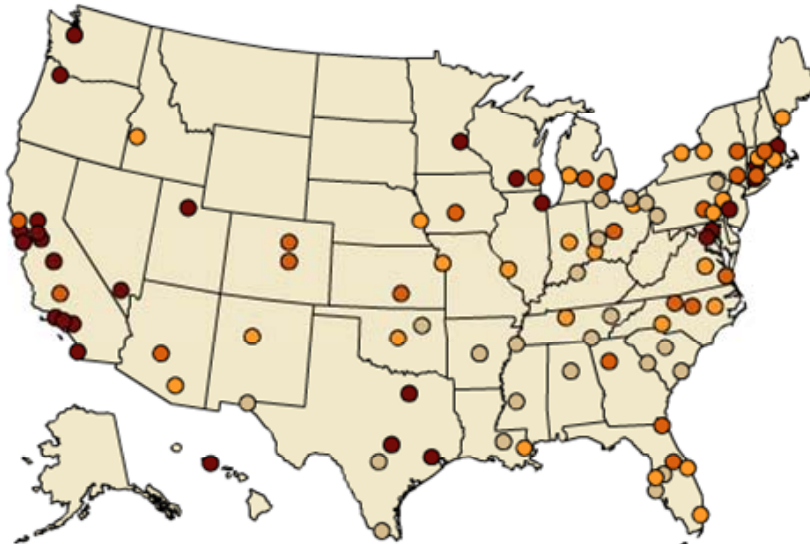
- 0.3% - 7.4%
- 7.4% - 16.0%
- 16.0% - 24.5%
- 24.5% - 63.4%

Source: Diversitydata.org analysis of NCES Common Core of Data, 2008-09.

Map 4

### Non-Hispanic Asian Share/Pac. Islander of Enrollment: 2008-09

Public Primary School Students in 100 Largest Metros



Key:

- 0.6% - 2.1%
- 2.1% - 3.4%
- 3.4% - 4.9%
- 4.9% - 71.9%

Source: Diversitydata.org analysis of NCES Common Core of Data, 2008-09.

Table 2

## Metros with Largest Numbers and Percents of Public Primary School Students by Race/Ethnicity: 2008-09

### 100 Largest Metro Areas

Largest Absolute Number							
White		Black		Hispanic		Asian/Pac. Islander	
New York, NY	497,096	New York, NY	260,699	Los Angeles, CA	599,439	New York, NY	135,453
Chicago, IL	315,408	Chicago, IL	202,930	New York, NY	383,228	Los Angeles, CA	117,075
Dallas, TX	216,300	Atlanta, GA	166,487	Houston, TX	263,928	San Francisco, CA	61,788
Philadelphia, PA	211,608	Washington, DC	128,806	Chicago, IL	256,649	Honolulu, HI	46,372
Boston, MA	207,463	Philadelphia, PA	123,617	Dallas, TX	241,540	Chicago, IL	42,100
Detroit, MI	196,770	Miami, FL	111,655	Riverside, CA	232,415	San Jose, CA	41,952
Phoenix, AZ	188,060	Houston, TX	109,436	Phoenix, AZ	183,772	Washington, DC	40,482
Los Angeles, CA	180,632	Detroit, MI	109,199	Miami, FL	162,581	Seattle, WA	33,244
Atlanta, GA	179,640	Dallas, TX	106,674	San Antonio, TX	128,116	Dallas, TX	32,747
Minneapolis, MN	165,525	Baltimore, MD	79,893	San Diego, CA	104,393	Houston, TX	32,192

Largest Percent							
White		Black		Hispanic		Asian/Pac. Islander	
Portland, ME	91.4	Jackson, MS	63.4	McAllen, TX	97.3	Honolulu, HI	71.9
Knoxville, TN	83.3	Memphis, TN	61.9	El Paso, TX	89.4	San Jose, CA	30.9
Scranton, PA	82.3	New Orleans, LA	56.7	San Antonio, TX	65.9	San Francisco, CA	23.3
Pittsburgh, PA	82.1	Baton Rouge, LA	53.8	Bakersfield, CA	59.9	Stockton, CA	16.6
Youngstown, OH	78.9	Augusta, GA	48.2	Los Angeles, CA	59.8	Seattle, WA	14.6
Boise City, ID	78.4	Columbia, SC	45.5	Fresno, CA	59.3	Sacramento, CA	14.4
Cincinnati, OH	78.3	Virginia Beach, VA	44.5	Riverside, CA	58.5	Los Angeles, CA	11.7
Des Moines, IA	77.9	Baltimore, MD	42.3	Albuquerque, NM	57.7	San Diego, CA	11.4
Akron, OH	77.0	Charleston, SC	41.5	Modesto, CA	53.0	New York, NY	10.6
Albany, NY	76.0	Atlanta, GA	38.8	Oxnard, CA	52.0	Fresno, CA	10.5

Note: Racial groups include only non-Hispanic members of those groups. Metro name includes only first named major city in metro area. Metros defined as of June, 2003. For complete description of metro areas and component counties, see: <http://www.census.gov/population/www/metroareas/lists/2003/03msa.txt> Primary schools defined as those with lowest grade of PK-3 and highest grade of PK-8.

Source: Diversitydata.org analysis of National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, 2008-09.

## Racial/Ethnic Segregation Within Metro Areas

While the racial/ethnic school composition differs greatly across the U.S. (as shown in **Table 1**), it also differs within metro areas and across neighborhoods. High levels of neighborhood segregation fuel high levels of primary school segregation, as the vast majority of children attend neighborhood schools, based on geographic proximity<sup>c</sup>. As a result, most children do not attend schools which reflect the racial/ethnic composition or the poverty composition of their metro areas as a whole. White students attend schools with disproportionate shares of white, non-poor classmates, while racial/ethnic minority students attend schools with disproportionate shares of minority, poor classmates.

Research at the national level has found increasing segregation for blacks and Latinos since 1988. In that year, the average black student was in a school that was one-third white, and just one-third of black students were in intensely segregated schools (those with 90-100 percent minority students.) Latinos attended schools with average enrollments that were one-third white, and one-third of Latinos were in intensely segregated schools. By 2006, both minority groups were in schools that were almost three-fourths minority on average, and about 40% were in intensely segregated schools. For Latinos this increase is linked to their rapidly growing numbers and increasing residential segregation. For blacks it was related, to some degree, with the ending of court-ordered desegregation plans[11].

