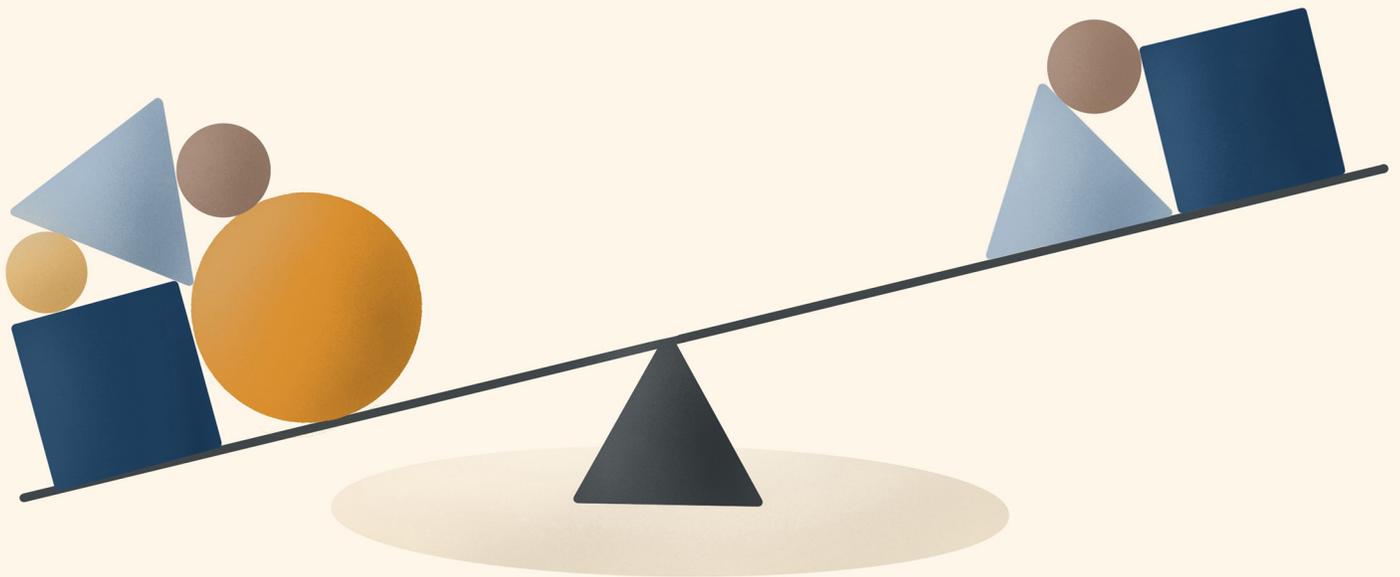

Double Segregation by Race and Poverty in Virginia Schools



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and



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Introduction

Race and class, related but distinct student and family attributes, intersect in powerful ways to shape learning opportunities.

A recent Stanford study, based on roughly 100 million test scores in over 300 metro areas, found that disparate white and Black student exposure to school poverty is highly correlated with persistent racial achievement gaps.¹ In other words, racially unequal concentrations of poverty in schools are a central explanation for the racial achievement gap, as measured by standardized test scores.

Behind that basic fact lies several possible explanations. Schools with concentrations of student poverty, which strongly overlap with concentrations of Black and Latinx students,² receive fewer resources for higher needs, on average. The students in these schools also tend to experience inadequate facilities and less challenging curricula.³ Relationship churn can erode trust within high poverty schools as administrators, teachers and students cycle in and out of underfunded organizations stretched to capacity by punitive accountability systems.⁴ Segregated social networks cordon off information about postsecondary and employment opportunities and segregated political networks splinter power and influence over how resources are distributed.⁵

The education landscape today is influenced by wide income and wealth disparities between racial groups. According to census data, in 2019 the median Black household earned about \$46,000 per year, the median Latinx household earned about \$56,000 and the median white household earned about \$76,000.⁶ Asian households earned the highest median income at \$98,000, though income inequality is also highest among Asians, partly related to differing immigration histories and discrimination for Asian subgroups.⁷ These differences in income have stark implications for generational wealth building

1. Reardon, S.F. (2016). "School Segregation and Racial Achievement Gaps." *Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 2(5): 34-57.

2. Orfield, Gary & Lee, Chungmei (2005). *Why segregation matters: Poverty and educational inequality*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Civil Rights Project. Orfield, G., Kuscera, J. & Siegel-Hawley, G. (2012). *E pluribus... separation: Deepening double segregation for more students*. Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Civil Rights Project.

3. Government Accountability Office. [GAO] (2016). *Better Use of Information Could Help Agencies Identify Disparities and Address Racial Discrimination*. Washington, DC; Johnson, Rucker, *Children of the Dream* (New York: Basic Books, 2019); Rooks, Noliwe, *Cutting School* (New York: The New Press, 2017).

4. Simon, Nicole and Johnson, Susan Moore (2015). *Teacher Turnover in High-Poverty Schools: What We Know and Can Do*. *Teachers College Record* Volume 117(3), 1-36

5. See, e.g., Wells, Amy Stuart and Crain, Robert. (1994). *Perpetuation Theory and the Long-Term Effects of School Desegregation*, *Review of Educational Research* 64(4), 531-55.

