

Does Neighborhood Gentrification Create School Desegregation?

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Background/Context: *Race and class inequality have long governed patterns of residential and school segregation across America. However, as neighborhoods across the country that have historically been home to residents of color experience an influx of White and middle-class residents, new questions arise as to whether these demographic shifts in neighborhoods correspond to school-level demographic changes. Purpose: This study examines Washington, DC's, most gentrifying areas, and the impact on racial diversity in local public schools.*

Research Design: *This quantitative study draws on data from the decennial census, the American Community Survey, and the National Center for Educational Statistics. Findings/Results: This study finds evidence that school enrollment patterns in Washington, DC's, most rapidly gentrifying areas have seen a reduction in racial segregation, more so in traditional public schools than in charters. Although this trend is promising, a high level of racial segregation remains, and progress is still needed to ensure that newly integrated neighborhoods also mean desegregated schools.*

Conclusions/Recommendations: *Given barriers to school desegregation efforts, gentrification is offering a unique opportunity to create racially and economically diverse schools. However, managing the process of gentrification such that it supports school desegregation requires coordinated and targeted policies that underscore the fundamental relationships among housing, communities, and schools.*

The landscape of urban America has changed radically over the last two decades as extensive gentrification—often depicted as an influx of White middle-class residents moving into poor, minority neighborhoods—has become a major force in some of the nation's largest urban areas (Hyra, 2016; Mordechay & Ayscue, 2017). Once relegated to a select few urban communities, it is now common to neighborhoods across the country (Pan, 2017). One analysis of the nation's 50 largest cities found that

nearly 20% of neighborhoods with lower incomes and home values have experienced gentrification since 2000. In a select group of cities, including Portland, The District of Columbia, Minneapolis, and Seattle, more than half of the census tracts have gentrified (Maciag, 2015). This pattern is a reversal of a decades-long trend of White and middle-class flight out of urban central cities. One question this trend raises is whether these stark demographic shifts on the neighborhood level correspond to school-level demographic changes. Much of the research on gentrification and schools suggests that gentrifier families who move into low-income neighborhoods often opt out of the neighborhood schools (Hankins, 2007; Keels, Burdick-Will, & Keene, 2013; Kennedy & Leonard, 2001). However, there is some evidence that more recent waves of gentrifiers—that is, young, largely White middle- to upper-class families—are beginning to engage with urban school districts (Kimelberg & Billingham, 2013; Siegel-Hawley, Thachik, & Bridges, 2017). In this article, we examine the nation’s capital as a case study of some of the nation’s most rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods and the impact of gentrification on racial diversity in local public schools.

Although gentrification has typically been seen as class based, it has a clear racial dimension as well (Moore, 2009); demographic changes produced by gentrification are nearly as frequently race based as they are class based (Goetz, 2011). This study defines gentrification as the process by which urban neighborhoods that have experienced sustained disinvestment and White and middle-class “flight” subsequently experience renewal, reinvestment, and the influx of higher socioeconomic-status (SES) White residents (Pearman & Swain, 2017; Smith, 1998). Although racial turnover of communities as a condition for gentrification is widely debated (Freeman, 2005; Hwang & Sampson, 2014), race is at the forefront of our study because of our interest in understanding patterns of racial segregation and racial change in gentrifying neighborhoods.

We begin with an overview of U.S. urban history as it relates to the abandonment of inner-city schools and neighborhoods. Next, we review the literature related to neighborhood effects and gentrification, gentrification and schools, and the rise of school-choice policies. We then describe how these themes have played out in Washington, DC, the city under study. After describing data and methodology, we present our analyses and findings. We close with a discussion of implications of the analysis, limitations of the study, and policy considerations.

THE “FLIGHT” FROM URBAN NEIGHBORHOODS AND SCHOOLS

The flight of White and middle-class families from urban public schools has been a major concern of researchers and policy makers since the postwar era of suburbanization (Coleman et al., 1966; Logan, Oakley, & Stowell, 2008). While there is considerable debate about the causes and consequences of suburbanization (Mieszkowski & Mills, 1993), few dispute the size and impact of this demographic transformation (Hanlon, 2010; Jackson, 1985). One of the central concerns over middle-class flight is the depletion of financial, social, and cultural resources that is associated with the movement of middle-class families out of city schools. It is frequently cited as a contributing force behind the stark isolation and resource inequity that defines most urban schools (Noguera, 2003; Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014). The flight of the middle class effectively deepens racial and economic segregation for the most disadvantaged families and undermines key local institutions, especially schools (Kahlenberg, 2001). The desire of parents to provide their children with high-quality education is a common trigger for middle-class relocation; many of these parents seek to avoid urban public school systems that are often plagued with inadequate resources and poor reputations (Holme, 2002; Kimelberg & Billingham, 2013; Mordechay, Gándara, & Orfield, 2019). For many years, families who had the financial means to move would frequently abandon inner-city schools—so much so that it was easy to assume that these families were reflexively opting out of urban public schools (Kimelberg & Billingham, 2013). As a result of this historical dynamic, the movement of White middle-class students out of inner-city schools has been closely associated with federally mandated racial desegregation efforts. In fact, in the latter decades of the 20th century, interdistrict segregation within metropolitan areas actually increased as White families often sought out racially homogeneous suburban schools in an attempt to circumvent urban schools (Logan et al., 2008; Reardon, Yun, & Eitle, 2000). Despite the overarching trend of intensifying interdistrict segregation, in some places, interdistrict programs have facilitated greater desegregation (Hodge, 2018; Wells & Crain, 1999). Meanwhile, the end of school desegregation orders in many cities has often led to a noticeable resegregation (Glenn, 2011; Reardon, Grewal, Kalogrides, & Greenberg, 2012). Only recently have scholars begun to turn their attention to middle-class, often White, families who make the opposite choice—that is, to remain in the city and send their children to local public schools (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2009; Posey, 2012).

