



The first of a two-part special series

**News & Analysis on Urban School Reform
from The Piton Foundation**

the **term** *paper*

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STUDY DOCUMENTS THE RESEGREGATION OF DENVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS



Editor's note: The study excerpted in this issue of The Term Paper was written by Chungmei Lee, a researcher with the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University. The introduction was written by Term Paper Editor Alan Gottlieb. Gottlieb also edited the study for length and content. A full version of the study, including footnotes, is available at the Civil Rights project website: <http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu> It is also available on The Piton Foundation web site: www.piton.org

Introduction

Denver Public Schools have reseggregated dramatically by race and socio-economic status since court-ordered busing ended a decade ago, according to a new study commissioned by The Piton Foundation.

The adverse impacts of segregation will continue disproportionately affecting Denver's low-income, minority students, unless creative measures are taken to foster more integrated schools for all students, the study concludes.

The issue is an important one, the study argues, because schools filled with students of color are almost always high-poverty schools. And a large body of research clearly shows that low-income students perform significantly better in schools that have a mixed-income population.



from

THE EDITOR

**THE END OF BUSING,
10 YEARS LATER:
A STUDY**

Ten years ago, a federal judge released Denver from over two decades of court-ordered school busing for racial integration.

The Denver Board of Education wasted no time planning for a rapid return to a system of neighborhood schools. People would be so invested in their nearby schools, board members reasoned, that all schools would improve, regardless of their racial or socio-economic make-up.

A decade of flat achievement would suggest that at best things

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This and another study conducted of DPS by the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University will be released this year. Both focus on the impact of busing's end. The second study, coming this spring, will examine changes in student achievement patterns since the federal courts released Denver from busing in 1995.

The current study yielded the following major findings, to be detailed below:

- Since 1995, the typical Latino student's exposure to Anglo students has been cut nearly in half, despite a dramatic surge in Latino enrollment and only a modest decline in Anglo enrollment.
- African-American exposure to Anglo students has dropped markedly as well.
- Anglo students, though a shrinking proportion of the DPS student population, are increasingly clustered in a small number of disproportionately Anglo schools.
- In the first two years of the post-busing era, the share of Latino students attending intensely segregated schools (90 percent or higher minority population) more than tripled, from 11 percent to 38 percent.
- The increase was even more dramatic for African-American students, jumping as much as 31 percentage points during this time period.
- Latinos who are English Language Learners are even more isolated from other racial and ethnic groups than are Latinos as a whole.

SOME BACKGROUND

This study was undertaken because Denver Public Schools provide a unique opportunity to study the dynamics of school segregation within the context of rapid demographic shifts and key policy changes.

In 1973, Denver became the first northern school district ordered to desegregate by the U.S. Supreme Court. Lawyers representing a group of African-American, Latino, and Anglo families filed a lawsuit in U.S. District Court alleging that schools in the Park Hill neighborhoods were intentionally segregated to keep Anglo students separate from minority students. Keyes was the first Supreme Court ruling that recognized the rights of Latinos to desegregation.

Throughout the desegregation case, busing for integration remained unpopular among outspoken members of the Latino community. As the desegregation order entered the 1990s, it became increasingly unpopular among some African-Americans as well, because they did not perceive any significant gains in student achievement.

It is important to note that the Keyes case did not affect all Denver schools. The case concentrated primarily on the east side of town, and more than a dozen schools on the west side – some of them heavily Latino – never came under the court order. Those schools remained heavily Latino throughout the duration of the Keyes case, and many remain heavily Latino today.

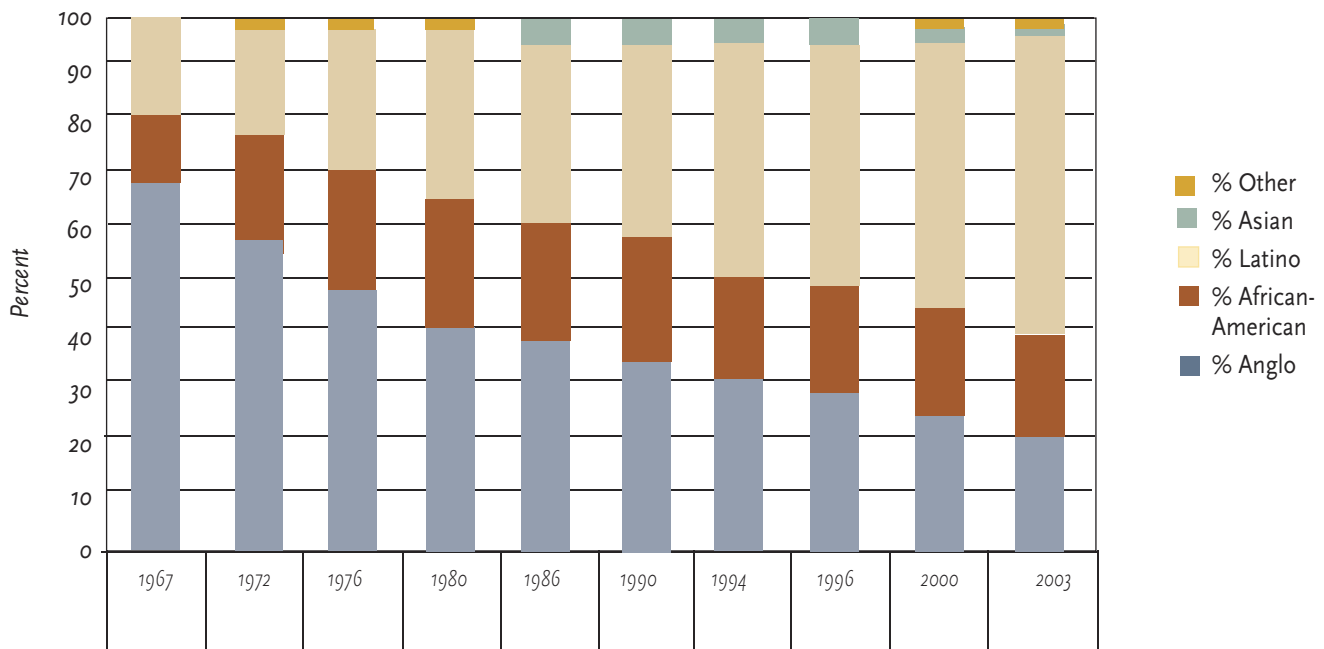
Even though not all schools were involved in busing, it is still important to examine the demographic trends and segregation patterns at the district level for several reasons. Although certain schools were excluded from the case and therefore have not reseggregated, it does not change the fact that for those schools in the district that fell under the desegregation order, Latino students have experienced reintegration after a period of desegregation.