6. Wilson, Valerie (2020 Sept 16). *Racial disparities in income and poverty remain largely unchanged amid strong income growth in 2019*. *Working Economics Blog*, EPI: <https://www.epi.org/blog/racial-disparities-in-income-and-poverty-remain-largely-unchanged-amid-strong-income-growth-in-2019/>

7. *Ibid*; See also Kochhar, Rakesh & Cilluffo, A. (2018 July 12). *Income inequality in the U.S. is rising most rapidly among Asians*. *Pew Research Trends*: <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2018/07/12/income-inequality-in-the-u-s-is-rising-most-rapidly-among-asians/>

(wealth disparities by race are much sharper than by income) and opportunity for Black and Latinx people, as well as for some Asian subgroups.⁸

Students confronting poverty in their homes and communities bring resilience and potential to their schools and classrooms, which are often sites of rich connection and strong leadership and teaching that emphasizes social and racial justice.⁹ Lacking necessary supports, however, many adults and children in schools of concentrated poverty also struggle to cope with the day-to-day challenges of institutionalized inequities.¹⁰

Meanwhile, their more affluent counterparts, isolated in largely white and affluent schools,¹¹ often develop biased, myopic understandings of people of color, how society functions and how opportunity is distributed. With little to no access to meaningful engagement with leaders, teachers and students of color,¹² isolated white and/or affluent students are then ill-prepared for positive relationships across racial lines, productive citizenship and work in an increasingly polarized and unequal democracy.¹³

We have made a series of policy choices over time, now almost surely exacerbated by the pandemic, that have consigned far too many families and children to poverty.¹⁴ Racial disparities in exposure to school poverty flow from longstanding discrimination across multiple spheres of society, from education to housing to employment.¹⁵ We can, of course, make different policy choices.

The context for making those different choices is admittedly challenging. While discrimination based on race remains endemic to American society, federal courts have increasingly backed away from race-conscious law and policy. In the realm of education, this has meant that systems wishing to begin

8. Shapiro, Thomas. (2017). *Toxic inequality: How America's wealth gap destroys mobility, deepens the racial divide and threatens our future*. New York, NY: Hatchett.

9. Siddle Walker, Vanessa. (2017). *The lost education of Horace Tate*. New York, NY: The New Press.

10. Prudence Carter and Kevin Welner, Eds. (2013). *Closing the Opportunity Gap*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press; Sonia Nieto (1992) *Affirming Diversity: The sociopolitical context of education*. White Plains, NY: Longman; Pedro Noguero and Esa Syeed (2020). *City Schools and the American Dream 2*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

11. GAO, 2016.

12. Frankenberg, E. & Orfield, G. (2006). *The segregation of American teachers*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Civil Rights Project.

13. Robert Reich (2018). *The common good*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf. Siegel-Hawley, G. (2012). *How non-minority students also benefit from racially diverse schools*. Washington, DC: National Coalition on School Diversity.

14. In 2016, 12 percent of white children lived in poverty, compared to 37 percent of Black children and 32 percent of Latino children. These figures showcase a deep disparity between the shares of white and Black and Latino children living in poverty, and they also show that a substantial majority of Black and Latino children who are not poor, and a large number of white children are poor. See Wallman, K. (2016). *America's Children in Brief: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2016*. Washington, DC: Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. In terms of actual numbers, there are about half a million more white children in poverty than Black children, though Latinx children considerably outnumber but Black and white children. See <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/44-children-in-poverty-by-race-and-ethnicity#detailed/1/any/false/1729,37,871,870,573,869,36,868,867,133/10,11,9,12,1,185,13/324,323>. So while race and poverty are related, they are far from perfectly overlapping.

15. For an overview of the history of residential segregation, which underlies a great deal of school segregation, see Richard Rothstein (2017). *The color of law*. New York, NY: Livewright. For a description of multi-pronged discrimination in housing and employment, see Devah Pager and Hava Shepherd, *The Sociology of Discrimination: Racial Discrimination in Employment, Housing, Credit, and Consumer Markets*, *Annu Rev Sociol.* 2008 Jan 1; 34: 181–209.

or maintain a focus on school integration tend to focus on methods of assigning students to schools that rely on student socioeconomic status (SES). Research suggests, though, that SES integration does not always produce the same level of racial integration as directly considering an individual student's race.¹⁶ That is now prohibited by the courts for districts not under court supervision of de jure segregation violation. Districts *are* still permitted to use a combination of racial/ethnic and SES factors in student assignment under certain circumstances, making it more important than ever to understand the relationship between race and SES across different communities. With clear knowledge of how student race and poverty interact in Virginia, we will be better positioned to design student assignment policies that effectively advance integration.

This research brief explores the contours of school segregation by race and poverty in Virginia over the past decade.

Summary of key findings

- The share of Virginia students eligible for Free or Reduced Priced Lunch (FRL) rose by nearly 126,000 students, from 36.4% to 44.4% of the overall enrollment, between 2009 and 2018.
- Exposure to student poverty has increased faster and remains far higher for Black students in Virginia compared to other racial/ethnic groups.
 - ◊ In 2018, the average Black student attended a school where about 60% of their peers qualified for FRL, more than half the level of FRL exposure (28%) for Asian students, who reported the lowest average exposure.
- Student poverty is concentrated in Virginia's city school systems, where nearly 60% of students qualify for FRL. Past and present discrimination across multiple sectors, including housing and education, has also shaped the fact that the share of student poverty is far lower in the suburbs, at about 36%.
- Exposure to students eligible for FRL, regardless of race, is highest in elementary school and lowest in high school, in part because of the way we measure poverty. Black and Latinx students experienced the highest exposure to school poverty in all grade levels, while Asian and white students experienced the lowest.
- Economically Disadvantaged (ED) students experienced much higher exposure to ED peers than their non-Economically Disadvantaged (NED) counterparts.
- School racial segregation is intense regardless of economic disadvantage. To illustrate: Black students, both Economically Disadvantaged (ED) and non-Economically Disadvantaged (NED), experienced the highest average exposure to poverty compared to other racial groups. Indeed,

16. See, e.g., Siegel-Hawley, G., Frankenberg, E. & Ayscue, J. (2017). *Can socioeconomic diversity plans produce racial diversity in K-12 schools?* Washington, DC: National Coalition on School Diversity.