NEIGHBORHOOD EFFECTS AND GENTRIFICATION

Following decades of public policy and private initiatives to regenerate central cities, scholars are increasingly attentive to the causes and consequences of neighborhood ascent or upgrading (Owens, 2012), much of which has coalesced around gentrification. Historically, gentrification has been a minor feature of urban change in most cities, but it is becoming a major force in a number of strong market cities where the demand for urban living among the young and middle class is accelerating (Florida, 2003; Lee, 2018; Petrilli, 2012). Gentrification has transformed high-poverty inner-city neighborhoods across U.S. cities since the mid-1990s and 2000s in particular, as billions of dollars in public and private investments have entered impoverished communities (Goetz, 2011). With an influx of a new upper-income population into downtown areas, real estate developers looked to expand the core of cities. Once begun, that process developed strong momentum, making neighborhoods attractive to more households. Historically, many of these neighborhoods have long faced the reality that as neighborhoods became poorer, they experienced decline and depletion of resources that amplified the social isolation of poor urban neighborhoods (Wilson, 1987). Gentrification, however, may ease that drain by introducing social and financial capital to neighborhoods that previously lacked it (Freeman, 2005), although some scholars have linked gentrification with residential displacement of vulnerable residents (McKinnish, Walsh, & White, 2010; Newman & Wyly, 2006). Other research, however, counterintuitively suggests that poor households residing in gentrifying neighborhoods are no more likely to move than poor households residing elsewhere (Dragan et al., 2019, Ellen & O'Regan, 2011; Freeman & Braconi, 2004). Much of the inconclusive evidence stems from definitional and methodological shortcomings as well as measuring displacement in the various stages of gentrification. Although researchers have experienced major data challenges in measuring the extent of gentrification-induced displacement, most studies have agreed that gentrification at a minimum leads to some displacement and may push out some renters, while in-movers are whiter, more affluent, and of higher educational attainment than incumbent residents (Zuk, Bierbaum, Chapple, Gorska, & Loukaitou-Sideris, 2018).

Although gentrification can clearly have some harmful effects, we argue that some potential benefits are being overlooked. Because gentrifying neighborhoods have the required residential demographics necessary for school desegregation, this article explores whether the potential educational and social benefits that could come from greater race and class diversity are being realized in some of the nation's fastest gentrifying areas.

GENTRIFICATION AND SCHOOLS

Gentrifiers are often childless young professionals, artists, and gay and lesbian couples (Kennedy & Leonard, 2001). Those who do have children tend to pay for private school or exercise school choice when available, often outside the gentrifying neighborhood (Keels et al., 2013; Pearman & Swain, 2017). Some studies have observed that gentrifiers tend to put their children into select charter or public schools with other gentrifier families, resulting in little change to other schools in the area (Kimelberg & Billingham, 2013). However, if gentrifiers enroll their children in public schools, it is possible that historically segregated schools could become more desegregated and begin to accrue the benefits associated with desegregation.

Desegregated schools are associated with numerous positive outcomes, including improved academic achievement (Mickelson & Nkomo, 2012) and reduction in prejudice and stereotypes (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). In general, students who have attended desegregated schools have higher levels of civic engagement (Kurlaender & Yun, 2005) and a greater likelihood of living and working in diverse environments later in life (Braddock & McPartland, 1989). They also experience increased educational and occupational attainment, greater economic returns, health benefits, and a reduction in adult poverty (Johnson, 2011). It is possible that the benefits associated with desegregated schools would have a positive impact on individuals and neighborhoods. However, it should be noted that racially correlated tracking in desegregated school systems that disproportionately assigns minority students to lower tracks and Whites to higher tracks can undercut desegregation's capacity to improve outcomes for all students (Mickelson, 2015; Welner & Oakes, 1996).

In recent years, there has been a resurgence in the debates over gentrification and its effects. Proponents call it neighborhood revitalization and reinvestment for declining urban neighborhoods (Byrne, 2003; Caulfield, 1994). Opponents call it forced displacement and ethnic cleansing (Powell & Spencer, 2003). To date, much of the gentrification literature has focused primarily on housing and, until recently, tended to overlook its impact on local schools. However, a small but growing number of studies have begun to document the relationship between gentrification and schools (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2009; Kimelberg & Billingham, 2013; Siegel-Hawley et al., 2017). This study proposes to expand on existing research by exploring the potential of neighborhood gentrification for urban school desegregation and reform in one of the nation's fastest gentrifying cities (Jordan & Gallagher, 2015), where the

White population has grown from 27.8% of the total in 2000 to more than 35% by 2014, countering decades of White decline (Orfield & Ee, 2017). Between 2002 and 2015, the city's White public-school demographic more than doubled, growing from 4.3% of the total to 9.6%.

Although it is still the case that most urban low-income students in the United States attend high-poverty, racially isolated schools, the movement of middle-class families into some cities, neighborhoods, and schools within them raises important questions about the extent to which such changes disrupt existing patterns of segregation and inequality. The present study examines whether demographic changes in the most rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods in Washington, DC, have produced corresponding demographic changes in the local school population and increases in school diversity. The findings provide insight into the extent to which gentrification in this city has created more equitable and desegregated school opportunities for children and neighborhoods that have lacked them for generations.

SCHOOL CHOICE

Given that public school assignments are typically determined by residence, racially segregated schools often reflect racially segregated neighborhoods. However, school choice policies, which have been rapidly expanded in districts across the county, have provided households with alternatives to “neighborhood schools” by allowing them to choose schooling options outside their area of residence. The result is a decoupling of schools and residential location. Between 1993 and 2007, the proliferation of school choice initiatives meant that an additional 3.1 million school-age children nationwide attended schools outside their geographically assigned area (Grady, Bielick, & Aud, 2010).

School choice can be used to enhance desegregation efforts, or it can further exacerbate segregation (Ayscue & Frankenberg, 2018). Historically, school choice in the form of magnet schools was used to create desegregation. As a voluntary approach to desegregation, magnet schools were intended to attract racially diverse students from geographically different parts of a school district to the same school based on an interest in the school's theme, innovative teaching approach, or unique curriculum (Goldring & Smrekar, 2000). In doing so, magnet schools are often more desegregated than neighborhood schools (Betts, Kitmitto, Levin, Bos, & Eaton, 2015; Bifulco, Cobb, & Bell, 2009). Interdistrict choice programs can also be used to facilitate desegregation (Wells, Warner, & Grzesikowski, 2013). In general, there is greater segregation between school districts than within school districts (Bischoff, 2008; Reardon et al., 2000). Thus,

programs that encourage the transfer of students between school districts (e.g., urban and suburban districts that enroll distinct groups of students) often result in more desegregated schools.