Moreover, the goal of this report is to examine the broader demographic and segregation patterns of the district within the context of the 1973 Keyes case. These general trends tell an important story in their own right and build a foundation for school-level analyses that will be presented in the upcoming second report.

Under Keyes, Denver created a plan that desegregated both African-American and some Latino students within the city in such a way that it became the only large metropolitan area during the 1970s where both African-American and Latino students became markedly less segregated from Anglos.

Over the past three decades, one of the most dramatic demographic changes in DPS has been the surge of Latino enrollment. In 1980, DPS was already majority minority, with 41 percent Anglo, 23 percent African-American, 32 percent Latino, and 3 percent Asian student enrollment. A little over two decades later, DPS became majority Latino, with Anglo students comprising only one-fifth of the entire student body by 2003.

Change in Racial Composition in the Denver Public Schools 1967-2003



Denver school growth was cut off by a state constitutional amendment that prohibited incorporating surrounding suburban communities into the Denver school district. Approved by voters in 1974, the Poundstone Amendment prohibited annexation except by the consent of the majority of the voters in each county that was giving up the land.

While the overt goal of the amendment was to prevent Denver's growth from overwhelming the suburbs, an unspoken ulterior motive was to limit the reach of the desegregation order into the suburbs. Keyes only covered schools within the 1974 boundaries of Denver and none of the other school districts in the metropolitan area.

As a result, the Poundstone Amendment sealed off Denver from the surrounding suburbs

and severely curtailed DPS' ability to desegregate its schools.

In 1995, the courts ended two decades of federally-mandated school desegregation in Denver, ruling that Denver had eliminated vestiges of past segregation, thereby earning "unitary" status.

Because DPS is one of the few major school districts with a history of desegregation of both African-Americans and Latinos, it is important to examine how the end of the Keyes case affected the district and its students.

Policymakers and educators face daunting challenges as they strive to provide high-quality education in a context that is both majority Latino and, as this paper finds, increasingly segregated and unequal for its increasingly diverse student body.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES

THE DENVER METROPOLITAN AREA CONTEXT

The Denver metropolitan area is extremely diverse. In 2003-04, among the students attending public schools in the Denver metropolitan area, approximately 59 percent were Anglo. Across the entire metropolitan area, Latino students are the largest minority group at 28 percent, followed by African-Americans at 8 percent and Asians at 4 percent.

DPS is overwhelmingly minority—only 20 percent of its students are Anglo—with Latino students comprising more than half of the students (57%) and African-American students another 19 percent. In fact, it enrolls only six percent of the metropolitan area's Anglo students.

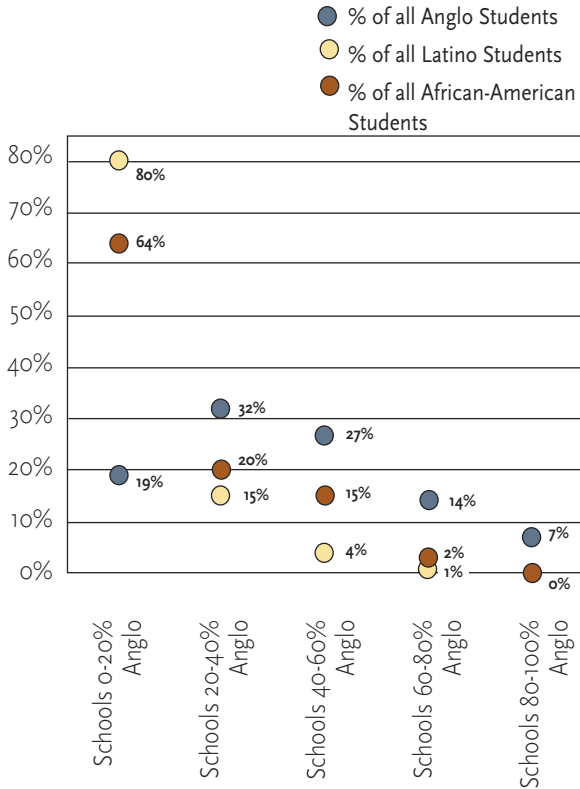
The metro area has experienced two major demographic shifts since 1990: the continued migration of the urban student

population from Denver to the surrounding counties, and an increasing share of the non-Anglo population in the greater metropolitan area.