Dissimilarity is one commonly used index of segregation, used to measure residential (i.e. neighborhood) segregation as well as school segregation. When examining segregation of minority students from white students, dissimilarity is a measure of evenness and can be interpreted conceptually as the share of the particular minority group that would need to move to another school in order for each school in the metro area to have the same minority share as the metro area as a whole. In general, scores above 60 are considered high segregation, scores between 30 and 60 are considered moderate segregation, and score below 30 are considered low segregation[12]. A score of 100 indicates complete segregation.

**Table 3** shows, for the largest minority groups, those metro areas with the highest and lowest segregation from whites. Note that, according to commonly used interpretations of dissimilarity indices, only two metro areas for blacks (Lakeland, FL and El Paso, TX,) and one for Hispanics (Honolulu, HI) would be considered to have low levels of segregation. The vast majority of metros have at least moderate and often high segregation levels. Consistent with residential segregation patterns, highest school segregation from whites is experienced by black students, followed by Hispanics and then Asians. The most segregated metros for black students are located primarily in older, large Midwest and Northeast metros such as Chicago IL, Milwaukee WI, New York NY, Detroit MI, and Cleveland OH, with the least segregated primarily in the West but also in some Southeastern locations. This finding coincides with previous research which revealed higher levels of segregation in large metropolitan areas which are fragmented into many districts and which have large concentrations of minority students[13].

While Los Angeles tops the list of segregated metros for Hispanic students, the most segregated metros are generally found in the Northeast and Midwest, with a heavy representation in New England. Four out of the top ten most segregated metros for Hispanics are in New England (Springfield MA, Boston MA, Hartford CT, and Providence RI.) The least segregated metros for Hispanics are located mostly in the Southeast. There is no clear

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<sup>c</sup> According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 73% of students in grades 1 to 12 in 2007 attended public schools to which parents report the student was assigned, 16% attended public schools where parents reported that the student's school was chosen (such as magnet schools, charter schools and inter and intra-district choice programs,) and 12% attended private schools. [10]

Table 3

## Metros with Highest and Lowest Dissimilarity (Segregation) Between White and Minority Students Public Primary Schools: 2008-09

### 100 Largest Metro Areas

#### Highest Dissimilarity with White Students (Most Segregated)

Black		Hispanic		Asian/Pac. Islander	
Chicago, IL	82.3	Los Angeles, CA	73.4	Baton Rouge, LA	67.3
Milwaukee, WI	81.2	Springfield, MA	73.0	New York, NY	58.0
New York, NY	80.7	New York, NY	71.2	Greensboro, NC	56.4
Detroit, MI	80.2	Boston, MA	70.2	Detroit, MI	55.4
Cleveland, OH	80.1	Hartford, CT	69.7	New Orleans, LA	54.3
Youngstown, OH	77.4	Cleveland, OH	69.0	San Francisco, CA	54.2
Syracuse, NY	77.0	Chicago, IL	68.6	Buffalo, NY	53.9
Cincinnati, OH	76.9	Milwaukee, WI	68.2	Lansing, MI	53.9
Springfield, MA	75.1	Providence, RI	67.6	Birmingham, AL	53.5
Indianapolis, IN	74.3	Allentown, PA	66.9	Los Angeles, CA	53.5

#### Lowest Dissimilarity with White Students (Least Segregated)

Black		Hispanic		Asian/Pac. Islander	
Lakeland, FL	25.2	Honolulu, HI	24.2	Palm Bay, FL	24.9
El Paso, TX	27.9	Palm Bay, FL	30.8	Sarasota, FL	25.0
Honolulu, HI	31.6	Raleigh, NC	32.7	Colorado Springs, CO	25.1
Boise City, ID	33.4	Virginia Beach, VA	34.1	New Haven, CT	27.0
Albuquerque, NM	34.6	Lakeland, FL	34.3	Las Vegas, NV	27.7
Modesto, CA	35.5	Augusta, GA	36.1	Tucson, AZ	27.8
Raleigh, NC	35.7	Jacksonville, FL	36.2	Oxnard, CA	28.0
Greenville, SC	38.1	Colorado Springs, CO	37.9	El Paso, TX	28.5
Las Vegas, NV	39.1	Akron, OH	38.5	Charleston, SC	28.6
Santa Rosa, CA	39.3	Toledo, OH	38.6	Albuquerque, NM	28.9

Note: Dissimilarity values over 60 are considered high; those between 30 and 60 are considered moderate and those below 30 are considered low. A dissimilarity value of 100 would indicate complete segregation. Racial groups include only non-Hispanic members of those groups. Metro name includes only first named major city in metro area. Metros defined as of June, 2003. For complete description of metro areas and component counties, see: <http://www.census.gov/population/www/metroareas/lists/2003/03msa.txt> Primary schools defined as those with lowest grade of PK-3 and highest grade of PK-8.

Source: Diversitydata.org analysis of National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, 2008-09.



geographic pattern among the most segregated metros for Asians, though the least segregated tend to be in the Southwest, in mountain states and in Florida. Baton Rouge, LA is the most segregated metro for Asians.

Another common measure of segregation, isolation, is the degree to which students are concentrated in schools with other members of their own racial/ethnic group and isolated from other groups. Isolation indices show, for each particular racial/ethnic group, that group's share of school enrollment in the school where the average student of that racial/ethnic group attends. **Table 4** shows the metros with the highest isolation indices. For example, the average white student in Portland ME attends a primary school that is 93% white, the highest degree of isolation for whites. In general, whites are the most racially isolated of all racial/ethnic student groups. White students attend the most concentrated white schools in Portland ME; Youngstown OH; Pittsburgh PA, and Cincinnati OH. In other words white students in these metros attend school with the highest proportion of other white students. On the other hand, black students experience the highest degree of isolation with other blacks in areas of the South and Midwest. In Jackson MS, Memphis TN, and Detroit MI, the average black student attends a school that is over 80% black. In the Mexico border metros of McAllen TX and El Paso TX, the average Hispanic student attends a school that is over 90% Hispanic. Asian students experience the highest degree of isolation with other Asians in Honolulu and also in California metros such as San Jose, San Francisco, and LA.

*In metro Chicago and Cincinnati, the average black student attends a school with a black enrollment over ten times that of the school attended by the average white student.*

Isolation indices may reflect both the racial/ethnic composition of a metro area as well as the level of school segregation in that metro, both of which vary considerably across regions. A metro area could exhibit high isolation of black students among other black students because there are larger shares of black students in that metro or because black students are very segregated across schools within the metro. Therefore, to control for variation in racial composition across metro areas, we also present the ratio of the extent to which minority students are exposed to other students of their own group (their isolation) relative to the extent to which white students in the same metro area are exposed to students of that particular minority group. For example, in Chicago IL, the average black student attends a school that is 73.7% black, while the average white student attends a school that is 6.3% black, for a ratio of 11.7, the highest of any large metro area. The average black student in Cincinnati OH also attends a school with a black share over ten times that of the school attended by the average white student (**Table 5.**) In Detroit MI and Buffalo NY, the average Hispanic student attends a school with a Hispanic share over nine times that of the school attended by the average white student. In Baton Rouge LA, the average Asian student attends a school with an Asian share almost six times that of the school attended by the average white student.