Black *NED* students approached the average exposure to student poverty (42%) that white ED students experienced (45%) and experienced higher exposure to poverty than Asian ED students (41%). In other words, Black students, regardless of income level, are more likely to be exposed to higher levels of school poverty.

- Virginia data suggests that Asian students, whether ED or NED, experience much lower exposure, on average, to school poverty than other racial/ethnic groups. Asian students are not a monolith, of course, as the group includes many different subgroups with different immigration histories and, relatedly, average income and educational attainment levels.
- The number of schools of concentrated racial and economic *disadvantage*—more than 75% FRL-eligible and Black and/or Latinx—increased from 97 in 2009 to 156 in 2018. Over the same time period, students enrolled in these schools nearly doubled to about 85,000, or roughly 7% of Virginia’s enrollment. The number of Latinx students in these settings increased most dramatically, tripling in the last decade. Black students experienced a 60% increase in enrollment in these schools.
- The number of schools with concentrated economic and racial advantage, where less than 25% of students are FRL-eligible and over 75% are white, declined by 38% over the past decade, from 203 to 125. White students made up the vast majority of enrollment in the 125 schools with concentrated advantage—more than 80%.

A note about the measurement of student poverty

Student eligibility for Free and Reduced Priced Lunch (FRL), a program run through the Department of Agriculture, is often used as a proxy for student poverty. Eligibility for FRL is usually based on family income, such that a family with an income at or below 130% of the federal definition of poverty (\$25,750 for a family of four in 2019) qualifies for free lunch and a family earning between 130 and 185 percent of the federal poverty definition qualifies for reduced lunch.¹⁷

On the one hand, FRL eligibility overestimates student poverty because it includes families in a specified income range above the federal poverty line.¹⁸ But on the other, the U.S. has not reevaluated the way it defines poverty since the mid-1960s, when research indicated that the average family spent about one-third of its income on food. Thus the poverty line was and continues to be calculated by multiplying the price of a minimal food budget by three, adjusted for inflation.¹⁹ Most experts consider the resulting line far too low, inadequately capturing the cost of living beyond food and not accounting for wide geographic variation in expenses.²⁰

17. Snyder, T. & Musu-Gillette, L. (2015). Free or reduced price lunch: A proxy for poverty? *NCES Blog*, <https://nces.ed.gov/blogs/nces/post/free-or-reduced-price-lunch-a-proxy-for-poverty>. Other methods of eligibility are available too, including foster children, student homelessness or children participating in Head Start.

18. Ibid.

19. Greenberg, M. (2009 August 25). It’s time for a better poverty measure. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2009/08/25/6582/its-time-for-a-better-poverty-measure/>

20. O’Brien, R. & Pedulla, D. (2010). Beyond the poverty line. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, https://ssir.org/articles/entry/beyond_the_poverty_line.

A note about the measurement of student poverty (cont.)

For decades, researchers have relied on FRL-eligibility as a measure of student poverty, since it captures family income data reported to the federal government at the school-level. Yet FRL is by no means perfect. Research has indicated, for instance, that the program misclassifies about 20% of students, that student participation decreases from elementary to middle to high school, partly because of the stigma attached to it, and that it is a binary measure, meaning either you qualify or you don't, which doesn't reflect a continuum of access to resources.²¹

FRL as a consistent measure of the socioeconomic status of students in schools shifted in 2011, when the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) began to go into effect. CEP sought to reduce administrative and service inefficiencies in providing free and reduced priced lunches to students, offering universal meals to all students in schools where at least 40% of students are eligible. Reducing the paperwork burden on school and families, along with the stigma since students are no longer divided into eligibility categories, have been important benefits of the CEP. At the same time, the shift towards universal eligibility has meant that federal FRL data now includes a portion of non-FRL eligible students who attend schools with higher concentrations of poverty.²² In Virginia, 9% of students are in CEP schools, according to an Urban Institute analysis.²³

For accountability purposes, states, including Virginia, still collect data on student poverty. We rely on Virginia's measure of Economic Disadvantage (ED) in this report, along with federal FRL data. Virginia's ED is defined as eligibility for FRL, plus several other federal aid programs, including SNAP, TANF and Medicaid. As such, as a measure of student poverty, Virginia's poverty measure runs into some of the same shortcomings outlined for the federal measure.

One last note: the relatively new Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) data collection on race plus ED allows for some of the more nuanced analyses on the relationship between student race and socioeconomic status in the tables that follow. These data offer a critical, cutting edge window into the interplay between race and SES in education. Similar data should be made publicly available across as many states as possible.

21. For a summary of these issues and others see Harwell, M. (2018). Don't expect too much: The limited usefulness of common SES measures and a prescription for change. Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center, <https://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/SES>

22. Orfield, G. (2021). Black segregation matters. Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Civil Rights Project. USDA waivers extended in response to Covid 19 over the past year will make it even more difficult to parse out and understand the data.

23. Urban Institute (2019). Measuring student poverty: Dishing up alternatives to free and reduced-price lunch. Washington, DC: Urban Institute, <https://www.urban.org/features/measuring-student-poverty-dishing-alternatives-free-and-reduced-price-lunch?state=Virginia>.