Despite the increase in total enrollment in the metropolitan area, DPS is capturing a slowly decreasing share of the overall metropolitan area enrollment, from 21 percent in 1990 to 19 percent in 2003. Jefferson County has witnessed a similar trend; its schools currently enroll about 23 percent of the metropolitan student population, a decrease from 27 percent in 1990.

Conversely, there has been an increase in both numbers and shares of the total enrollment in surrounding counties such as Douglas. The movement of families (mostly Anglos) to the suburbs and away from urban Denver further exacerbates the racial isolation of students in Denver County.

**Distribution of Students
in the Denver Public Schools 2003-2004**



The second major trend is the surge in Latino enrollment across the metropolitan area, especially in Denver, Adams, and Arapahoe counties. More than half of the students in Denver are Latino, compared to 40 percent in 1990. Overall, while there were some increases in the African-American enrollment shares in the Denver metropolitan area, most of the demographic changes were driven by Latino growth.

The uneven distribution of students by race is even more notable at the district level. Forty-four percent of African-American students and 39 percent of Latino students in the greater Denver metropolitan area attend schools in Denver. DPS and Aurora Public Schools account for more than two-thirds of the African-American student population and more than half of the Latino student population in the metropolitan area, but less than one-ninth of the area's Anglo students.

Anglo enrollment, by contrast, is concentrated in suburban districts such as Jefferson, Douglas, and Cherry Creek. Although some of the concentration of minority

students may be due to the size of Denver and Aurora relative to some of the smaller suburban districts, the same does not hold for Anglo students. Compared to minority students, Anglos are spread throughout suburban districts surrounding the two major cities.

Denver has about the same number of Anglo students attending its schools as some smaller suburban districts – Littleton, for example.

*DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES OVER TIME
IN THE DENVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS*

The decrease in Anglo enrollment and increase in the share of the Latino population, coupled with the Poundstone-imposed fixed boundaries, account for much of the demographic transformation of Denver Public Schools.

Even before the Keyes ruling in 1973, the Anglo share of the district's student enrollment was already dropping. Anglos continued moving to the suburbs throughout the 1970s, '80s and '90s. Anglo enrollment plummeted from 66 percent of the district total in 1967 to 20 percent



In an increasingly multiracial society, public schools can play a critical role in preparing all individuals to live and work among people of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds.

by 2003.

Under these conditions, attempts to desegregate within an urban center became increasingly difficult. The drop in Anglo enrollment was partially offset by Latino enrollment, which rose from 20 percent to 57 percent of the district total enrollment during this same time period.

African-American and Asian shares of school enrollment also increased during this time, albeit at a slower rate than the Latino enrollment.

SEGREGATION TRENDS

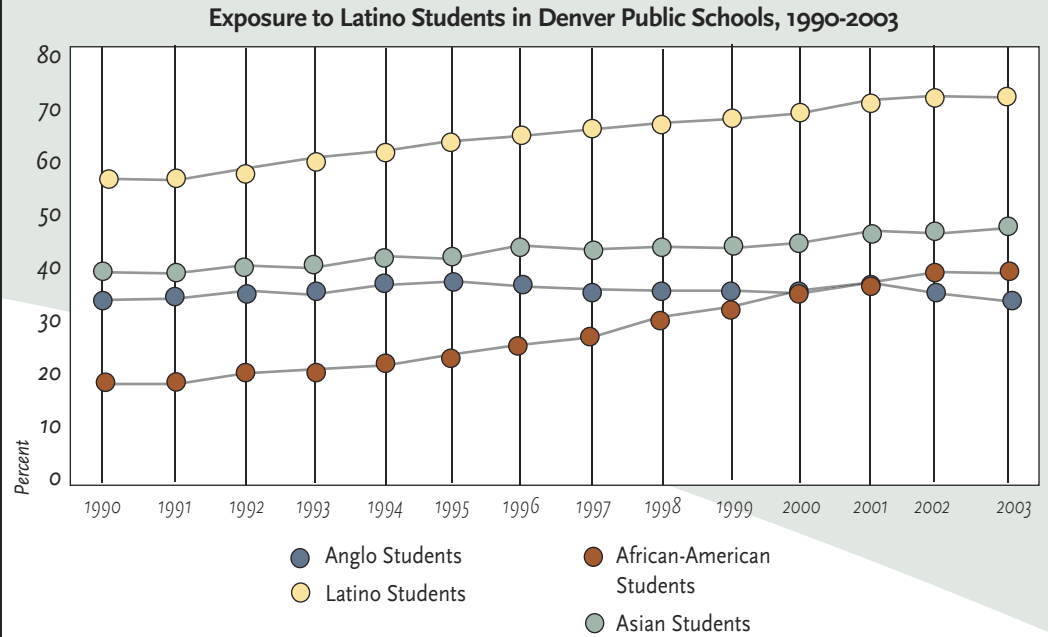
SEGREGATION BY RACE

Between 1990 and 2003, African-American, Latino, and Asian students in Denver experienced a drop in exposure to Anglo students. Latino students are especially isolated in DPS; the average Latino student attends a school that is 71 percent Latino, even though Latinos make up only 57 percent of student enrollment.