However, when choice is unregulated and does not have diversity as a goal, it can often result in intensified segregation. Charter schools, which entered the school choice landscape in the early 1990s, usually do not have an explicit focus on desegregation efforts and instead are often designed to serve students from a homogeneous racial, ethnic, or socio-economic background (Kahlenberg & Potter, 2014). Charters tend to be more segregated than both neighborhood schools and magnet schools (Ayscue, Siegel-Hawley, Kucsera, & Woodward, 2018; Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Wang, 2011; Ladd, Clotfelter, & Holbein, 2015). Thus, despite the decoupling of schools and residential location, charter schools tend to exacerbate segregation.

The growth of school choice facilitates gentrification by providing middle- and upper-class White families with the option of moving into a low-income neighborhood of color but not enrolling their children in schools that are minority segregated low-income schools, as they would have to do in the absence of school choice. A recent national study found that gentrification of the most racially segregated neighborhoods of color was more than twice as likely to occur if the school district expanded school choice options, including charters and magnets, than if choice options were not available (Pearman & Swain, 2017). It is possible that gentrifiers feel more comfortable moving into and living in low-income neighborhoods of color when they do not have to send their children to schools of similar racial and economic compositions. Thus, the growth of school choice is potentially perpetuating the segregation of schools in gentrifying, and potentially desegregating, neighborhoods.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Gordon Allport's intergroup contact theory offers a useful framework for understanding the benefits that could result from schooling in an integrated setting. Allport (1954) posited that contact between people of different groups leads to a reduction in prejudice. Several conditions for contact enhance the reduction in prejudice: (1) equal status, (2) united goals, and (3) support from leadership. Indeed, research has demonstrated that to be truly supportive of integration, schools must prioritize the promotion of equity across race and class. In so doing, educators can confront the challenges presented by the inequalities across race and class that cut across a variety of social domains and that have long been a reality of the American urban metropolis (Orfield & Lee, 2005).

Allport's contact theory has been affirmed across numerous studies, including a meta-analysis of more than 500 studies, which provides clear support that contact is likely to lead to improvement in intergroup relations, particularly when structured under the conditions outlined earlier (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). If one or more of the conditions are undermined, the benefits related to contact between groups—a reduction of prejudice, lower propensity to stereotype, and more friendship across subgroup lines—may not surface. These benefits become increasingly important as our society becomes more diverse.

Perpetuation theory provides a framework for understanding the long-term benefits of desegregation. Perpetuation theory posits that sustained desegregation and its effects perpetuate across the life cycle and across institutions, such that students of all races who have attended integrated schools are more likely to seek out integrated settings later in life, which in turn may have perpetuating effects across generations (McPartland & Braddock, 1981; Mickelson, 2011). Given the positive outcomes associated with desegregation based on intergroup contact theory and perpetuation theory, this study analyzes the extent to which gentrification impacts desegregation in local public schools.

WASHINGTON, DC: A CASE STUDY

Washington, DC, provides an ideal case study for analysis for several notable reasons. For six of the last seven decades, the city lost population, plummeting from a high of more than 802,000 in 1950, to 572,000 by 2000—a drop of 29%. Over the past quarter century, Washington, DC, has undergone dramatic demographic and economic change. Since 1990, the city's Black population has declined from nearly 70% to less than 50%, a decrease of close to 90,000 residents. The Latino population has increased by more than a factor of three (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Since 2000, the city's White population has grown from 27% to well over a third of the total population—an increase of close to 65,000 residents. The city's Black population peaked in 1970 (537,370), just before the rapid suburbanization of middle-class Black families (Orfield & Ee, 2017). Since 2000, most of the area's suburban population growth has been fueled primarily by minority groups, particularly Hispanics and Asians. Economically, median household income in the city was \$70,848 in 2015, one of the highest in the nation (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). For Black households, it was \$40,677, while for White households, it was estimated at \$119,334.

Although Washington, DC, has one of the largest concentrations of high-income earners in the United States, the city was on the verge of

bankruptcy in the mid-1990s (Jackson, 2015). After economic restructuring in the late 1990s, the city began to see prosperity that continued into the 2000s. During this time, new housing and commercial construction boomed, leading to a net population increase from 2000 to 2010, marking the first time the population had not declined between decades since 1950 (Jackson, 2015). This rapidly changing demographic context has deemed Washington, DC, a “hotbed” of gentrification (Jackson, 2015). While the city is unique in the extent of its rapidly shifting demography, this case study offers important insights for other cities in the midst of widespread demographic changes.

The city is home to a single large school district that falls under the supervision of the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS). Although there is only one school district in the city, there are many attendance zones. All DCPS students eligible for grades K–12 have a guaranteed right to enroll in their in-boundary school. In recent years, however, DCPS has undergone significant changes, including school closures, consolidations, reconfiguration of grades, and a dramatic expansion of charter schools (Ferreira & Kosenok, 2015).

The city’s racial changes have not been as stark at the school level as in the city as a whole; nevertheless, the racial changes in school enrollment have been noteworthy (Orfield & Ee, 2017). In 1990, of the 77,000 total public school enrollments, Blacks made up over 90% (69,300 students) and Latinos 5%, with Whites comprising fewer than 1 out of 25 students (3.8%). By 2015, the total enrollment was approximately 81,000, an increase of 15% since 2003. Of the total enrollment in 2015, including both traditional public schools (TPSs) and charter schools, the Black share declined to less than 72% (57,510 students), while the White share increased to close to 10%, and the Latino share to more than 15%.

The dramatic economic and demographic transformations playing out at both the city and school level raise important questions: (1) To what extent are public schools in gentrifying areas of Washington, DC, desegregating, and how does the racial diversity of schools in gentrifying areas of Washington compare with that of schools in nongentrifying areas? (2) How do the student bodies in charter schools compare with those of TPSs in gentrifying and nongentrifying areas of Washington? This analysis will examine these questions and, in doing so, will seek to inform the debate over whether the significant demographic changes that the city has undergone have benefited schools.

Throughout this analysis, we use the words *desegregation* and *integration* as follows:

“Desegregation” refers to a legal or political process of ending the separation and isolation of different racial and ethnic groups. Desegregation is achieved through court order or voluntary means. “Integration” refers to a social process in which members of different racial and ethnic groups experience fair and equal treatment within a desegregated environment. Integration requires further action beyond desegregation. (Ayscue & Frankenberg, 2016, para. 1)

DATA AND METHODS

This article draws on data from a variety of sources. To determine which individual census tracts experienced the most dramatic increase in White residents between 2000 and 2015, demographic data were obtained from the 2000 U.S. Census Bureau and the 2015 American Community Survey (ACS). Although all 2015 ACS data are based on a five-year average (2011–2015), throughout this analysis, we refer to this data point as 2015. Student demographic data came from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). NCES is a reliable data source that collects the federal government’s school enrollment figures from virtually every district in the nation (Siegel-Hawley, 2014). In addition, we relied on data from NCES (2014–2015), using geographic information systems (GISs) to map the spatial distribution of schools to descriptively illustrate the growth of Whites taking place on the neighborhood level (Figure 1).