Enrollment and double segregation

Over the past decade or so, student poverty and multiracial diversity have increased significantly in Virginia (see Table 1). The share of Virginia students eligible for Free or Reduced Priced Lunch (FRL) rose by nearly 126,000 students, from 36.4% to 44.4% of the overall enrollment, between 2009 and 2018. This is slightly lower than the national figure, which comes in at just over 50%.²⁴ As noted, some, but not all, of the growth in FRL enrollment over the past ten years is related to the new CEP provision (see sidebar). But this period also captures the aftermath of the Great Recession, which left many families reeling from the longterm economic fallout. In terms of race, students of color now make up a majority of Virginia's K-12 enrollment, driven by an increase in Latinx²⁵ and, to a lesser extent, Asian students. Additionally, a relatively new racial/ethnic classification of students from two or more racial/ethnic backgrounds represented nearly 6% of the enrollment.

Table 1: Composition of student enrollment, Virginia, 2009-10 and 2018-19

	White	Black	Latinx	Asian	Two+	FRL
SY 2009-10	696,821 (57.8%)	315,122 (26.1%)	116,200 (9.6%)	73,838 (6.1%)	N/A	443,770 (36.4%)
SY 2018-19	623,162 (48.4%)	285,136 (22.2%)	207,758 (16.1%)	91,901 (7.1%)	73,384 (5.7%)	569,538 (44.4%)

Source: NCES' Common Core of Data

As the overall share of Virginia students eligible for FRL has increased, so too has student exposure to concentrations of poverty in schools, a key driver of the racial achievement gap (see Table 2). While all racial/ethnic groups have experienced an increase, exposure to student poverty has increased faster and remains far higher for Black students in Virginia compared to other racial/ethnic groups. In 2018, the average Black student attended a school where about 60% of their peers qualified for FRL. The average Asian student, by contrast, attended a school where about 28% of their peers qualified for FRL. Student exposure to poverty for white (roughly 38%) and Latinx students (roughly 50%) fell in between these two extremes. Though national poverty exposure numbers for white and Asian students tend to be similar, white rural poverty likely accounts for higher levels of white poverty in Virginia (see Table 2).

24. National Center for Education Statistics. Digest of Education Statistics. Table 2014.10, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dtr19_204.10.asp

25. The term Latinx is used to disrupt gender binaries as opposed to Latino/a, which are gendered terms when discussing identity. See Vidal-Ortiz, S., & Martínez, J. (2018). Latinx thoughts: Latinidad with an X. *Latino Studies*, 16(3), 384-395.

Table 2: Exposure to FRL students by race, Virginia, school year 2009-10 and 2018-19

	Average white student	Average Black student	Average Latinx student	Average Asian student	Average two race student	FRL Composition
%FRL 2009-10	30.5%	48.1%	41.2%	25.2%	N/A	36.4%
%FRL 2018-19	38.0%	60.3%	49.6%	27.5%	40.6%	44.4%

Source: NCES' Common Core of Data

Student poverty is highly concentrated in Virginia’s city school systems, where nearly 60% of students qualified for FRL in 2018. Ongoing discrimination in housing, vast racial disparities in wealth, exclusionary zoning, segregated social networks, school choice, the boundaries between school divisions and between schools within the same division often cordon off higher opportunity areas from lower opportunity ones, contributing to a vicious cycle of segregation in metropolitan housing markets.²⁶ These macro trends have shaped the fact that student poverty levels continue to be much lower in Virginia’s suburbs, at about 36% in 2018. Meanwhile, roughly 46% of students in Virginia’s town and rural areas qualify for FRL, about even with the overall share of student poverty in the state.

Exposure to student poverty varies considerably by both race and locale in Virginia, with far higher levels of exposure to student poverty in cities relative to town/rural areas and particularly suburbs. To illustrate: Black students experience the highest levels of exposure to student poverty across all locales, but levels are highest, on average, in cities (71.9%) and lowest in suburbs (49.6%). White exposure to poverty in town/rural areas is the one exception to this trend, with roughly even levels of exposure for White students in town/rural systems and city systems. Still, the same general patterns in exposure to poverty by race in the state overall hold for locale, with Black students experiencing the highest levels of exposure to poverty, followed by Latinx, White and, finally, Asian students.

Table 3: Exposure to FRL students by race and locale, Virginia, school year 2018-19

	Average white student	Average Black student	Average Latinx student	Average Asian student	Average two race student	FRL enrollment
City						
%FRL	46.3%	71.9%	60.4%	45.1%	53.3%	58.5%
Suburban						
%FRL	27.4%	49.6%	47.6%	25.3%	31.6%	35.8%
Town and Rural						
%FRL	44.7%	58.6%	43.1%	21.8%	42.9%	46.1%

Source: NCES' Common Core of Data

26. Bischoff, K. (2008). School district fragmentation and racial residential segregation: How do boundaries matter? *Urban Affairs Review*, 44(2), 182-217; Fiel, J. (2013). Decomposing school resegregation: Social closure, racial imbalance, and racial isolation. *American Sociological Review*, 78(5), 828-848; Krysan, M. & Crowder, K. (2017). *Cycle of segregation: Social processes and residential stratification*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation; Owens, A. (2016). *Inequality in children's contexts: Income segregation of households with and without children*. *American Sociological Review* 81(3), 549-574.