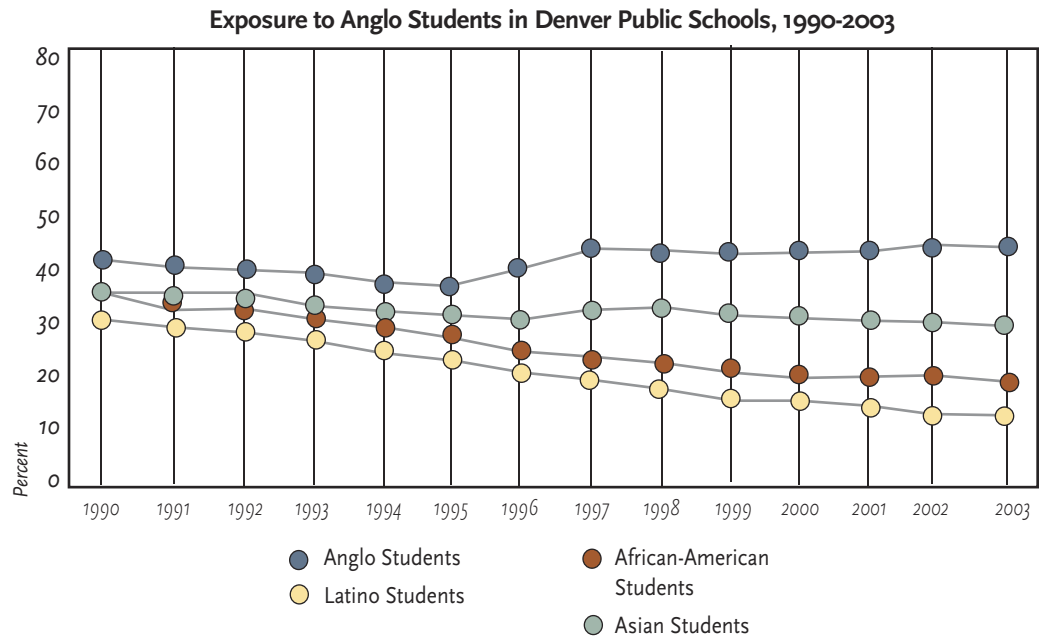
Furthermore, the percentage of Anglo students in DPS attended by the average Latino student dropped from 29 percent in 1990 to its present rate of 12 percent. African-American exposure to Anglo students also fell from 33 percent to 18 percent in a little over a decade, while the share of Latino students in the school of the average African-American student more than doubled, from 18 percent to 39 percent.

The exposure index in the accompanying tables shows the share of a particular group present in the school of the average student in another group. Isolation is the exposure of one racial group to other members of the same group.

A breakdown of the distribution of students in DPS clearly shows a heavy concentration of students in racially isolated schools. Eighty-four percent of Latino, 74 percent of African-American and



This graph shows the percentage of Latino students in schools attended by the typical Anglo, African-American, Asian and Latino student. For example, a typical African-American student in 1990 attended a school that was 18% Latino. By 2003, a typical African-American student attended a school that was 39% Latino.



This graph shows the percentage of Anglo students in schools attended by the typical Anglo, African-American, Asian and Latino student. For example, a typical Anglo student in 1990 attended a school that was 40% Anglo. By 2003, despite the fact that Anglo enrollment in DPS declined from 34% in 1990 to 20% in 2003, a typical Anglo student attended a school that was 42% Anglo (An increase of 2 percentage points).

termpaper

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Segregation has never just been about race.

Racial segregation is systematically linked to other forms of segregation, including segregation by socio-economic status, by residential location, and increasingly by language.

52 percent of Asian students

attend schools with more than 70 percent minority students. While minority students are heavily clustered in segregated minority schools, only 27 percent of the district's Anglo students attend these schools, despite the fact that two-thirds of DPS schools fall into this category.

At the other end of the spectrum, seven percent of Anglo students and three percent of Asian students attend schools in which at least 80 percent of the student body is Anglo. The presence of these predominantly Anglo schools in an urban area where only a fifth of the student body is Anglo powerfully illustrates the level of segregation within the district.

While it might be tempting to attribute increased racial isolation to "white flight" from DPS, to do so would oversimplify matters. Undoubtedly, "white flight" plays a role in growing isolation. But as the share of Anglos in a district declines, one would expect remaining Anglo students to attend schools that, on average, have an increased share of minority students. In Denver, however, even though the percentage of Anglo students has declined significantly, the level of Anglo contact with Latinos has fallen.

Also, despite the drop in the Anglo share of the student population, the percentage of Anglo students in schools attended by the average Anglo student has actually increased slightly since 1990 – from 40 percent in 1990 to 42 percent in 2003.

These trends suggest that one cannot explain the pattern of growing racial isolation as simply a reflection of demographic forces; it may also be a reflection of external pressures, in particular the [Keyes](#) decision. Many of the shifts in racial exposure and isolation trends coincided with the termination of the court order in 1995.