Next, we examined changes in socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of census tracts in 2000 and 2015 to determine which census tracts are most rapidly gentrifying. It should be noted that the U.S. Census Bureau attempts to maintain consistent census tract boundaries over time (e.g., 2000 and 2015), but boundaries are sometimes changed as neighborhoods evolve and as tract populations increase or decrease. Therefore, we analyzed only those census tracts that could be linked between the 2000 and 2015 censuses. We were able to link 179 out of the 205 census tracts, approximately 88% of the tracts across both data points. In 2015, of the city’s 179 census tracts, 85 had at least 30% or more White residents, up from 64 out of 188 census tracts in 2000. Of those with a minimum of 2,000 residents in 2015, 11 census tracts experienced an increase of 25 *percentage points or more* in White residents between 2000 to 2015. Because gentrification is so locally dependent, thresholds are not well established for identifying various levels of gentrification (Freeman, 2005).

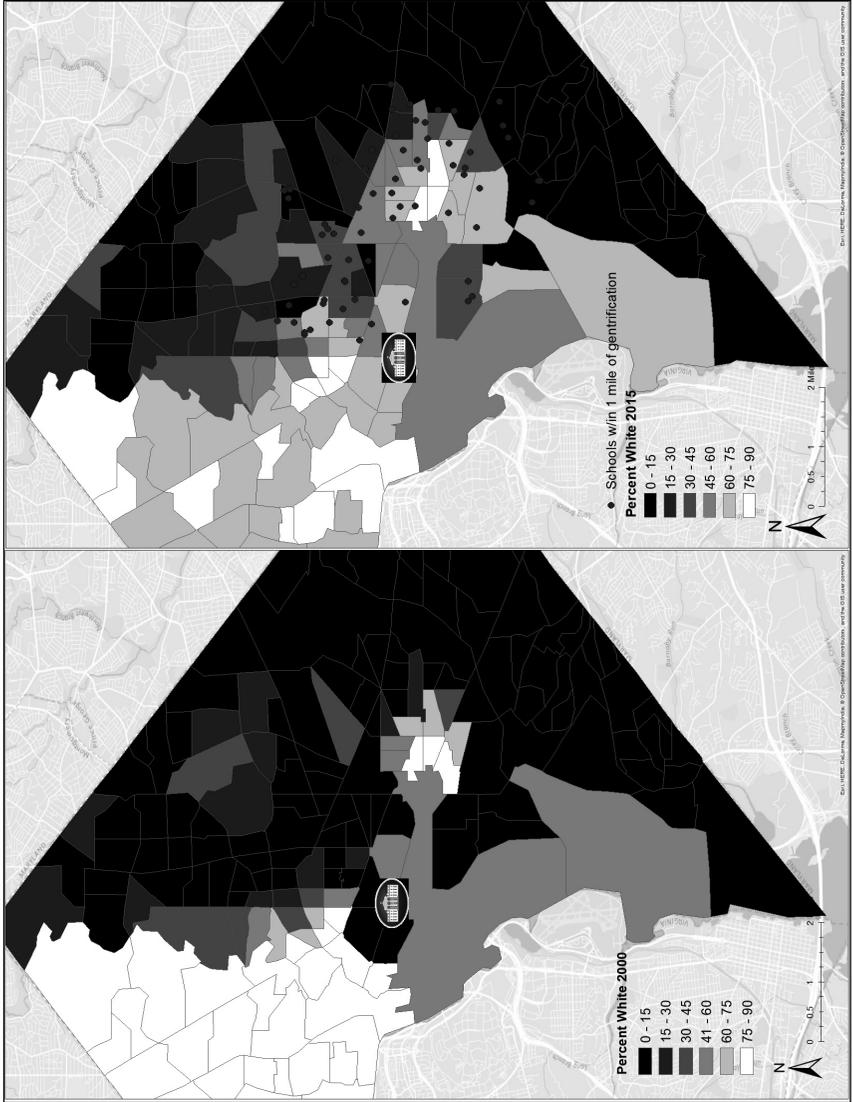


Figure 1. Distribution of White residents, Washington, DC, 2000 and 2015

Therefore, the influx of White residents is used as a proxy for determining which neighborhoods in the city are most rapidly gentrifying (Petrilli, 2012; Smith, 1998). The 11 census tracts selected for analysis will be referred to throughout this article as either the “most rapidly” or “fastest” gentrifying census tracts (Figure 2). In addition to the stark racial change across these census tracts, when combined, they experienced close to a twofold increase in inflation-adjusted median income, compared with a citywide increase of 28% between 2000 and 2015 (U.S. Census, 2015). Table 1 illustrates the socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of the 11 census tracts. These combined areas have a population of more than 34,000 residents, almost half of whom are White, with a median income of more than \$94,000.

Table 1. Sociodemographic Profile of 11 Gentrifying Tracts, Washington, DC

	Total Population	White Population	% White	Median Income
2000	20,713	1,201	5.8	\$47,324
2015	34,274	16,768	49	\$94,233

Note. Median income is adjusted to 2015 dollars.

Source: Author’s calculations using 2000 decennial census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000) and 2015 American Community Survey.

Mapping the district’s 2014–2015 school addresses, which we overlaid with census tracts, we identified 67 schools that fall within a one-mile radius buffer of the center of the 11 most gentrifying census tracts. Because census tracts and school zone boundaries are not equivalent, we included schools that fall within one mile of the gentrifying census tract because most students in Washington, DC, who attend TPSs travel less than a mile to get to school. Median distance traveled to charter schools is slightly more than a mile (Ferreya & Kosenok, 2015; DC Public Charter School Board, 2015).