Being educated in less isolated, more diverse environments is a benefit both to students and to the community; a benefit which becomes more important as our nation becomes increasingly diverse. Research has shown that “racially integrated schools prepare students to be effective citizens in our pluralistic society, further social cohesion, and reinforce democratic values. They promote cross-racial understanding, reduce prejudice, improve critical thinking skills and academic achievement, and enhance life opportunities for students of all races.” [4] Despite these benefits, high levels of school segregation and isolation persist.

Table 4

### Metros with Highest Isolation Indices; Public Primary School Students: 2008-09

Percent of same racial/ethnic group in school attended by average student of specified group  
100 Largest Metro Areas

White		Black		Hispanic		Asian/Pac. Islander	
Portland, ME	92.7	Jackson, MS	82.0	McAllen, TX	97.5	Honolulu, HI	78.1
Youngstown, OH	90.4	Memphis, TN	80.2	El Paso, TX	91.2	San Jose, CA	50.2
Pittsburgh, PA	89.8	Detroit, MI	80.2	Los Angeles, CA	77.1	San Francisco, CA	43.1
Cincinnati, OH	89.1	Baton Rouge, LA	78.8	San Antonio, TX	75.2	Los Angeles, CA	32.7
Akron, OH	87.3	Cleveland, OH	77.8	Oxnard, CA	73.0	New York, NY	32.0
Knoxville, TN	87.1	New Orleans, LA	75.8	Bakersfield, CA	72.1	Minneapolis, MN	26.5
Dayton, OH	86.9	Birmingham, AL	75.1	Fresno, CA	70.1	Stockton, CA	25.5
Syracuse, NY	86.8	Milwaukee, WI	74.5	Riverside, CA	68.3	Sacramento, CA	23.8
Scranton, PA	86.7	Chicago, IL	73.7	Albuquerque, NM	67.1	San Diego, CA	23.0
Chattanooga, TN	86.6	Baltimore, MD	73.0	Miami, FL	65.6	Seattle, WA	21.9

Note: The white isolation index in Portland, ME can be interpreted as: the school attended by the average white student in Portland has an enrollment that is 92.7% white. Racial groups include only non-Hispanic members of those groups. Metro name includes only first named major city in metro area. Metros defined as of June, 2003. For complete description of metro areas and component counties, see: <http://www.census.gov/population/www/metroareas/lists/2003/03msa.txt> Primary schools defined as those with lowest grade of PK-3 and highest grade of PK-8.

Source: Diversitydata.org analysis of National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, 2008-09.

Table 5

## Metros with Highest Ratios of Minority Isolation to White Exposure to Specified Minority Group; Public Primary School Students: 2008-09

### 100 Largest Metro Areas

	Black				Hispanic				Asian/Pac. Islander		
	Black Exposure to Blacks	White Exposure to Blacks	Ratio		Hispanic Exposure to Hispanics	White Exposure to Hispanics	Ratio		Asian Exposure to Asians	White Exposure to Asians	Ratio
Chicago, IL	73.7	6.3	11.7	Detroit, MI	36.8	3.4	10.8	Baton Rouge, LA	5.3	0.9	5.9
Cincinnati, OH	66.3	6.1	10.9	Buffalo, NY	32.4	3.3	9.8	Buffalo, NY	8.2	2.0	4.1
New York, NY	55.0	5.8	9.5	Youngstown, OH	11.1	1.4	7.9	Minneapolis, MN	26.5	6.6	4.0
Detroit, MI	80.2	8.6	9.3	Syracuse, NY	20.3	2.6	7.8	Detroit, MI	17.2	4.3	4.0
Milwaukee, WI	74.5	8.1	9.2	Cleveland, OH	33.0	4.5	7.3	Milwaukee, WI	16.6	4.5	3.7
Cleveland, OH	77.8	9.1	8.5	Milwaukee, WI	55.9	7.7	7.3	Lansing, MI	12.9	3.5	3.7
Youngstown, OH	62.0	7.3	8.5	Boston, MA	46.0	6.7	6.9	New Orleans, LA	9.0	2.5	3.6
Boston, MA	35.0	4.2	8.3	Philadelphia, PA	36.6	5.7	6.4	Syracuse, NY	8.2	2.3	3.6
Dayton, OH	72.2	8.7	8.3	Providence, RI	45.6	8.3	5.5	Birmingham, AL	5.3	1.5	3.5
Grand Rapids, MI	46.0	5.8	7.9	Grand Rapids, MI	40.6	7.4	5.5	Louisville, KY	6.0	1.7	3.5

Note: For example, for Chicago the "Black Exposure to Blacks" index (also termed the black "isolation" index,) indicates that the average black student attends a school with an enrollment that is 73.7% black. The "White Exposure to Blacks" index indicates that the average white student attends a school that is 6.3% black. The ratio of 11.7 indicates that the average black student in Chicago attends a school with a black share of enrollment that is 11.7 times that of the school attended by the average white student. Racial groups include only non-Hispanic members of those groups. Metro name includes only first named major city in metro area. Metros defined as of June, 2003. For complete description of metro areas and component counties, see: <http://www.census.gov/population/www/metroareas/lists/2003/03msa.txt> Primary schools defined as those with lowest grade of PK-3 and highest grade of PK-8.

Source: Diversitydata.org analysis of National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, 2008-09.

## Exposure to School Poverty

Children in concentrated-poverty schools (i.e. schools with high proportions of students in poverty,) face enormous challenges. In such schools, students' peers are generally less prepared, have lower aspirations and graduation rates and have greater mobility and absences; parents are less involved, with less political and financial clout; and teachers tend to be less experienced and more commonly teach outside their fields of concentration[2, 14]. Further, while some high-poverty schools have achieved high academic achievement, a study of more than 60,000 schools found that low-poverty schools were "22 times more likely to reach consistently high academic achievement compared with high-poverty schools." [15]

In this report, eligibility for free or reduced lunch is used as an indicator of poverty<sup>d</sup>. Eligibility for free and reduced-price lunches is determined by students' family income in relation to the federally established poverty level. Students whose family income is at or below 130 percent of the poverty level qualify to receive free lunch, and students whose family income is between 130 percent and 185 percent of the poverty level qualify to receive reduced-price lunch. Because not all schools report valid data for this measure, we exclude any metro area in which 10% or more of students attend schools which do not report valid free/reduced lunch eligibility data<sup>e</sup>. Thus, for this analysis we exclude 3 metro areas out of the largest 100.