The end of busing was followed by growing concentration of minority students in intensely segregated (90-100%) minority schools. In a little over a decade, the percentage of Latino students attending these schools shot up from 3 percent in 1990 to 70 percent in 2003. More than half of African-American students and a third of Asian students attend these schools, compared to about one-eighth of Anglo students.

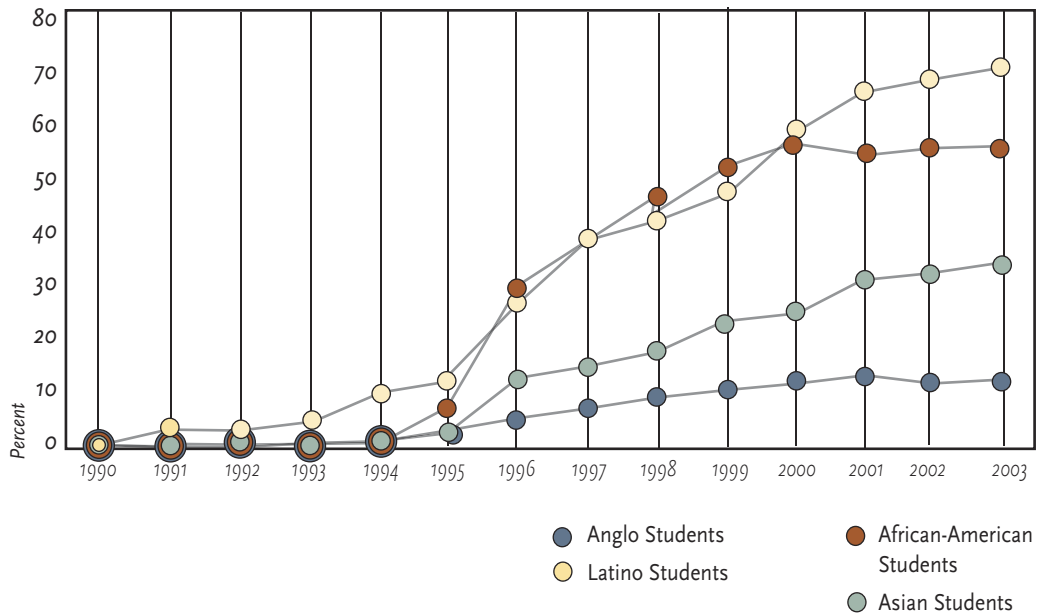
In a period of two years from 1995 to 1997, during which DPS returned to a system of neighborhood schools, the share of Latino students attending intensely segregated schools more than tripled from 11 percent to 38 percent.

The increase was even more dramatic for African-American students, jumping as much as 31 percentage points during this time period. The share of Anglo enrollment at these racially isolated minority schools also increased somewhat during this period, but at a much slower rate and for a much smaller number of students (from 2% to 7%).

Furthermore, the rise in isolation of Anglo students in concentrated Anglo schools was especially steep in the years immediately following the lifting of the desegregation order in 1995. In 1995, 14 percent of Anglo students attended schools that were majority Anglo. Two years later, in 1997, the percentage of DPS' Anglo students in majority Anglo schools had more than doubled to 31 percent.

Even after the dismantling of desegregation in 1995, the Anglo share of DPS enrollment continued decreasing. But the dwindling numbers of Anglos increasingly concentrated in a smaller number of schools.

Increased Concentration of Minority Students
% of Students within Each Group Attending Schools That Are 90-100% Minority



In a district where only 20 percent of the students are Anglo, more than one third of Anglo students (34%) in 2003-2004 attended schools in Denver that were majority Anglo.

In short, the end of the desegregation order in 1995 further exacerbated the segregation levels of minority students at a time when the Anglo enrollment share was already dropping in DPS.

**THE POVERTY DIMENSION
 IN SEGREGATION**

It is vitally important to examine racial segregation in the context of the strong relationship between race and poverty. Some might argue, with justification, that it is illogical to think that changing the color of a student's classmates would make any real educational difference. Many cite as examples minority schools that despite all odds were able to provide quality education to students.

But segregation has never just been about race. Racial segre-

gation is systematically linked to other forms of segregation, including segregation by socioeconomic status, by residential location, and increasingly by language.

Past research has shown that segregated schools tend to have high concentrations of poverty, low parental involvement, and high dropout rates. Students attending these schools are exposed to less credentialed teachers, higher teacher turnover, and lower educational aspirations and career options than students in more desegregated settings. In contrast, suburban schools, which tend to be majority Anglo, usually provide a more rigorous curriculum, have more highly skilled and experienced teachers, and tougher academic competition than their urban counterparts.

Many scholars have documented the real educational and opportunity costs of attending segregated schools in inner

cities. Yet socioeconomic and racial segregation in urban centers continues to increase.

Since the 1970s, there has been a gradual decline of Anglo families in large metropolitan centers as they moved to suburbs or small cities, leaving a large concentration of African-American and Latino students in central cities. These urban communities usually reflect conditions of distress—housing inadequacy and decay, weak and failing infrastructure, and unemployment—all of which directly affect inner city children's educational success. Schools in these urban settings are often high poverty schools, and segregated high poverty schools typically struggle with attracting and retaining good teachers.