We examined school segregation trends at three time points: in 2000 (pregentrification), 2007 (midpoint), and 2014 (most recent year of data available). To analyze school segregation trends in the gentrifying neighborhoods, we used two measures of segregation: concentration and exposure/isolation. Although there are multiple ways to measure segregation, we selected these two measures because they show the proportion of students who attend schools with various levels of isolation from or contact with other groups. Instead of calculating statistical randomness of distribution—which can be informative but does not give the full picture of students’ lived experiences—these two measures describe the potential for interaction and an indication of students’ actual

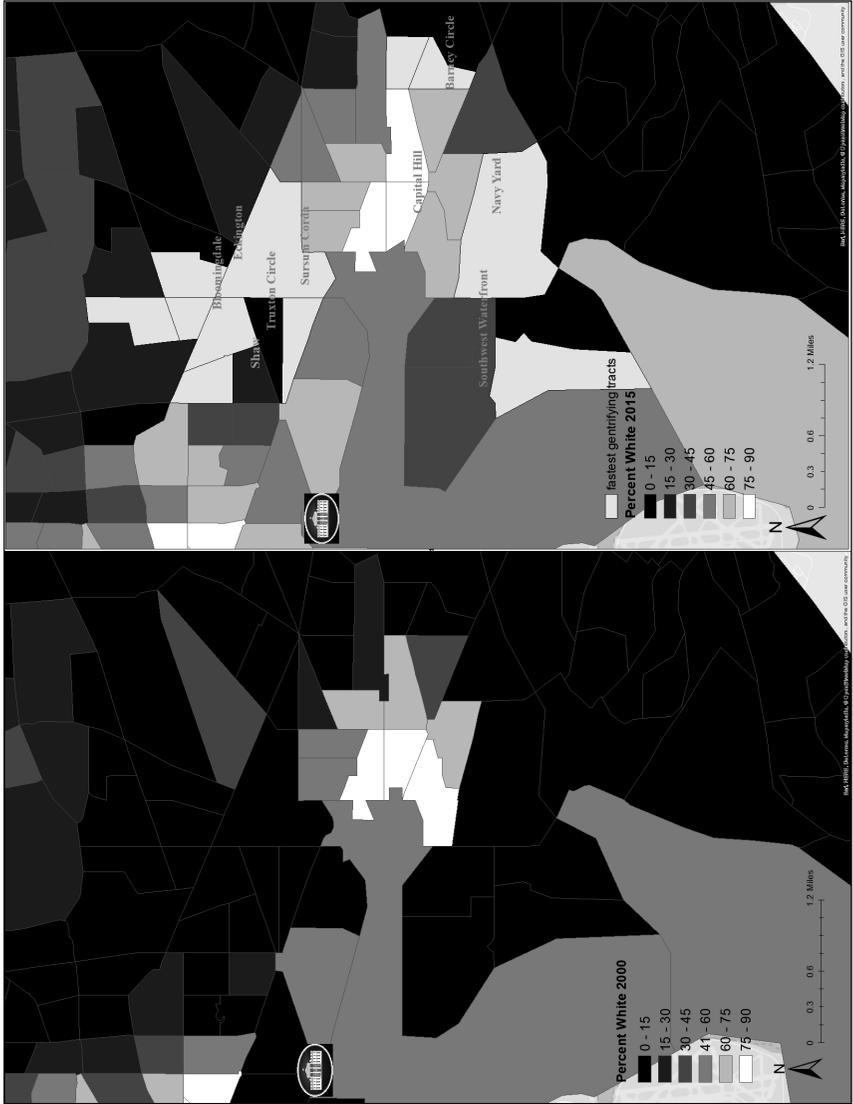


Figure 2. Most rapidly gentrifying census tracts, Washington, DC, 2000 and 2015

lived experiences (Orfield, Siegel-Hawley, & Kucsera, 2014). To measure concentration, we calculated the percent of schools that were majority minority (enrolling 50%–100% non-White students), intensely segregated (enrolling 90%–100% non-White students), and hypersegregated (enrolling 99%–100% non-White students). Exposure and isolation are measures of the potential contact between groups of students. Exposure refers to the degree of potential contact between students of one racial group and another racial group; isolation refers to the degree of potential contact between students of one group and other members of the same group (Massey & Denton, 1988). To measure exposure and isolation rates, we explored the percentage of a certain group of students (e.g., Latino students) in school with a particular student (e.g., White student) in a larger geographical area and computed the average of all these results using the following formula:

$$P^* = \sum_{i=1}^n \left(\frac{x_i}{X} * \frac{y_i}{t_i} \right),$$

- where n is the number of schools or smaller area units,
- x is the number of the first racial/socioeconomic group of students in the school or smaller area i ,
- X is the total number of the first racial/socioeconomic group of students in the larger geographical area,
- y_i is the number of the second racial/socioeconomic group of students in the school or smaller area i , and
- t_i is the total number of students in the school or smaller area i .

LIMITATIONS

Several limitations of this study restrain our capacity to both define gentrification and understand its unfolding in schools. The localized nature of gentrification makes it especially challenging to generalize these findings to other neighborhoods and cities, especially considering the varied types of gentrification. This study focused on a very specific type of gentrification: the gentrification of low-income communities of color by high-SES White households. Therefore, any generalizing of these results to other communities, times, and gentrifying areas should be done with caution. There should be no presumption that the patterns found in these data hold for other neighborhoods and schools.

Our research was also limited in the extent to which we could pinpoint when gentrification began; we were only able to identify whether

significant neighborhood change occurred between 2000 and 2015, two points in time. In other words, it is impossible to tell whether a neighborhood changed slowly and steadily across the 15-year period, or whether a neighborhood experienced rapid change during some portion of that period. Therefore, we are unable to make any statements about the lag between neighborhood change and any resulting school change. In addition, because census tracts and school zone boundaries are not equivalent, it is impossible to know exactly which schools were selected by which gentrifier families, thus making it challenging to establish precise linkages between residence and school attendance. Pinpointing such linkages is particularly challenging in DC; in 2007, Michelle Rhee began her tenure as DCPS chancellor, instituting rapid changes to both DCPS and the local charter schools, including opening and closing schools, changing grade configurations, adding or subtracting grades, moving locations of schools, and changing the names of schools (Filardo et al., 2008). In addition, adding private school options through vouchers (“DC Opportunity Scholarship Program”) to this tremendous array of public school choice also increases the complexity.

Finally, it should be noted that this analysis does not claim a causal understanding of the link between gentrification and school desegregation. Instead, careful site selection, GIS mapping, and the use of two measures of segregation have allowed for an in-depth analysis and case study of the relationship between neighborhood demographic changes, school enrollment changes, policy, and school segregation.

FINDINGS

The following section highlights several key findings. First, school enrollment patterns in Washington, DC’s, most rapidly gentrifying areas have seen a reduction in racial segregation, more so in TPSs than in charters. Second, although this trend is promising, a high level of racial segregation remains, and substantial progress is still needed to ensure that these newly integrated neighborhoods also mean desegregated schools.