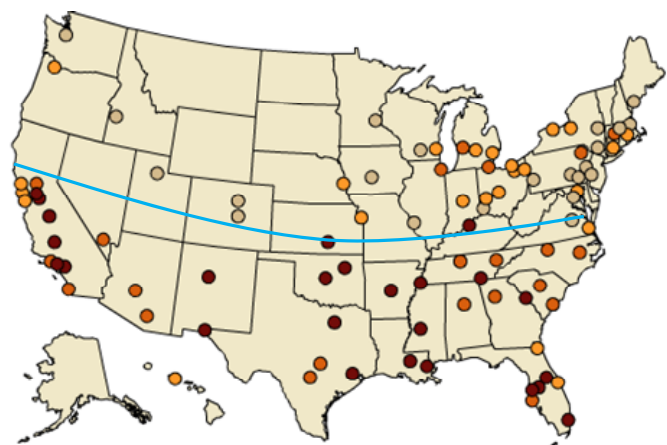
Geographically, places with the highest school poverty rates are concentrated in California and in the Deep South (**Map 5**). Of the 14 metro areas with school poverty rates over 60%, 6 are located in California, and 4 are in the Deep South. In fact, all of the highest poverty metros except one (Louisville, KY) lie to the south of the line drawn across the center of the country in Map 5, while all of the lowest poverty metros lie to the north.

We further classify metro areas according to the poverty rate of the school attended by the average student of a particular race/ethnicity. This indicator is similar to the isolation measure of segregation discussed earlier, but instead of describing the racial composition of the school attended by the average student of each race/ethnicity, it describes the poverty rate of such schools.

Map 5

### School Poverty Rates: 2008-09

Public Primary School Students in 100 Largest Metros



Key:

● 28.7% - 39.7% ● 39.7% - 46.3% ● 46.3% - 52.0% ● 52.0% - 76.6%

Source: Source: Diversitydata.org analysis of NCES Common Core of Data, 2008-09.

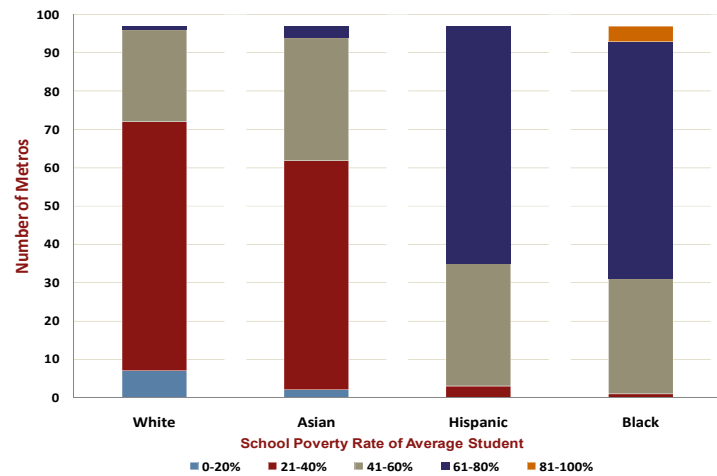
<sup>d</sup> In Illinois, New Jersey and South Dakota, the state reported the number of students participating in the Free and Reduced Lunch Program instead of those eligible, so the number of students reported as eligible by the NCES in these states may be undercounted.

<sup>e</sup> We also exclude McAllen, TX which has a school poverty rate that differs significantly from the rate which would be expected based on its 2000 Census child poverty rate.

The extent to which students of different racial/ethnic groups attend high poverty schools differs dramatically across metros (**Table 6.**) In the vast majority of metro areas (88 of 97,) the average black student attends a school where half or more of the students are poor. This is also the case in 83 metros for Hispanics. In only 11 metros for Asians and 8 metros for whites does the average Asian or white student attend a school where over half of the students are impoverished.

**Figure 1** shows a more complete distribution of metro areas according to the poverty rate of the school where the average student of each race/ethnicity attends. The combined light blue and red portions of the bars reveal that, in 72 metros for whites and 62 metros for Asians, the average student attends a school that is lower poverty (40% or less poor,) compared to just 4 metros for Hispanics (Pittsburgh PA, Portland, ME, St. Louis MO-IL, and Honolulu HI) and 1 metro for blacks (Honolulu.) In contrast, the combined dark blue and orange portions of the bars reveal that, in 64 metros for blacks and 62 metros for Hispanics, the average student attends a school that is higher poverty (over 60% poor,) compared to just 1 metro for whites (New Orleans LA) and 4 for Asians (New Orleans LA, Baton Rouge LA, Fresno CA, and Modesto CA.)

**FIGURE 1**  
**Distribution of Metro Areas According to Poverty Rate in School of Average Student**  
*by Race/Ethnicity 2008-09*



*Note: Includes 97 largest metros with valid free/reduced lunch data.  
Source: Diversitydata.org analysis of NCES Common Core of Data, 2008-09.*

In some metro areas, students attend schools with fairly similar poverty levels regardless of their race/ethnicity, while in others there is great disparity (or difference) in the extent to which students of various races/ethnicities attend high-poverty schools. **Table 7** shows those metros with the greatest and least disparity in minority students' exposure to poverty schools compared to white students' exposure, where disparity is defined as the ratio of the two exposure to poverty rates. With some exceptions, metros with the lowest levels of disparity tend to be in the South. There is a strong consistency among those metros showing the highest minority/white disparities for all racial/ethnic minority groups, with Bridgeport CT, Hartford, CT, Milwaukee, Boston, New York, Philadelphia and San Francisco ranking in the top ten highest disparity metros for all three major racial/ethnic minority groups. In metro Bridgeport CT, the average black student attends a school with a poverty rate 5.2 times that of the school attended by the average white student, and the average Hispanic student attends a school with a poverty rate 4.7 times that of the school attended by the average white student.

In several metro areas, such as Cincinnati OH, Birmingham AL, St. Louis MO-IL, and Pittsburgh PA, Asian students have exposure to school poverty levels that are both low overall and lower than white students' exposure to poverty in the same metros. While Asians do show higher exposure to poverty than whites in 63 (of 97) metros, the disparity with whites is less than for Hispanics and blacks. Overall across all the largest metros, black and Hispanic exposure to poverty in schools is 2.2 times that of whites, while Asian exposure to poverty is just 1.3 times that of whites.