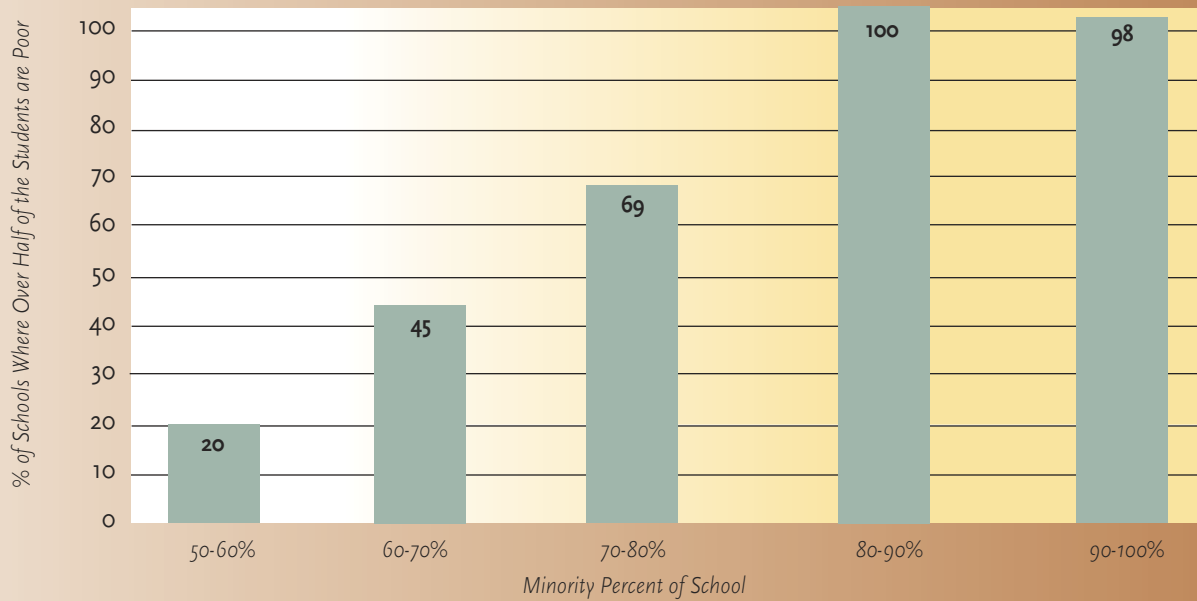
Nationally, the average African-American or Latino student attends a school where close to half of the students present are poor. By contrast, more than half of Anglo students attend

schools where less than 30 percent of the students are poor. At the other end of the spectrum, African-American and Latino students are over-represented in extreme poverty (90-100% poverty) schools: 12 percent of African-American and Latino students attend these schools, compared to one percent of Anglos and four percent of Asians.

The accompanying table (page 8) details the strong correlation between poverty (as measured by free school lunch eligibility) and racial segregation in DPS. For example, every Denver school that had 10 percent or fewer minority students was a low poverty school – with 10 percent or fewer students eligible for free or reduced lunch.

Yet close to all (98%) of the intensely segregated minority schools (more than 90% minority) were also high poverty schools, where more than half of the students were on free or reduced lunch.

The Minority-Poverty Connection in Denver Public Schools (2003-04)



This chart illustrates that the higher a Denver school's minority population, the higher the probability that the school will also have extremely high poverty. For example, 69% of the schools that are between 70-80% minority are also high poverty schools (over half qualify for free and reduced lunch)

More than two-fifths (43%) of Denver Public Schools are intensely segregated (90-100% minority) and more than half of the schools (58%) have at least an 80 percent minority student body. Almost all of these schools (98% and 100% respectively) are serving largely free and reduced lunch eligible students.

These trends are consistent with previous research on the relationship between racial segregation and poverty. The reality of segregation by race means that, while the majority of Anglo students attend middle class schools, minority students in racially segregated schools are very likely attending a school of concentrated poverty.

SEGREGATION BY LANGUAGE: ISOLATION OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Increasingly, DPS students are isolated not only by race but by language as well. Nationally, the average Latino

English Language Learner attends a school where over three-fifths of the students are Latino. In the Denver Public Schools, Latino students in general, and Latino English Language Learners in particular are more racially isolated than their peers nationally.

In Denver, the average Latino ELL student attends a school that is 73 percent Latino compared to the exposure of the average English speaker to Latino students (57%). Asian ELL students also attend schools with large percentages of Latino students; the average Asian ELL student attends a school where more than half (52%) of the students are Latino.

SEGREGATION AND GRADUATION RATES IN THE DENVER METROPOLITAN AREA

The nation's dropout problem is concentrated in segregated high poverty schools. For the

class of 2001, the highest graduation rates are found in suburban districts (73%) and the lowest in central cities (58%). More than three quarters of Anglo and Asian students complete high school with a diploma, compared to 50 percent for African-American students and 53 percent for Latino students. Nationally the gap in graduation rates between districts with high and low proportions of low-income students is 18 percentage points.

In Denver Public Schools, only 43 percent of students in the class of 2002 completed high school with a diploma. Heavily Anglo and suburban districts have much higher graduation rates: 82 percent of the students in Douglas County and 91 percent of the students in Cherry Creek completed high school with a diploma.

