

# TIPS FOR WRITING ABOUT RACIAL SEGREGATION IN SCHOOLS

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## WHAT IS SEGREGATION?

It often depends who you ask! Researchers generally measure segregation in two ways. These measures are often correlated with each other but may also lead us to different conclusions.

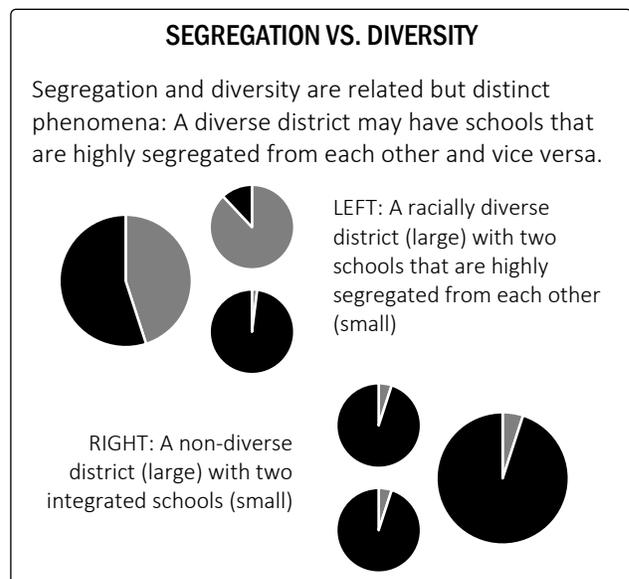
	EVENNESS	EXPOSURE/ISOLATION
<i>What is it measuring?</i>	How evenly are students distributed by race?	<i>Exposure</i> —To what extent are students exposed to members of other racial/ethnic groups? <i>Isolation</i> —To what extent are students exposed to members of the same racial/ethnic group?
<i>How is it interpreted?</i>	E.g., What % of white students would need to switch to a different school to ensure that white students are evenly distributed across the district?	<i>Exposure</i> —E.g., What is the average % of white students in the school of a typical black student? <i>Isolation</i> —E.g., What is the average % of black students in the school of a typical black student?
<i>When is it most useful?</i>	For measuring change over time and comparing across districts or other areas	For understanding the racial/ethnic context in which a typical student attends school
<i>What are its key limitations?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May be difficult to interpret values in meaningful ways</li> <li>• Does not always correspond with peoples' perceptions of segregation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May be influenced by racial composition/changes in diversity of public schools               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ E.g., Because the % of non-white students in the U.S. has increased since 1960s, the average % of white students in a typical school has necessarily decreased</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<i>What does research generally find?</i>	Large decreases from 1960s to 1980s; small increases in 1990s; small declines since 1990s Decreases in segregation within districts but increases in segregation between districts	Large decreases from 1960s to 1980s, steady increases thereafter

## KEY QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

*What measure of segregation is reported?* Because different measures provide complementary and sometimes contradictory information, research using one measure (e.g., evenness or exposure/isolation) may only tell half the story. Whenever possible, report on both measures!

*Does it control for racial composition?* The key difference between evenness and exposure/isolation is that evenness is independent of racial diversity and exposure/isolation is influenced by diversity.

When interpreting research using exposure/isolation, remember that increases in racial diversity may be associated with increases in segregation even if students are evenly distributed by race. When interpreting research using evenness remember that even stark changes in diversity and racial composition may not be associated with changes in segregation, if those changes are evenly distributed.



In an interesting study, Fiel (2013) was able to reconcile the divergent findings from studies using evenness and exposure/isolation by statistically controlling for racial diversity. After controlling for diversity, both exposure/isolation and evenness exhibited declines since the 1990s.

*What is the scale of segregation?* Some research focuses on segregation within school districts (i.e., between schools), some at the metropolitan level (i.e., between districts), and some consider both (a weighted composite of segregation within and between districts). Seemingly contradictory findings may sometimes be attributable to differences in geographic scale – segregation may be declining within school districts but increasing between districts.

*Do findings look beyond black and white?* Segregation between black and white students is historically important and commonly reported but may miss other important racial dynamics: E.g., Is segregation between Asian and white students increasing even as segregation between black and white students declines?

*How credible is the research?* As with reporting on academic research in general, consider whether research on segregation is peer-reviewed and published in reputable journals. There is certainly value to work that falls outside of top-tier academic journals; however, you should be particularly vigilant when reporting on such work.

*Would a map be more effective?* Segregation measures are *all* flawed in that they are trying to capture complex spatial patterns in a single number. When reporting on or considering a single district or metropolitan area, a map will likely tell you (and your readers) more about segregation than any measure of segregation. However, maps may be less useful for examining change over time or comparing two different areas.

*How does research relate to the context on which I'm reporting?* Segregation research is often conducted at the national level. Thus, reports of the average severity of segregation or average trends often masks important differences across contexts. When consuming research, consider whether the researchers explored this variation in a way that helps understand differences. If you are interested in information on a specific district or metropolitan area, researchers may be able to provide that to you.

## RESOURCES

<i>Measurement of Segregation</i>	This 2002 Census report by Iceland and colleagues contains succinct and accessible summaries of segregation measures. <a href="https://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/censr-3.pdf">https://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/censr-3.pdf</a>
<i>School and District Characteristics</i>	The National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data (NCES CCD) is the authoritative source for racial data on public schools nationally. Data are released more than a year after the end of the school year (e.g., 2016-17 not yet released). State data is usually more current. <a href="https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/">https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/</a>
	The Office of Civil Rights' Civil Rights Data Collection (OCR CRDC) provides more detailed information, including chronic absenteeism, single-sex classes, civil rights coordinators, and school expenditures. Data from 2015-16 recently released. <a href="https://ocrdata.ed.gov/">https://ocrdata.ed.gov/</a>
	The Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates program provides special tabulations of Census data for district boundaries, giving detailed information on the racial/ethnic, income, housing, etc. characteristics of district residents. <a href="https://nces.ed.gov/programs/edge/">https://nces.ed.gov/programs/edge/</a>
<i>School Segregation Data</i>	Unfortunately, researchers generally compute segregation values as needed from NCES CCD data – there is no public, longitudinal repository for these data.
<i>Desegregation Order Data</i>	Qiu and Hannah-Jones at ProPublica have assembled the most current data on desegregation orders. <a href="http://projects.propublica.org/graphics/desegregation-orders">http://projects.propublica.org/graphics/desegregation-orders</a>
	While less current, the Brown University American Communities Project (2005) has the most complete data on desegregation orders, including the type of plan. <a href="https://s4.ad.brown.edu/Projects/USSchools/cases.aspx">https://s4.ad.brown.edu/Projects/USSchools/cases.aspx</a>
<i>Educational Boundaries</i>	The School Attendance Boundary Survey provides school attendance zone boundary shapefiles for use in mapping software for most schools for the 2013-14 and 2015-16 school years. May be downloaded or mapped via NCES CCD's MapEd tool. <a href="https://nces.ed.gov/programs/edge/SABS">https://nces.ed.gov/programs/edge/SABS</a>
	School district boundaries are collected and disseminated every 2 years via the Census Bureau's School District Review Program (SDRP). <a href="https://www.census.gov/geo/partnerships/sdrp.html">https://www.census.gov/geo/partnerships/sdrp.html</a>