Table 6

## Metros with Highest and Lowest Exposure to School Poverty; Public Primary School Students: 2008-09

Poverty rate in school attended by average student of each racial/ethnic group

### Highest Exposure to Poverty

White		Hispanic		Black		Asian/Pac. Islander	
New Orleans, LA	61.2	Fresno, CA	80.1	New Orleans, LA	84.7	New Orleans, LA	76.7
El Paso, TX	59.8	Oklahoma City, OK	78.9	Baton Rouge, LA	81.5	Baton Rouge, LA	70.6
Lakeland, FL	56.8	Los Angeles, CA	76.6	Buffalo, NY	80.7	Fresno, CA	69.3
Baton Rouge, LA	55.3	New Orleans, LA	76.4	Jackson, MS	78.6	Modesto, CA	61.5
Modesto, CA	50.9	Buffalo, NY	75.2	Toledo, OH	78.6	Stockton, CA	57.7
Chattanooga, TN	50.4	Bakersfield, CA	74.8	Chattanooga, TN	78.5	Wichita, KS	55.6
Bakersfield, CA	49.8	Wichita, KS	74.3	Tulsa, OK	78.0	El Paso, TX	54.4
Tulsa, OK	48.9	Springfield, MA	73.4	Milwaukee, WI	76.7	Lakeland, FL	53.7
Stockton, CA	48.1	Grand Rapids, MI	73.4	Rochester, NY	76.2	Sacramento, CA	52.7
Augusta, GA	47.7	Providence, RI	73.4	Miami, FL	75.9	Greensboro, NC	49.9

### Lowest Exposure to Poverty

White		Hispanic		Black		Asian/Pac. Islander	
Bridgeport, CT	15.4	Pittsburgh, PA	35.5	Honolulu, HI	36.0	St. Louis, MO-IL	20.2
Hartford, CT	16.4	Portland, ME	37.9	Salt Lake City, UT	41.5	Cincinnati, OH	21.2
Boston, MA	18.4	St. Louis, MO-IL	38.5	Boise City, ID	43.7	Allentown, PA	21.3
Washington, DC	19.2	Honolulu, HI	39.2	San Jose, CA	43.8	Richmond, VA	21.7
San Francisco, CA	19.5	Virginia Beach, VA	41.8	Madison, WI	45.5	Pittsburgh, PA	22.6
New York, NY	19.8	Madison, WI	42.5	Oxnard, CA	47.1	Birmingham, AL	22.9
Philadelphia, PA	20.1	Jacksonville, FL	43.4	Santa Rosa, CA	47.7	Baltimore, MA	23.0
Chicago, IL	21.0	Baltimore, MD	44.6	Las Vegas, NV	48.5	Dayton, OH	24.1
Milwaukee, WI	21.3	Salt Lake City, UT	45.2	Colorado Springs, CO	49.5	Columbus, OH	24.1
Denver, CO	21.7	Richmond, VA	45.6	Tucson, AZ	50.3	Hartford, CT	24.5

Note: Racial groups include only non-Hispanic members of those groups. Metro name includes only first named major city in metro area. Metros defined as of June, 2003. For complete description of metro areas and component counties, see: <http://www.census.gov/population/www/metroareas/lists/2003/03msa.txt> Primary schools defined as those with lowest grade of PK-3 and highest grade of PK-8. Poverty defined as eligibility for free or reduced lunch. Includes 97 metros which are among the 100 largest in terms of population and for which at least 90% of students attend schools that reported valid data on free and reduced lunch eligibility.

Source: Diversitydata.org analysis of National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, 2008-09.

Table 7

## Metros with Highest and Lowest Ratios of Minority Exposure to School Poverty to White Exposure to Poverty: 2008-09

<b>Metros with Highest Ratios (Disparities)</b>								
	Hispanic Exposure to Poverty	Ratio to White Exposure		Black Exposure to Poverty	Ratio to White Exposure		Asian Exposure to Poverty	Ratio to White Exposure
Bridgeport, CT	63.5	4.70	Bridgeport, CT	70.2	5.20	New York, NY	45.4	2.30
Hartford, CT	68.8	4.25	Hartford, CT	60.3	3.72	Minneapolis, MN	47.6	2.10
Boston, MA	64.8	3.75	New York, NY	71.5	3.63	Bridgeport, CT	27.8	2.06
New York, NY	70.6	3.58	Milwaukee, WI	75.4	3.56	Boston, MA	33.9	1.96
Milwaukee, WI	70.5	3.33	Chicago, IL	73.7	3.53	Milwaukee, WI	41.1	1.94
Chicago, IL	67.9	3.25	Boston, MA	60.7	3.51	San Francisco, CA	34.6	1.77
San Francisco, CA	62.3	3.18	Philadelphia, PA	61.1	3.02	Los Angeles, CA	43.8	1.63
Philadelphia, PA	62.1	3.07	San Francisco, CA	58.5	2.98	Providence, RI	48.1	1.61
Denver, CO	64.4	2.91	New Haven, CT	66.9	2.80	Philadelphia, PA	31.6	1.56
Los Angeles, CA	78.2	2.91	Albany, NY	65.1	2.77	Hartford, CT	24.6	1.52
<b>Metros with Lowest Ratios (Disparities)</b>								
	Hispanic Exposure to Poverty	Ratio to White Exposure		Black Exposure to Poverty	Ratio to White Exposure		Asian Exposure to Poverty	Ratio to White Exposure
Honolulu, HI	0.41	1.13	Lakeland, FL	0.65	1.09	Cincinnati, OH	0.20	0.63
El Paso, TX	0.70	1.16	Honolulu, HI	0.40	1.09	Birmingham, AL	0.23	0.64
Pittsburgh, PA	0.37	1.17	El Paso, TX	0.66	1.10	St. Louis, MO-IL	0.19	0.66
Lakeland, FL	0.71	1.19	Modesto, CA	0.63	1.19	Knoxville, TN	0.30	0.69
Augusta, GA	0.59	1.20	Boise City, ID	0.43	1.22	Pittsburgh, PA	0.23	0.73
New Orleans, LA	0.78	1.27	Greenville, SC	0.56	1.24	Greenville, SC	0.24	0.73
Jacksonville, FL	0.45	1.27	Stockton, CA	0.66	1.33	Toledo, OH	0.27	0.74
Knoxville, TN	0.56	1.28	Louisville, KY-IN	0.57	1.35	Augusta, GA	0.38	0.77
Louisville, KY	0.61	1.31	Albuquerque, NM	0.65	1.39	Indianapolis, IN	0.27	0.77
Palm Bay, FL	0.51	1.31	New Orleans, LA	0.86	1.40	Columbus, OH	0.24	0.78