In part because of the way we measure poverty, exposure to students eligible for FRL, regardless of race, is highest in elementary school and tapers off in middle to high school.²⁷ As with overall numbers and locale, Black and Latinx students experience the highest exposure to school poverty regardless of grade level, while Asian and white students experience the lowest. For instance, in 2009, the average Black elementary school student attended a school where about 55.6% of students are eligible for FRL whereas the average for white elementary students was 34.0%. For high school students, the average Black high school student attended a school where 36.4% of students are eligible, compared to the 21.4% average for Asian high school students. Exposure to poverty for all grade-level groups has increased over the past decade, particularly for Black students who experienced 11 to 14 percentage point increases. By contrast, exposure to poverty increased at markedly lower levels for Asian students, in the range of 1 to 4 percentage points.

Table 4: Exposure to FRL students by race and school level, Virginia, 2009-10 and 2018-19

	Average white student	Average Black student	Average Latinx student	Average Asian student	Average two race student	All students
School Year 2009-10						
%FRL Elementary	34.0%	55.6%	47.5%	26.8%	N/A	40.3%
%FRL Middle	31.4%	48.6%	39.5%	27.3%	N/A	36.5%
%FRL High	24.8%	36.4%	30.0%	21.4%	N/A	28.0%
School Year 2018-19						
%FRL Elementary	41.5%	66.7%	55.3%	28.8%	43.9%	48.6%
%FRL Middle	39.1%	60.5%	49.4%	28.4%	41.9%	45.1%
%FRL High	32.8%	50.5%	40.6%	25.6%	33.2%	37.4%

Source: NCES' Common Core of Data

How student socioeconomic status and race/ethnicity influences exposure to school poverty

Virginia's Economic Disadvantage (ED) numbers show exposure patterns that closely correspond to the numbers for FRL though the reported share of ED students (40%) is slightly lower than the reported share of FRL students (44.4%). Virginia data on student poverty additionally illustrates how ED and *non*-Economically Disadvantaged (NED) students experience exposure to student poverty.

Overall, the typical ED student in Virginia attends a school where about 50% of students are also ED and about 46% are NED (Table 5). By contrast, the typical NED Virginia goes to a school where 31.5% of students are ED and 62.8% are NED. In other words, ED students in Virginia tend to attend schools with much higher concentrations of poverty than NED students.

27. Harwell, 2018.

Table 5. Exposure to economic disadvantage by economically-disadvantaged status, Virginia, 2018

	Average ED Student	Average NED Student	Overall Enrollment
%ED	48.8	31.5	40.0
%NED	46.4	62.8	60.0

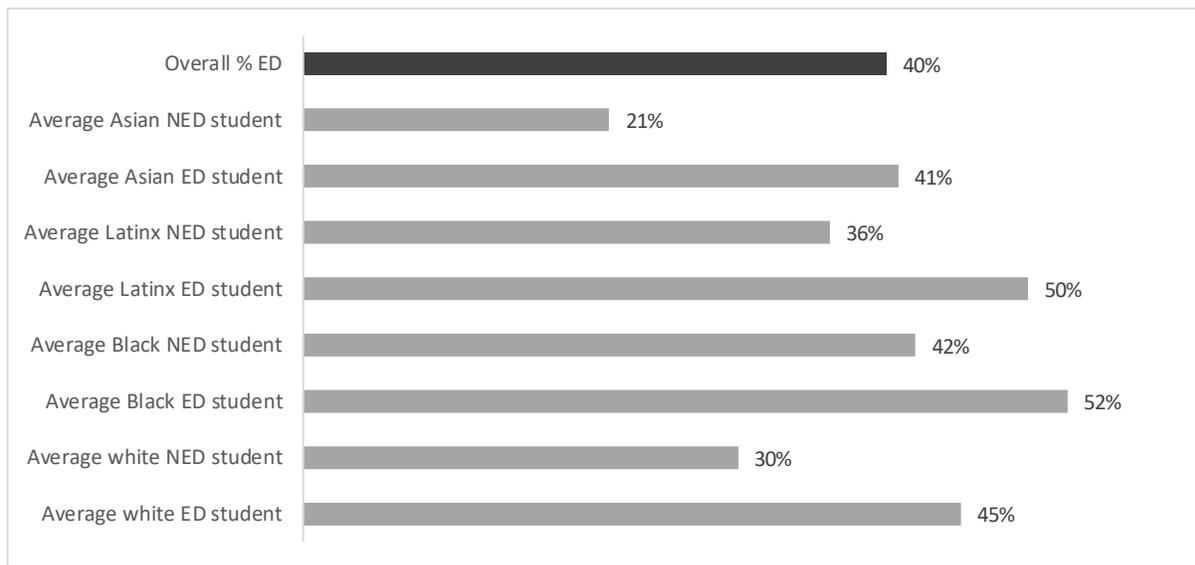
Source: Virginia Department of Education. Note: Totals do not add to 100 because of missing data.

Considerable variations in the general pattern described in Table 5 emerge when looking at exposure to ED and NED by race, however. Black students, both ED and NED, experience the highest average exposure to poverty compared to other racial groups (Figure 1). Indeed, Black *NED* students approached the average exposure to student poverty (42%) that white *ED* students experienced (45%) and experienced higher exposure to poverty than Asian ED students (41%). This corresponds with residential segregation literature indicating that Black families with children, regardless of income level, are more likely to live in or in close proximity to communities with concentrated poverty.²⁸ And given the research discussed above, higher Black exposure to school poverty, regardless of the individual students' own economic status, has implications for racial achievement gaps as measured by test scores.