ENROLLMENT AND SEGREGATION TRENDS IN GENTRIFYING VERSUS NONGENTRIFYING AREAS

Enrollment

The White share of enrollment increased in both gentrifying and nongentrifying areas (Tables 2 and 3). The share of White enrollment doubled from 5% to 10% in nongentrifying neighborhoods. Although the percent change was larger in gentrifying areas, from 1% to 8%, the overall share of

White enrollment remains smaller in schools located in gentrifying areas (8%) than in nongentrifying areas (10%).

Table 2. Enrollment, All Schools in Gentrifying Areas, Washington, DC

	Schools	Enrollment	White (%)	Black (%)	Hispanic (%)	Asian (%)	FRL (%)
2000	26	12,148	176 (1)	11,107 (91)	659 (5)	200 (2)	9,173 (76)
2007	40	15,642	553 (4)	13,744 (88)	1,119 (7)	216 (1)	9,061 (58)
2014	67	24,030	1,916 (8)	19,208 (80)	2,149 (9)	262 (1)	22,413* (93)

*This total likely overrepresents the actual number of students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch (FRL) because it includes schools using the community eligibility provision, in which the entire school receives FRL if a minimum threshold of FRL students is met. In such cases, the data show 100% of students receiving FRL.

Source: National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data.

Table 3. Enrollment, All Schools in Nongentrifying Areas, Washington, DC

	Schools	Enrollment	White (%)	Black (%)	Hispanic (%)	Asian (%)	FRL (%)
2000	124	53,137	2,671 (5)	43,987 (83)	5,556 (10)	892 (2)	38,166 (72)
2007	188	62,466	3,654 (6)	51,158 (82)	6,651 (11)	953 (2)	29,248 (47)
2014	142	55,474	5,816 (10)	37,594 (68)	9,940 (18)	886 (2)	51,034* (92)

*This total likely overrepresents the actual number students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch (FRL) because it includes schools using the community eligibility provision, in which the entire school receives FRL if a minimum threshold of FRL students is met. In such cases, the data show 100% of students receiving FRL.

Source: National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data.

There are a couple of possible explanations for this trend. First, it could be an indication that gentrification is still occurring, and the White share of enrollment in gentrifying areas will continue to increase in future years to a level that matches or exceeds nongentrifying areas that had larger White shares originally. Alternatively, this trend might indicate that despite gentrification in these areas, some of the White families who are moving in are not enrolling their children in the local

public schools. Instead, they are either choosing other schools—private schools or public schools that are outside of the gentrifying areas—or they do not have children, in which case the change in the residential population does not have as strong an effect on the local school enrollment as on residential demographics.

To test these hypotheses, we examined both the preschool population (aged 0–5 years) and the school-age population (aged 5–17 years) in the gentrifying areas. Among preschool-age children, we found that close to one third (31%) were White in 2009, and almost half (48%) were White in 2015 (Figure 3). Among the school-age population, we found that 2% were White in 2000 and 3% in 2009, but the White share rose to more than 17% in 2015. The disparity between neighborhood and school demographics likely suggests that a large share of White gentrifier parents are opting out of neighborhood schools.

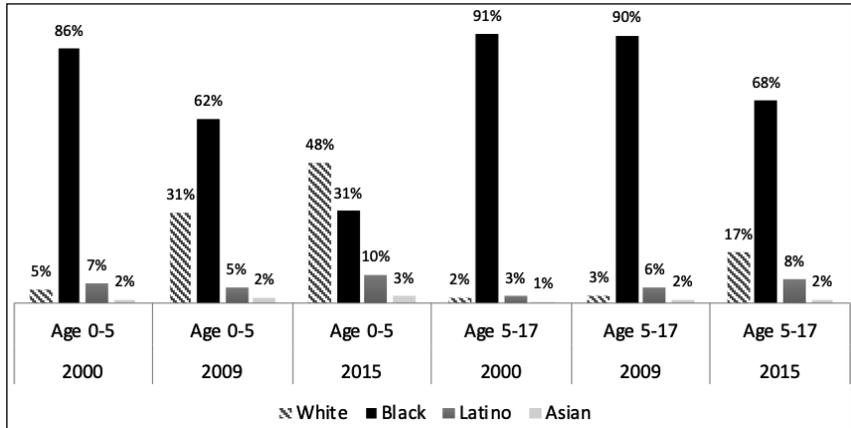


Figure 3. Age distribution of children by race in gentrifying neighborhoods: 2000, 2009, and 2015

Source: Author’s calculations using 2000 decennial census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000) and 2009 and 2015 American Community Survey.

At the school level, between 2000 and 2014, a larger share of schools in gentrifying areas than in nongentrifying areas experienced more extreme increases in the White share of enrollment (Figure 4). Over this period, 12% of schools in gentrifying areas (three schools) but no schools in nongentrifying areas had more than a 50-percentage-point increase in the White share of enrollment. In addition, 4% of schools in gentrifying areas (one school) and 1% of schools (one school) in nongentrifying areas had a White share of enrollment that increased between 20 and 50 percentage points. Conversely, 13% of schools in nongentrifying areas

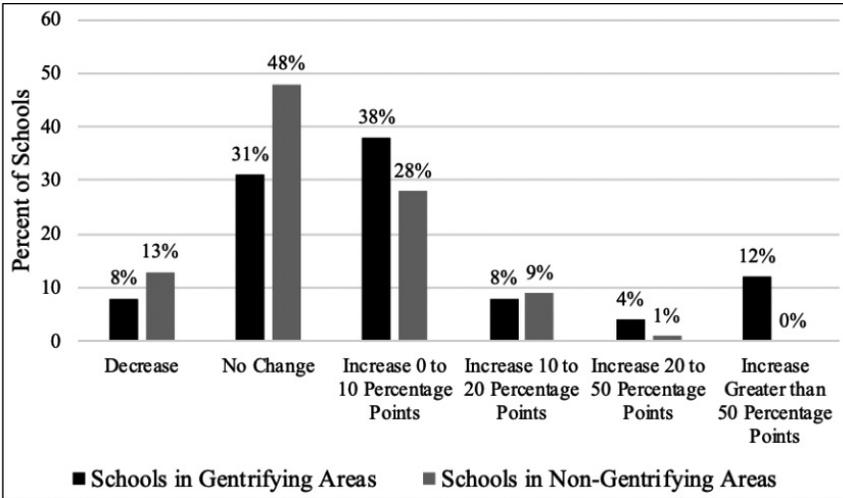


Figure 4. Percentage point change in White share of enrollment, 2000–2014

Note. This figure only includes schools that were open at all three time points. $N = 26$ schools in gentrifying areas; $N = 67$ schools in nongentrifying areas.