*Note: Exposure to poverty refers to the poverty rate of the school attended by the average student of each race/ethnicity. Poverty defined as eligibility for free or reduced lunch. Includes 97 metros which are among the 100 largest in terms of population and for which at least 90% of students attend schools that reported valid data on free and reduced lunch eligibility.*

*Source: Diversitydata.org analysis of National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, 2008-09.*

In some metros, the low disparity between white exposure to poverty and Hispanic/black exposure to poverty is due to all groups having high overall exposure to poverty. In other words, greater equality takes place in the context of worse school environments (e.g. high school poverty) for children of all groups, including white

*In metro Bridgeport CT, the average black student attends a school with a poverty rate 5.2 times that of the school attended by the average white student.*

children. The ideal would be both low exposure to school poverty and low levels of racial disparity in exposure to school poverty. Metros exhibiting both relatively low exposure to school poverty and a low racial disparity in exposure to school poverty include Honolulu HI, Pittsburgh, PA, and Jacksonville FL for Hispanics and Honolulu HI and Boise City ID for blacks. These few metro areas where black and Hispanic students attend schools with lower poverty rates tend to contain very small shares of the total black and Hispanic enrollment in large metro areas. Most black and Latino students attend schools in metros where high shares of their groups attend high-poverty schools. In fact, as shown in **Table 8**, 99% of black and 94% of

Latino students are enrolled in metros where the average student of their racial/ethnic group attends a school with a poverty rate of 50% or more. In contrast, only 3% of white students and 6% of Asian students are enrolled in metros where the average white or Asian student attends a school with a poverty rate of 50% or more. About 60% of black and Hispanic students are enrolled in metros where their group's exposure to school poverty is at least two times that of the average white student in the same metro area. Close to 60% of black and Hispanic students are enrolled in metros where the average student of their group experiences both high poverty schools ( $\geq 50\%$  poor) and attends a school with a poverty rate twice as high as that of the average white student in that metro. No Asian students live in a metro with similarly high rates of poverty and disparity.

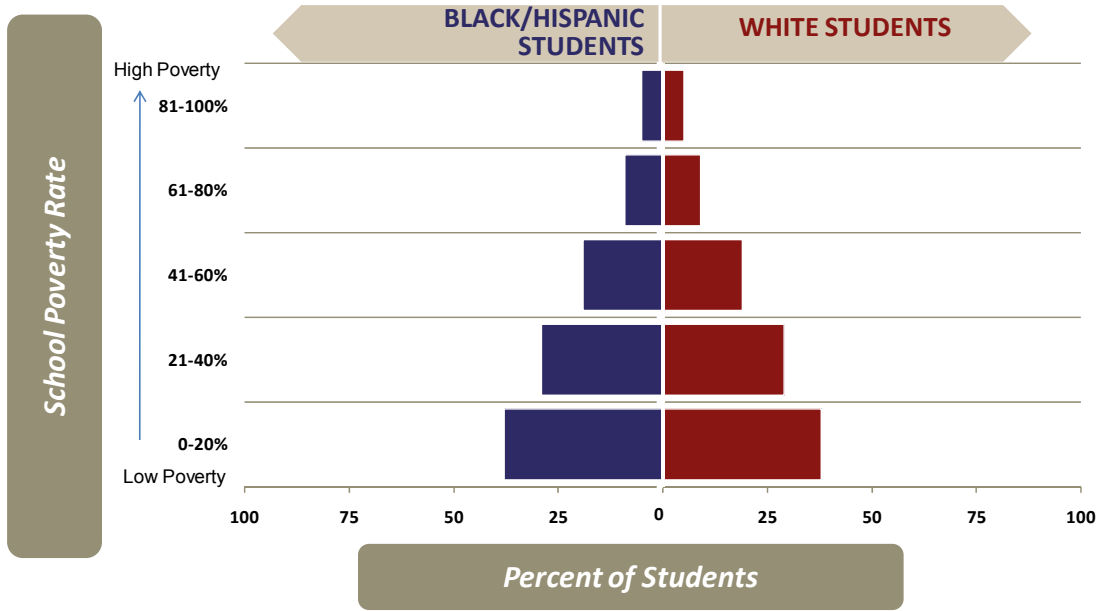
## Distribution of Exposure to Poverty in Schools Within Metro Areas: A Closer Look at Inequality

The school poverty exposure indices discussed above reflect the average school attended by students of different races/ethnicities. However, averages tell only part of the story. Examining the fuller distribution of poverty in schools attended by students of different races/ethnicities shows completely contrasting patterns for blacks/ Hispanics as compared to whites. Consider the stylized (theoretical) pattern shown in **Figure 2**, in which, for both whites and blacks/Hispanics, relatively high shares of students attend the lowest-poverty schools (schools with poverty rates of 20% or less,) declining to fairly low shares of each group attending the highest-poverty schools (schools with poverty rates above 80%.) Of course, an ideal pattern would show 100% of each group in low-poverty schools. The stylized pattern is pyramid-shaped and symmetrical. Compare **Figure 2** with **Figure 3**, which shows the actual pattern we see in public, primary schools in 97 of the largest metro areas that reported valid free/reduced lunch data. While the white pattern is fairly similar to the stylized one, the black and Hispanic pattern is "flipped," with very small shares of students in low-poverty schools and high shares in high-poverty schools. Close to half (43%) of white students attend schools with poverty rates of 20% or less, compared with just 7% of black/Hispanic students. In contrast, 43% of black/Hispanic students attend schools with poverty rates over 80%, compared to just 4% of white students.