On the whole, though, white, Latinx, Asian and Black ED students experienced higher average poverty exposure levels relative to their same-race NED counterparts and to the overall enrollment of ED students. For instance, the average white ED student attended a school where about 45% of their peers were classified as ED, compared to about 30% for their white NED peers. This was also higher than the overall share of Virginia's ED enrollment in 2018 (about 40%). The trends were similar, but somewhat more severe, for Latinx students. Asian ED and NED students experienced the lowest average exposure to student poverty relative to their ED/NED different race counterparts and Asian NED students experienced the lowest exposure to school poverty of all.

28. Greene, S. Turner, M., Gourevitch, R. (2017 August 29). Racial residential segregation and neighborhood disparities. U.S. Partnership on Mobility from Poverty, <https://www.mobilitypartnership.org/publications/racial-residential-segregation-and-neighborhood-disparities>.

Figure 1: Race by economic disadvantage exposure to disadvantage, school year 2018-19



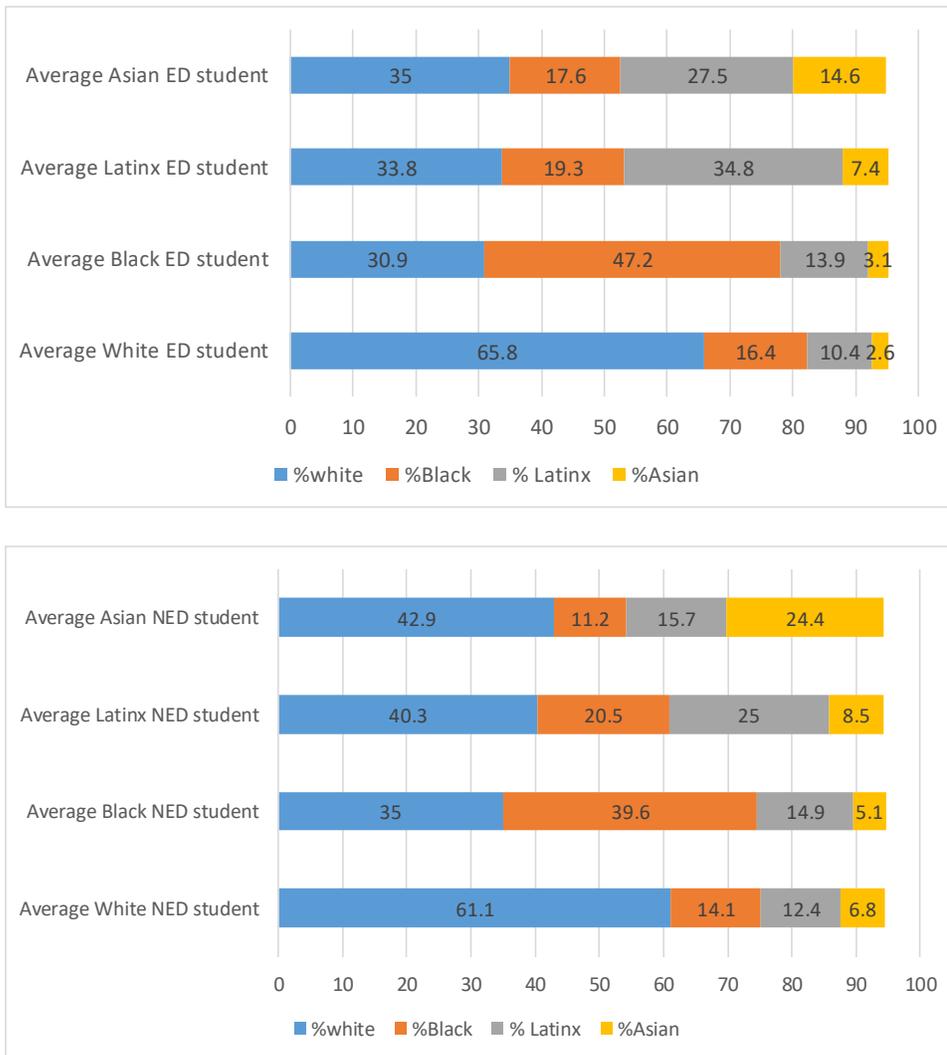
Source: Virginia Department of Education; Note: NED stands for “non-economically disadvantaged”.

A slightly different analysis indicates that school racial segregation is intense regardless of economic disadvantage. The average Black ED student experienced a rate of exposure to white peers (30.9%) in 2018 roughly similar to the average Black NED student (35.0%). Yet Black ED students experienced higher isolation with Black peers (47.2%) relative to Black NED students (39.2%). Broadly speaking, Black ED and NED students experienced the highest exposure to same race peers, followed by white students and then Latinx students. Black NED and ED students experienced the least exposure to Asian students in schools (see Figure 2).

Somewhat more variation in exposure to white students occurred among Latinx and Asian ED and NED students, with NED students from both racial/ethnic groups experiencing higher exposure to white students. The typical Latinx ED student attended a school in 2018 where about 34% of his or her peers were white, while the typical Latinx NED student attended a school where about 40% of his or her peers were white. Those same numbers for Asian ED and NED student exposure to white students were 35.0% and 42.9%, respectively. Latinx NED are much less isolated with same race peers than Latinx ED students, however, while Asian NED students are much *more* isolated with same race peers than Asian ED students. This may relate to residential settlement patterns for affluent Asian families, who are increasingly likely to settle in high status ethnic suburban enclaves.²⁹ Asian NED students also experience much lower exposure to Latinx students than Asian ED students.