Source: National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data.

(nine schools) but only 8% of schools in gentrifying areas (two schools) experienced a decline in the White share of enrollment.

In addition to the changes in the White share of enrollment, the Black share of enrollment decreased, and the Hispanic share of enrollment increased (almost doubled) in schools located in both gentrifying and nongentrifying areas from 2000 to 2014 (Tables 2 and 3). However, the Black share of enrollment started higher in 2000 in gentrifying areas and remained higher in 2014 than in nongentrifying neighborhoods. The reverse is true for Hispanic students. The Hispanic share of enrollment began lower in gentrifying neighborhoods in 2000 and remained lower in 2014 than in nongentrifying neighborhoods.

Concentration

Nearly all schools were majority minority schools, enrolling greater than 50% non-White students, in gentrifying and nongentrifying areas in 2000, 2007, and 2014 (Tables 4 and 5). The share of intensely segregated schools, enrolling 90%–100% non-White students, was also quite similar and high, with more than three fourths of schools being intensely segregated for both gentrifying and nongentrifying areas at all

three time points. Interestingly, despite enrolling a slightly larger share of non-White students, nongentrifying areas had a slightly larger share of hypersegregated schools, enrolling 99%–100% non-White students, than gentrifying areas.

Table 4. Segregation Concentration, All Schools in Gentrifying Areas, Washington, DC

	Majority Minority (50%–100% non-White)	Intensely Segregated (90%–100% non-White)	Hypersegregated (99%–100% non-White)
2000	26 (100%)	23 (88%)	20 (77%)
2007	40 (100%)	34 (85%)	28 (70%)
2014	63 (94%)	53 (79%)	37 (55%)

Source: National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data.

Table 5. Segregation Concentration, All Schools in Nongentrifying Areas, Washington, DC

	Majority Minority (50%–100% non-White)	Intensely Segregated (90%–100% non-White)	Hypersegregated (99%–100% non-White)
2000	117 (94%)	109 (88%)	100 (81%)
2007	181 (96%)	166 (88%)	140 (74%)
2014	134 (94%)	110 (77%)	89 (63%)

Source: National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data.

Exposure

In both gentrifying and nongentrifying areas, Black students are exposed to similar and very small, although slightly increasing, shares of White students (Tables 6 and 7). In both areas, the typical Black student attends a school with 5% or fewer White schoolmates. The typical Hispanic student in both gentrifying and nongentrifying areas attends a school with a slightly larger share (10% or less) of White schoolmates. The typical Hispanic student's exposure to White students has also been increasing. For example, in gentrifying areas, the typical Hispanic student was exposed to 1% White peers in 2000 and 7% White peers in 2014. Compared with schools in gentrifying areas, in nongentrifying

areas, Asian and Hispanic students are exposed to larger shares of White students. For Black students, the reverse is true—the typical Black student is exposed to a larger share of White students in gentrifying areas than in nongentrifying areas.

Table 6. Exposure to White Students, All Schools in Gentrifying Areas, Washington, DC

	Typical Black Student Exposure to White Students %	Typical Hispanic Student Exposure to White Students %	Typical Asian Student Exposure to White Students %	Typical White Student Isolation with White Students %
2000	1	1	1	10
2007	3	3	7	24
2014	5	7	15	39

Source: National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data.

Table 7. Exposure to White Students, All Schools in Gentrifying Areas, Washington, DC

	Typical Black Student Exposure to White Students %	Typical Hispanic Student Exposure to White Students %	Typical Asian Student Exposure to White Students %	Typical White Student Isolation With White Students %
2000	1	1	1	10
2007	3	3	7	24
2014	5	7	15	39

Source: National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data.

From 2000 to 2014, the typical White student attended a school with an increasing share of same-race peers in gentrifying areas, but White isolation with same-race peers in nongentrifying areas has wavered. In 2014, the typical White student in a gentrifying area attended a school with 39% White schoolmates, an increase from 10% in 2000. The typical White student in a nongentrifying area attended a school with 45% White schoolmates in 2014, a slight decrease from 48% in 2000. The typical White student remained more isolated with same-race peers in nongentrifying areas (45% White schoolmates) than in gentrifying areas (39% White schoolmates).

In sum, we found increasing shares of White and Hispanic students alongside decreasing shares of Black students in both gentrifying and nongentrifying areas. More than three-fourths of schools in both gentrifying and nongentrifying areas are intensely segregated, and nongentrifying

areas had a slightly larger share of hypersegregated schools than gentrifying areas. Our results suggest that a large share of White gentrifier parents are opting out of neighborhood schools, indicating that while neighborhood gentrification is occurring, school desegregation is slower to follow.

ENROLLMENT AND SEGREGATION TRENDS BY TYPE OF SCHOOL (CHARTER VS. TPS) IN GENTRIFYING VS. NONGENTRIFYING AREAS

Enrollment

When enrollment trends were compared by school type, the share of White enrollment was larger in TPSs than in charters in both gentrifying and nongentrifying areas in 2014 (Tables 8 and 9). In gentrifying areas, TPSs enrolled 9% White students, while charters enrolled 6% White students; in nongentrifying areas, the disparity was larger, with TPSs enrolling 14% White students, while charters enrolled 5% White students. The disparity between school type was also larger in Black enrollment in nongentrifying areas where charters enrolled 78% Black students and TPSs enrolled 60% Black students, compared with gentrifying areas where charters enrolled 82% Black students and TPSs enrolled 78% Black students. For Hispanic students, 9% of charter and TPS enrollment comprised Hispanic students in gentrifying areas, but in nongentrifying areas, TPSs enrolled a larger share of Hispanic students (21%) than charters (14%). These enrollment trends indicate that there are larger differences between charters and TPSs in enrollment by race in nongentrifying areas than in gentrifying areas. However, in both cases, charters have a larger non-White enrollment than TPSs.