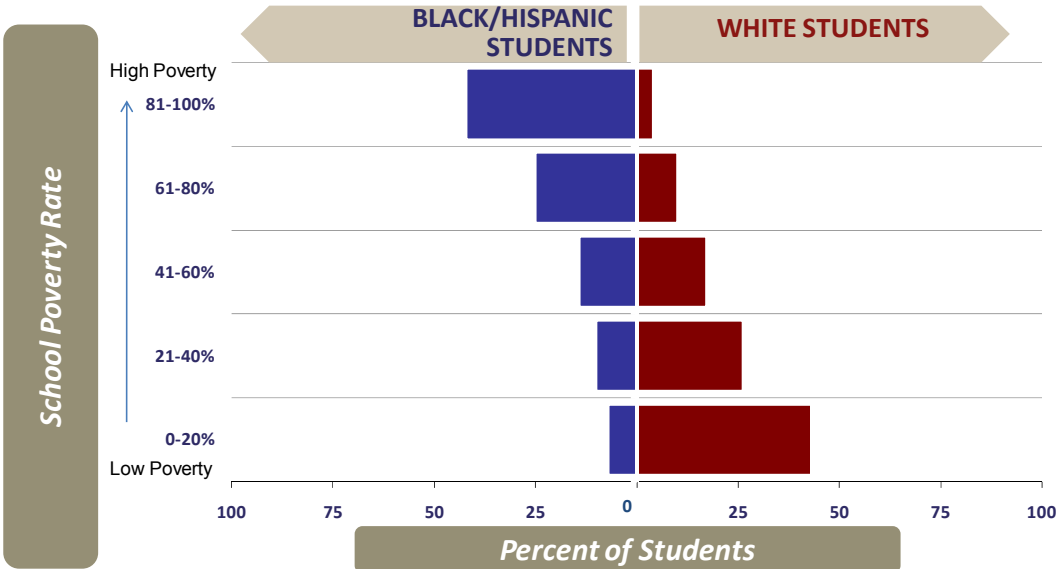




**Figure 2**  
**Equal Distribution**  
 (Percent of Students Attending Schools by Free/Reduced Lunch Eligibility)



**Figure 3**  
**Black/Hispanic Primary School Students Attend Schools with Dramatically Higher Shares of Low-Income Students Than Do Whites**  
 (Percent of Students Attending Schools by Free/Reduced Lunch Eligibility : 2008-09)



Note: Includes 97 of largest metro areas with valid free and reduced lunch data.  
 Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, 2008-09.

**Figures 4-6** show the poverty distributions for the 3 metros that exhibit the highest levels of disparity in terms of average exposure to poverty between black and white students: Bridgeport CT, Hartford CT, New York NY.

**Figures 7-9** show similar charts for the 3 metros with the highest disparity between Hispanic and white students: Bridgeport CT, Hartford CT, and Boston MA. Among metros with the largest disparities, two patterns are evident, shown in these very asymmetric pyramid graphs. In some metros, such as New York, there is almost complete inversion in the distribution across poverty levels for schools which blacks attend versus those whites attend. Fifty-two percent of black students attend the highest poverty-schools (poverty rate over 80%,) and 7% of black students attend the lowest-poverty schools (poverty rate of 20% or below.) In contrast, just 4% of white students in metro New York attend the highest-poverty schools, while 68% of white students attend the lowest-poverty schools.

*In metro New York, 52% of black students attend the highest poverty schools (over 80% poverty,) compared to just 4% of white students.*

In other metros, such as Hartford, the pattern is somewhat different. Compared with New York, a smaller share (33%) of black students in metro Hartford attends the highest poverty schools and a higher share (15%) attends the lowest poverty schools. Black students are not as highly concentrated in the poorest schools, and they exhibit a more even distribution across schools of different poverty levels. Despite this more favorable distribution for black students, Hartford still has a very large disparity in the poverty rate between the school where the average black student attends and the school where the average white student attends. This result is due to the fact that, while black students in Hartford are in lower poverty schools than in New York, white students in Hartford are also in lower-poverty schools than white students in New York. While 68% of white students in New York are in the lowest poverty schools, 75% of white students in Hartford are in the lowest poverty schools. And while 4% of white students in New York are in the highest poverty schools, just 1% of white students in Hartford are in the highest poverty schools. In other words, while blacks are better off in Hartford than in New York, whites are also better off, so the disparity between blacks and whites remains high. Ideally, large and equal shares of both groups would be in low-poverty schools, resulting in both low exposure to poverty and low disparity between white and minority students.

## Policy Implications

Residential segregation and the routine assignment of students to schools based on geographic proximity are the underlying causes of school segregation and differential exposure to high-poverty schools. Thus, measures which attack residential segregation, such as enforcement of fair housing laws, siting of affordable housing in higher opportunity areas, reducing zoning restrictions, and aiding in geographic mobility[16] are all useful tools in reducing racial and economic segregation in schools as well. Policies to boost school and neighborhood quality in lower-income minority areas, such as the new Promise Neighborhood Initiative, could also help by reducing poverty in those schools/neighborhoods and attracting more mixed-income and white families, producing more middle-income and diverse schools.

At the same time, mobility and school assignment programs should not be overlooked. More should be done to allow students in failing schools to transfer to better schools, even if they are outside school district boundaries. No Child Left Behind legislation provides for transfer provisions for students attending schools designated as needing improvement, yet only 1% of students at schools eligible for choice actually participated as of 2006-07[17]. Innovative school assignment plans, which take into consideration the composition of students'