29. Alba, R. et al. (2014). Immigrant groups in the suburbs: A reexamination of suburbanization and spatial assimilation. *American Sociological Review* 64(3), 446-460.

Figure 2: Student race by economic disadvantage exposure to race, Virginia, 2018-2019



Source: Virginia Department of Education. NED stands for “non-economically disadvantaged”; ED stands for “economically disadvantaged”

Understanding how concentrated students of different racial/ethnic or economic backgrounds are in schools together is another way of measuring segregation. The following section returns to federal data to examine trends for students in schools of concentrated racial and economic advantage and disadvantage.

Enrollment in racially and/or economically isolated schools

The number of schools with concentrated economic and racial advantage, where less than 25% of students are FRL-eligible and over 75% are white, declined by 38% over the past decade, from 203 to 125 (see Table 6). White students made up the vast majority of enrollment in these settings—more than 80%. White students have long been the most racially segregated group of students in U.S. schools, and white students in Virginia’s schools of concentrated racial and economic advantage are also economically isolated. Overwhelmingly white and affluent schools siphon off political and financial resources from other schools and disadvantage all students by not offering opportunities to regularly build relationships, learn and problem-solve across lines of difference in a highly diverse society.³⁰ Latinx students are gaining very marginal access to schools of concentrated racial and economic advantage, while Black and Asian students are losing access. [Segregation within these settings of concentrated racial and economic advantage is also intense.](#)

Table 6. Enrollment in schools of concentrated racial and economic advantage, Virginia, 2009 and 2018

	School Year 2009 -10	School Year 2018-19	% Change
Advantaged Schools (N)	203	125	-38.4%
Total Students	148,580	89,366	-39.9%
White Students	124,149 (83.6%)	72,740 (81.4%)	-41.4%
Black Students	10,779 (7.3%)	4,430 (5.0%)	-58.9%
Latinx Students	5,037 (3.4%)	5,190 (5.8%)	3.0%
Asian Students	5,555 (3.7%)	2,502 (2.8%)	-55.0%
FRL Students	19,223 (12.9%)	11,698 (13.1%)	-39.1%

Source: NCES' Common Core of Data.

30. Boddie, E. (2020). The struggle for the soul of public education. [video]. Berkeley, CA: UC Berkeley Othering and Belonging Institute.

The number of schools of concentrated racial and economic *disadvantage*—more than 75% FRL-eligible and Black and/or Latinx—increased from 97 to 156 (see Table 7). This represented a 61% increase in ten years. Students enrolled in these schools nearly doubled to about 85,000, or roughly 7% of Virginia’s enrollment. Black and Latinx students account for the vast majority of students enrolled in schools of concentrated and layered disadvantage. Latinx students in these settings increased most dramatically, tripling in the last decade for a 206% increase. Black students experienced a 60% increase. Though Asian students also experienced a sharp increase, very low numbers of Asian students enrolled in schools of concentrated disadvantage relative to Black and Latinx students. By definition, FRL-eligible students also are heavily concentrated in these schools—they account for 93% of the enrollment in schools of concentrated disadvantage.

Table 7. Enrollment in schools of concentrated racial and economic disadvantage, Virginia, 2009 and 2018

	School Year 2009 -10	School Year 2018-19	% Change
Disadvantaged Schools (N)	97	156	60.8%
Total Students	45,536	84,939	86.5%
White Students	2,721 (6.0%)	6,933 (8.2%)	154.8%
Black Students	36,284 (79.7%)	58,159 (68.5%)	60.3%
Latinx Students	5,112 (11.2%)	15,662 (18.4%)	206.4%
Asian Students	611 (1.3%)	1,448 (1.7%)	137.0%
FRL Students	38,601 (84.8%)	78,877 (92.9%)	104.3%

Source: NCES' Common Core of Data.

Conclusion and recommendations

We find an important and nuanced relationship between race, poverty, schools and locale in Virginia, with particularly detrimental trends for Black students. Black students experience the highest exposure to school poverty at all grade levels and across all locales. Deep racial disparities in exposure to school poverty, regardless of socioeconomic status, hold for Black students. Indeed, Black NED students experience poverty exposure levels that almost match those of white ED students. Substantial numbers of Black students also enroll in schools of concentrated racial and economic disadvantage.

Latinx students report similar, though less severe, trends relative to Black students. Latinx students also are experiencing some of the sharpest increases in exposure to school poverty and enrollment in schools of concentrated disadvantage.

These trends matter because high and uneven exposure to concentrated school poverty for Latinx and Black students is associated with numerous opportunity and achievement gaps.³¹

White students in Virginia experience higher exposure to school poverty, on average, than White students nationwide, which is related to the presence of substantial pockets of white rural poverty. White student exposure to school poverty still remains significantly lower than Black and Latinx student exposure, however, and white enrollment in racially and economically advantaged schools much higher.

Asian students across Virginia have the lowest levels of exposure to school poverty, on average. This is true for both Asian ED and NED students. Asian students are also the least likely to attend schools of concentrated racial and economic disadvantage.

School stratification by race and class, regardless of whether it is concentrated advantage or disadvantage, nurtures an American caste system and cyclically contributes to inequality.³²

Given the direction of the courts, the ongoing salience of racial inequality, and social science research suggesting that understanding the combination of isolation by race and poverty is important, a central recommendation is that contemporary student assignment policies consider race and poverty together.³³

School boards can and should consider both the racial/ethnic and socioeconomic (SES) demographics of neighborhoods when drawing attendance boundaries.³⁴ In student transfer, controlled choice and open enrollment, school boards should consider the racial/ethnic and SES makeup of student neighborhoods or sending/receiving schools, granting priority to student moves that increase integration and reduce segregation. Boards should take a similar approach when it comes to specialty programs or schools

31. Carter & Welner, 2013; reardon, 2016.

32. Ibid.

33. Frankenberg, E. (2020). Using socioeconomic-based strategies to further racial integration in K-12 schools – Literature Review. San Antonio, TX; IDRA EAC – South.