Furthermore, there is a gradu-

ation gap that separates the highest and lowest performing groups even within districts. For example, while less than 30 percent of the Latino students in Denver Public Schools graduate with a diploma, 69 percent of the Anglo students do. In Douglas County, while 83 percent of Anglo students and 78 percent of African-American students graduate with a diploma in four years, only 56 percent of the Latino students do.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While metropolitan Denver is still majority Anglo, its growth is increasingly non-Anglo and specifically Latino. DPS enrolls an ever-smaller share of the area's school age population while capturing an increasing share of the non-Anglo population.

Even before the Keyes decision, attempts to desegregate within an urban center became increasingly

Graduation Rates of Selected School Districts in the Denver Metropolitan Area

2001-02 Graduation Rate

	Enrollment in 2003-04	Total CPI*	Native American	Asian	Latino	African American	Anglo
Adams 12	34,869	74.8	65.2	71.1	68.6	67.4	74.7
Adams County 14	6,528	36.2	***	***	37.4	44.4	31.4
Aurora	32,530	46.4	56.4	53.7	33.2	49.5	53.7
Brighton	8,261	66.5	***	***	59.4	***	71.5
Cherry Creek	46,594	91.0	***	91.9	80.8	84.0	90.6
Denver County	72,100	42.6	28.0	76.8	29.6	44.1	69.0
Douglas County	41,924	81.5	***	76.3	55.9	78.4	83.1
Littleton	16,458	80.2	***	95.3	***	***	82.0
Mapleton	5,716	67.0	***	***	***	***	67.5
Westminster	10,467	54.6	***	62.6	50.9	***	57.1
Jefferson County	87,172	75.4	54.7	79.6	56.0	71.9	77.6

*The CPI ((Cumulative Promotion Index) estimates the likelihood that a ninth grader will complete high school with a regular diploma

***Numbers were too low for calculation

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, 2001-02 and 2002-03

difficult because of declining Anglo enrollment. After the Poundstone Amendment, it became virtually impossible for Denver to maintain meaningful desegregation for all students within its boundaries, given demographic changes, increasing suburbanization, and a segregated housing market.

The African-American community, which was active in pursuing desegregation litigation a quarter of a century ago, has experienced a dramatic decline in exposure to Anglo students since busing ended.

Increasing segregation levels disproportionately affect the educational opportunities of minority students. In the 2003-04 school year, more than half of the Denver Public schools have at least an 80 percent minority student body and, with a few exceptions, at least a 50 percent of students eligible for free or reduced lunch. Only 43 percent of the class of 2002 in Denver completed high school with a diploma. Moreover, less than a third of Latino stu-

dents graduated with a diploma, compared to more than two thirds of Anglo students.

Segregation has never been just about race. Segregated schools are still profoundly unequal and any serious desegregation plan that purports to address segregation in large urban centers with decreasing shares of Anglo enrollment must do so at the metropolitan level to have a lasting effect. One of the most successful desegregation plans is in Louisville-Jefferson County in Kentucky, which implemented city-suburban desegregation in 1975 and recently successfully defended its desegregation plan in court.

While Louisville-style desegregation would seem impossible in Colorado, given statewide school choice law, efforts elsewhere promoting voluntary integration have successfully mitigated some of the adverse impacts of segregation.

The Gautreaux program in Chicago provided poor families

As the share of Anglos in a district declines, one would expect remaining Anglo students to attend schools that, on average, have an increased share of minority students. In Denver, however, even though the percentage of Anglo students has declined significantly, the level of Anglo contact with Latinos has fallen.



(CONTINUED ON PAGE 11)

DENVER SUPERINTENDENT RESPONDS TO STUDY

BY ALAN GOTTLIEB

Editor's note: Michael Bennet assumed the mantle of Denver Public Schools superintendent in July of 2005, after serving two years as Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper's chief of staff. Bennet, 40, immediately set up about building a strong, energetic team and crafting a comprehensive, 82-page strategic plan to guide the district through the next decade and beyond. The Term Paper asked Bennet to respond to the findings of the Harvard University Civil Rights Project study on the resegregation of Denver Public Schools detailed in this issue. His comments follow.

Term Paper: *What is your overall reaction to the findings?*

Bennet: The data are revealing but not surprising. These are demographic trends that we would have seen just given the amount of time we have been spending in the schools, talking to teachers and community members. They are trends that I think most folks in Denver would not be surprised about either.

Term Paper: *How does your strategic plan – the Denver Plan – address some of the issues raised by the study?*

Bennet: The first thing the Denver Plan does is to underscore the importance of having a coherent academic program in every school, and then to wrap a range of solid academic choices around that basic program.

We've said that it's not just about having a broad set of aligned curricular expectations, but that it's also about having our instructional expectations and our student assessments aligned to the standards as well. The Denver Plan organizes this effort so that our expectations are explicit and our results will be measurable.

Term Paper: *The Harvard study, among others, argue that it's hard to create the kind of high quality you're aiming for in schools that are as high poverty as many DPS schools. How can you address this?*

Bennet: We know there is evidence showing there are so called 90-90-90 schools – high poverty, high minority, high proficiency – around the country. While we value diversity we know that we're not going to be able to conveniently get it through a project like student busing. And so we have to really commit ourselves to the kind

of high quality model that we see discussed in the 90-90-90 research.