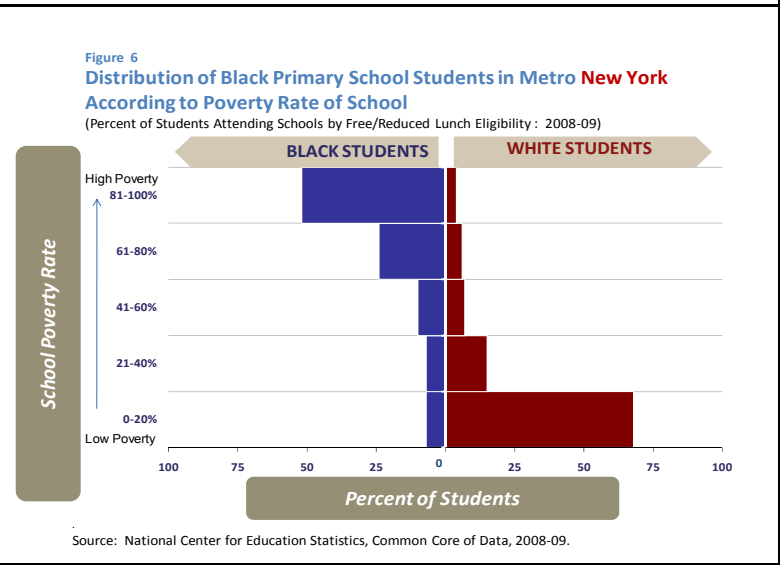
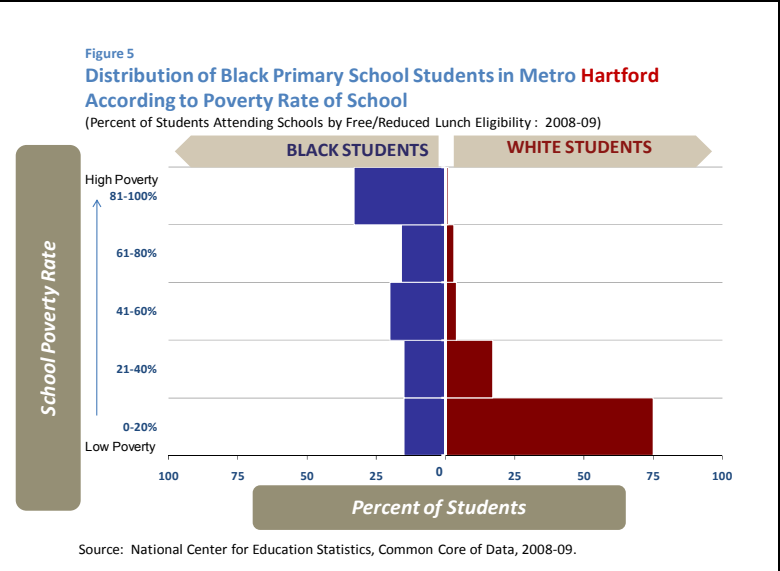
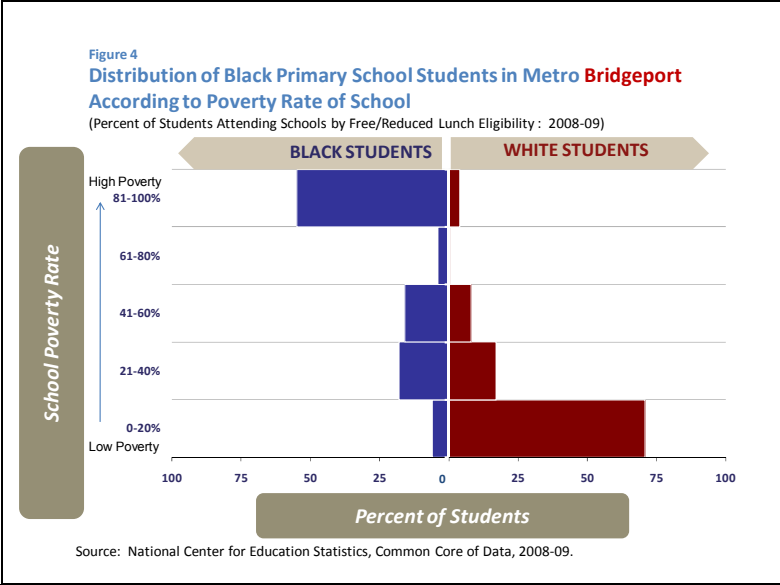
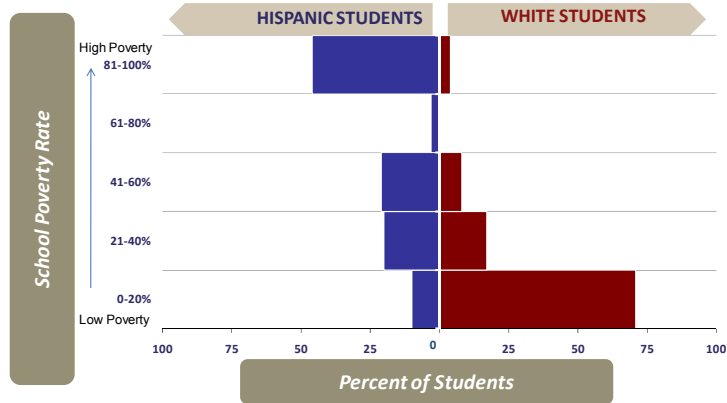
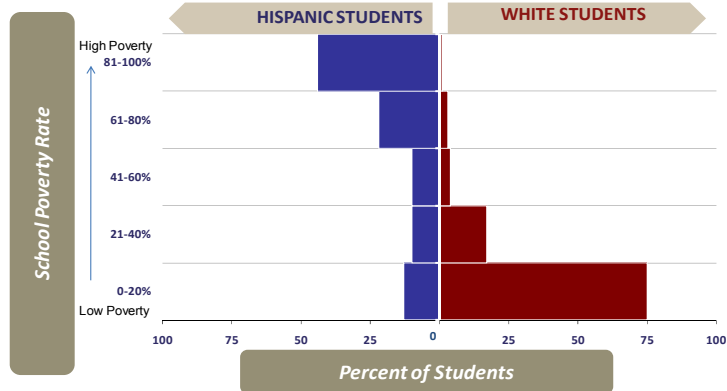


Figure 7  
**Distribution of Hispanic Primary School Students in Metro Bridgeport**  
**According to Poverty Rate of School**  
 (Percent of Students Attending Schools by Free/Reduced Lunch Eligibility : 2007-08)



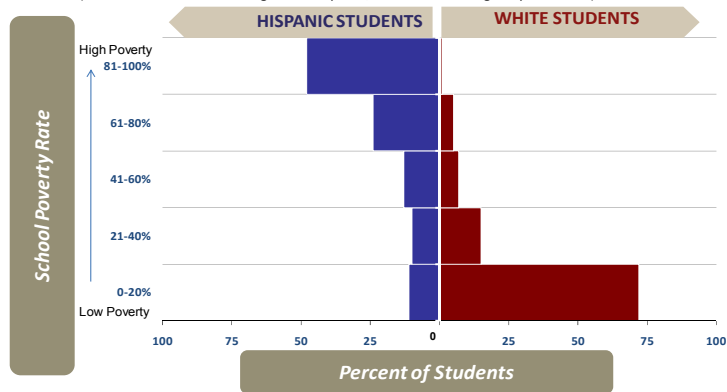
Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, 2008-09.

Figure 8  
**Distribution of Hispanic Primary School Students in Metro Hartford**  
**According to Poverty Rate of School**  
 (Percent of Students Attending Schools by Free/Reduced Lunch Eligibility : 2008-09)



Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, 2008-09.

Figure 9  
**Distribution of Hispanic Primary School Students in Metro Boston**  
**According to Poverty Rate of School**  
 (Percent of Students Attending Schools by Free/Reduced Lunch Eligibility : 2008-09)



Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, 2008-09.

neighborhoods as well as other factors should continue to be explored, perfected and utilized to break down segregation. For example, the Berkeley CA Unified School District has achieved substantial success in integrating schools using a controlled choice plan which makes use of neighborhood diversity scores based on the neighborhood's average household income level, highest level of education obtained by adults, and the percentage of students of color enrolled in grades kindergarten through 5 in public school[18]. Magnet schools which provide high quality education and draw diverse students from diverse neighborhoods may be another important tool. Schools should prepare all students to excel. The fact that such gross levels of disparity continue in American public schools must not be met with apathy or acceptance but be confronted to ensure that our children and our nation can thrive in an increasingly diverse and challenging world.

To investigate school demographics, segregation or exposure to school poverty for your metro area or any metro area, visit [www.diversitydata.org](http://www.diversitydata.org).

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