34. Kennedy concurring opinion, *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1*, 551 U.S. 701 (2007).

with selective admissions processes. Taking into account student experiences in schools and neighborhoods of layered disadvantage offers important context during competitive admissions processes. Ultimately, creating more diverse schools will boost learning for all students.³⁵ Regardless of the student assignment issue at hand, policy can facilitate integration.

The increase in student and school poverty over the past decade and as a consequence of the pandemic also necessitates allocating more resources for schools and school divisions serving students with the highest level of unmet needs. In addition to sufficient coronavirus aid to school divisions, it is long past time that we committed to funding schools in a more equitable way. The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) represents a first step in this direction, as does President Joe Biden's proposed doubling of Title I funding in the 2022 fiscal year.³⁶ Though more funding is vital, it should be accompanied by a systematic approach that provides more students access to racially and economically diverse learning environments.

35. Wells, A. et al. (2016). How racially diverse schools and classrooms can benefit all students. Washington, DC: The Century Foundation, <https://tcf.org/content/report/how-racially-diverse-schools-and-classrooms-can-benefit-all-students/>.

36. Camera, L. (9 April 2021). Biden's Budget Significantly Boosts K-12 Spending. U.S. News, <https://www.usnews.com/news/education-news/articles/2021-04-09/bidens-budget-significantly-boosts-k-12-education-spending>

Appendix

In tandem with a decline in the overall white student enrollment, Virginia saw a significant decline in the overall number of white isolated schools, or schools where white students accounted for more than 75% of the enrollment. Student enrollment in these white isolated settings is decreasing for all racial/ethnic groups except Latinx students. Meanwhile, students eligible for FRL students increased as a share of the enrollment in white isolated schools but decreased in terms of actual numbers. These trends may suggest increasing white rural economic isolation.

The number of Black and Latinx isolated schools (more than 75% Black and Latinx) in Virginia increased substantially from 188 to 220 and the number of students enrolled in these settings increased by about 30,000 children. Latinx students experienced a soaring 226% increase in enrollment in these racially isolated schools, from 10.5% to 27.2%. Asian students also experienced an increase in enrollment in Black and Latinx isolated schools, but their overall share remains low at 2.8%. Both white and Black students reported declines in enrollment in these schools.

Enrollment in Virginia’s poverty isolated schools (where more than 75% of students qualify for FRL) almost tripled between 2009 and 2018. Some of this increase almost surely reflects the implementation of the CEP provision providing universal eligibility to all students in high poverty schools. The biggest percent change in enrollment in poverty isolated schools is for white students (637%) followed by Asian and then Latinx students. The number of Black students enrolled in these settings doubled but declined as a percentage because of growth for other racial/ethnic groups. FRL-eligible students enrolled in poverty isolated schools nearly tripled.

Table 1A. Schools isolated by race and schools isolated by poverty, Virginia, 2018-2019

	School Year 2009 -10	School Year 2018-19	%Change
White Isolated Schools (N)	627	462	-26.3%
Total Students	340,729	233,762	-31.4%
White Students	295,703 (86.8%)	198,672 (85.0%)	-32.8%
Black Students	22,423 (6.6%)	10,171 (4.4%)	-54.6%
Latinx Students	10,569 (3.1%)	11,602 (5.0%)	9.8%
Asian Students	7,183 (2.1%)	3,316 (1.4%)	-53.8%
FRL Students	98,953 (29.0%)	79,980 (34.2%)	-19.2%

	School Year 2009 -10	School Year 2018-19	%Change
Black/Latinx Isolated Schools (N)	188	220	17.0%
Total Students	106,933	135,359	26.5%
White Students	9,948 (9.3%)	11,862 (8.8%)	19.2%
Black Students	81,762 (76.4%)	78,188 (57.8%)	-4.4%
Latinx Students	11,270 (10.5%)	36,758 (27.2%)	226.2%
Asian Students	1,763 (1.6%)	3,759 (2.8%)	113.2%
FRL Students	75,548 (70.6%)	107,804 (79.6%)	42.7%
Poverty Isolated Schools (N)	132	385	191.7%
Total Students	58,429	194,056	232.1%
White Students	7,723 (13.2%)	56,946 (29.3%)	637.4%
Black Students	41,270 (70.6%)	94,015 (29.3%)	127.8%
Latinx Students	7,404 (12.7%)	29,851 (15.4%)	303.2%
Asian Students	983 (1.7%)	4,058 (2.1%)	312.8%
FRL Students	48,899 (88.7%)	176,165 (90.8%)	260.3%

Source: NCES' Common Core of Data.

About the authors

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About the Center for Education and Civil Rights

The Center for Education and Civil Rights seeks to be a hub for the generation of knowledge and coalition-building among the education and civil rights communities to promote research-based actions that address the complicated nature of racial and ethnic inequality in the 21st century. The Center's collective work is intended to promote equity across the educational pipeline by supporting efforts that facilitate integration through an inter-disciplinary approach. The Center is directed by Erica Frankenberg. For more information, see www.cecr.ed.psu.edu or follow us on Twitter ([@psu_civilrights](https://twitter.com/psu_civilrights)).