We also know that we are going to need to give parents in Denver a wide range of academic choices that exceed expectations for a high-performing academic program. As we give the community these quality options for choices, we will cultivate the kind of diversity in the student body that we all want and think is a good thing in DPS.

Term Paper: *Does this mean that a more robust array of choices will help bring more middle-class families back into DPS?*

Bennet: Yes, but we know that we have to address the needs and desires of a more diverse population. We know, for instance, that the primary population moving out of our schools in northeast Denver are African-American families. We want our schools to be compelling choices for everyone with school age children in Denver.

What the Denver Plan really tries to do is to fulfill the aspirations of the city's diverse population, so that we are able to meet the demands of all our students to have a high quality education.❖



“These are demographic trends that we would have seen just given the amount of time we have been spending in the schools, talking to teachers and community members.”

– DPS Supt. Michael Bennet

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9)

access to suburban communities through subsidized housing. Cambridge, Massachusetts has used social and economic integration to keep diversity in the schools with some success.

In the Boston metropolitan area, the METCO program provides students from inner city schools access to more affluent schools and networks through inter-district transfers to the suburbs. Leaders of the Wake County Public School System in metropolitan Raleigh, North Carolina, have attempted to eliminate economic segregation by placing highly attractive magnet schools in inner-city neighborhoods. The Raleigh model in particular could serve DPS well.

Such efforts are of course limited, given the strong relationship between school and residential segregation. This is troublesome for many reasons. As this report has shown, segregation is currently on the rise. Unless we actively take measures to create more integrated schools for all students, the adverse impacts of segregation will disproportionately affect low-income, minority students.

These predominantly African-American and Latino students find themselves in increasingly high poverty schools with weaker academic outcomes and low graduation rates. An upcoming report—also sponsored by The Piton Foundation—will evaluate the extent to which the end of court-ordered school desegregation and busing in Denver in 1995 has affected the achievement levels of African-American, Latino and Anglo students in DPS.

Researchers and educators must be concerned with what is lost for all students, including Anglo students, in a segregated school. We know from a substantial body of desegregation literature that segregation tends to be self-perpetrating; those who experience desegregated environments earlier in life are more likely to end up in more integrated environments later in life.

In an increasingly multiracial society, public schools can play a critical role in preparing all individuals to live and work among people of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. This isn't simply a feel-good issue. As our nation continues to change, learning to live with diversity and thrive in an integrated environment serves the self-interests of people from all walks of life. ❖



from THE EDITOR

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

haven't improved since busing ended. Until now, however, no one has examined the impact a return to neighborhood schools has had on Denver students and schools.

With this issue of The Term Paper, The Piton Foundation launches a detailed, two-part examination of this vital question. The second half will appear in the Spring issue of The Term Paper.

The study is being conducted by The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University. Led by Professor Gary Orfield, the Civil Rights Project is the nation's preeminent research organization on issues of school desegregation and re-segregation.

Part One examines how the end of busing has contributed to the growing racial and socio-economic isolation of low-income, racial minority students, and the implications of this isolation for DPS graduation rates.

The next installment will provide a detailed analysis of student achievement trends, disaggregated by race and poverty, since the end of busing.

Why conduct this study now? The topic seems especially timely for a couple of reasons. First, achievement gaps between minority and Anglo students, as well as between low-income and more affluent students, remain a vexing challenge nationwide. This isn't a new problem, but the federal No Child Left Behind law has forced states and school districts to focus on it like never before.

A wide body of research clearly demonstrates that economically mixed schools work wonders in narrowing achievement gaps between low-income and more affluent students. Since race and class are inextricably intertwined in this country, economically mixed schools mean racially mixed schools.

Second, Denver has an energetic new superintendent committed to a "relentless pursuit of academic achievement." As Superintendent Michael Bennet rolls out his comprehensive strategic plan, the information provided by these two studies can only help him chart his course.

Underwriting this study does not mean that The Piton Foundation is advocating a return to mandatory school busing. Even if this seemed like a wise course – which it does not – political realities dictate against such a move.

And given Colorado law mandating school choice within and across districts, even less draconian legislative remedies would be impossible.

Still, creative thinking about how to reconcile seemingly conflicting self-interests can promote an effective system of voluntary integration. The Wake County Public School System in Raleigh, N.C. is the best national example of this.

Closer to home, the Denver School of Science and Technology, a fledgling charter high school, has committed itself to providing a universally rigorous, college preparatory education to an economically diverse student body. A future issue of The Term Paper will provide an in-depth case-study of this top-notch school.

It is important to confront head-on the realities laid out in these studies. Policy-makers, educators and citizens must recognize that racial and socio-economic segregation hurt not only low-income kids of color, but all kids. Only then will districts like Denver make strategic decisions about placement of attractive choice options to promote the kind of mixed-race and mixed-income schools that benefit everyone.

--Alan Gottlieb

As a useful companion piece to this two part Civil Rights

Project study, please see The Piton Foundation's study on economic school integration in the May 2002 Term Paper. It can be found on Piton's web site at http://www.piton.org/Admin/Article/TermPaper_May2002.pdf

News & Analysis
on Urban School Reform
from The Piton Foundation



The Spring issue of The Term Paper will feature the second part of the Civil Rights Project study on the resegregation of Denver Public Schools. This next installment will focus on how the district's resegregation by race and socio-economic status has affected the achievement of low-income and minority students.

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