

COMMENTARY

Does Segregation Create Winners and Losers?

Residential Segregation and Inequality in Educational Attainment

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Does segregation still matter for educational inequality? Nearly fifty years after the civil rights movement, American neighborhoods and schools remain highly segregated by race and income. A longstanding concern is that segregation has negative effects on the education of racial minorities and low-income students by concentrating them in the worst schools and neighborhoods. Correspondingly, a concern of many white or affluent parents when considering residence in racially or economically diverse neighborhood environment is that their child's education might not be as good as in a more homogenous, advantaged environment.

A recent study by Northwestern University Sociology Professor [Lincoln Quillian](#) in the journal *Social Problems* investigates the effects of residential segregation in creating educational "winners" and "losers" among adolescents by race and family income. His study uses a sample of more than 2500 youth in the [Panel Study of Income Dynamics](#), a national longitudinal study, who were tracked with regular re-interviews from ages 14 to 26. He examines the educational attainment of respondents at 26 across categories of race, family income, and the level of metropolitan segregation (a metropolitan area is a city together with its surrounding suburbs). Specifically, he incorporates youth's metropolitan segregation at age 14 into statistical models predicting high school graduation and college graduation. The models also account for individual family background, race or ethnicity, and characteristics of metropolitan areas such as the metropolitan poverty rate and race and ethnic composition.

The results show that for students raised in families with income below the poverty line, their chance of graduating high school was significantly lower when raised in metropolitan areas with higher levels of segregation of poor families from other families than less segregated areas. Likewise, black students raised in metropolitan areas with high levels of racial residential segregation had lower rates of high school graduation than black students raised in metropolitan areas with low levels of racial residential segregation. For poor and black students, growing up in a metropolitan area with higher income and race segregation (respectively) are associated with lower rates of high school graduation. These associations were statistically significant and fairly large, and were robust to alternative methods of estimating these associations.

For youth from white and affluent backgrounds, by contrast, the level of segregation of their metropolitan area of residence in adolescence had no association with graduation rates from high school or college by age 26. Whites and persons from more affluent backgrounds did not "win" educationally from segregation.

The results suggest that residential desegregation can increase the educational attainment of persons from disadvantaged social backgrounds without reducing the attainment of persons from advantaged backgrounds. More class and race integrated metropolitan areas tend to have higher overall educational attainment, because children from disadvantaged segregated groups tend to do better while members of advantaged segregated groups do no worse.

The [full study](#) (gated) can be found in Lincoln Quillian, "Does Segregation Create Winners and Losers? Residential Segregation and Inequality in Educational Attainment," *Social Problems*, Vol. 61, No. 3 (August 2014), pp. 402-426. An ungated version is also available from [Prof. Quillian's web page](#)

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