Table 8. Enrollment by School Type in Gentrifying Areas, Washington, DC

	Schools	Enrollment	White (%)	Black (%)	Hispanic (%)	Asian (%)	FRL (%)
2007							
Charter	13	4,027	175 (4)	3,457 (86)	359 (9)	34 (1)	2,156 (54)
TPS	27	11,615	378 (3)	10,287 (89)	760 (7)	182 (2)	6,905 (59)
2014							
Charter	33	10,335	643 (6)	8,494 (82)	894 (9)	83 (1)	8,748* (85)
TPS	34	13,695	1,273 (9)	10,714 (78)	1,255 (9)	179 (1)	13,665* (100)

Note. TPS = traditional public school.

*This total likely overrepresents the actual number of students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch (FRL) because it includes schools using the community eligibility provision, in which the entire school receives FRL if a minimum threshold of FRL students is met. In such cases, the data show 100% of students receiving FRL.

Source: National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data.

Table 9. Enrollment by School Type in Nongentrifying Areas, Washington, DC

	Schools	Enrollment	White (%)	Black (%)	Hispanic (%)	Asian (%)	FRL (%)
2007							
Charter	55	16,204	398 (2)	14,521 (90)	1,183 (7)	86 (1)	5,556 (34)
TPS	133	46,262	3,256 (7)	36,637 (79)	5,468 (12)	867 (2)	23,692 (51)
2014							
Charter	72	23,312	1,231 (5)	18,207 (78)	3,163 (14)	179 (1)	18,932* (81)
TPS	70	32,162	4,585 (14)	19,387 (60)	6,777 (21)	707 (2)	32,102* (100)

Note. TPS = traditional public school.

*This total likely overrepresents the actual number of students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch (FRL) because it includes schools using the community eligibility provision, in which the entire school receives FRL if a minimum threshold of FRL students is met. In such cases, the data show 100% of students receiving FRL.

Source: National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data.

Concentration

In both gentrifying and nongentrifying areas, a larger share of charters than TPSs are majority minority, intensely segregated, and hypersegregated (Tables 10 and 11). In 2014, there was a substantial disparity in the share of hypersegregated charters versus hypersegregated TPSs in both gentrifying and nongentrifying areas, although it was slightly more extreme in gentrifying areas where an even smaller share of TPSs was hypersegregated. In 2014, nearly three fourths of charters were hypersegregated—71% of charters in nongentrifying areas and 70% of charters in gentrifying areas. In nongentrifying areas, 54% of TPSs were hypersegregated, and in gentrifying areas, fewer than half (41%) of TPSs were hypersegregated. These trends represent a shift from 2007 in nongentrifying areas where there had been a larger share of hypersegregated TPSs than charters. While segregation persists at high levels in both charters and TPSs, segregation levels have declined substantially more in TPSs than in charters in gentrifying neighborhoods. Between 2007 and 2014, the share of hypersegregated TPSs in gentrifying areas fell from 67% to 41% (Table 8). During the same time period, the share of hypersegregated charters in gentrifying areas declined slightly, from 77% to 70%.

Table 10. Segregation Concentration by School Type in Gentrifying Areas, Washington, DC

	Majority Minority (50%–100% non-White)	Intensely Segregated (90%–100% non-White)	Hypersegregated (99%–100% non-White)
2007			
Charter	13 (100%)	11 (85%)	10 (77%)
TPS	27 (100%)	23 (85%)	18 (67%)
2014			
Charter	33 (100%)	27 (82%)	23 (70%)
TPS	30 (88%)	26 (76%)	14 (41%)

Note. TPS = traditional public school.

Source. National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data.

Table 11. Segregation Concentration by School Type in Nongentrifying Areas, Washington, DC

	Majority Minority (50%–100% non-White)	Intensely Segregated (90%–100% non-White)	Hypersegregated (99%–100% non-White)
2007			
Charter	55 (100%)	49 (89%)	39 (71%)
TPS	126 (95%)	117 (88%)	101 (76%)
2014			
Charter	70 (97%)	58 (81%)	51 (71%)
TPS	64 (91%)	52 (74%)	38 (54%)

Note. TPS = traditional public school.

Source: National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data.

DISCUSSION

Using Washington, DC, as a case study of a city that has experienced massive urban-core revitalization since the early 2000s, we examined whether demographic changes resulting from gentrification are associated with changing school enrollment and racial segregation patterns. Our findings illustrate that Washington, DC’s, school enrollment patterns in the city’s fastest gentrifying areas have seen a reduction in racial segregation. The reduction has been more substantial in TPSs than in charters. However, while this pattern is promising, high levels of racial segregation remain in the city and its gentrifying neighborhoods, and substantial progress is still needed to ensure that these newly integrated neighborhoods also establish and maintain desegregated schools.

GIS maps and measures of concentration and exposure show that while many of the city’s neighborhoods have undergone dramatic demographic transformations, the changes in local school enrollment have been less stark. For example, although there was a large percent change in the share of White students in gentrifying areas between 2000 and 2015, from 1% to 8%, the overall share of White enrollment remains smaller than the school-age population in gentrifying areas in 2015—8% versus more than 17% of the school-age population. At least one possible explanation for this asymmetry between neighborhood and school demographics is that a large share of White gentrifier parents are bypassing neighborhood schools.

Many scholars have found that gentrifying families with children often opt into nonneighborhood public and private school options (DeSena, 2006; Keels et al., 2013) or relocate to suburban communities on the arrival of children (Keels et al., 2013; Kennedy & Leonard, 2001). However, Hankins (2007) suggested that gentrifiers of the 2000s are demographically different than prior gentrifiers of the 1970s and 1980s, and that the more recent gentrifiers are often seeking children-focused amenities such as schools. Our findings regarding the increase in White student enrollment and the decline in school segregation in Washington, DC's, most rapidly gentrifying areas are possibly explained by the new wave of gentrifiers who are driving a new demand for urban schools (Hankins, 2007). Several other recent studies drawing on interviews and observation have brought attention to middle-class families who choose to stay in the city and send their children to local public schools (Cucchiara, 2008; Cucchiara & Horvat, 2009; Posey, 2012).

This study extends existing research on the impact of gentrification on local schools by focusing on a city considered one of the nation's most rapidly gentrifying (Maciag, 2015) and by examining the extent to which neighborhood-level demographic changes correspond to school-level changes. Our findings are aligned with recent research on gentrification and schools, indicating that at least on a small, localized scale, largely White, middle- to upper-class families are beginning to engage with urban school districts (Diem, Holme, Edwards, Haynes, & Epstein, 2018; Kimelberg & Billingham, 2013; Mordechay & Ayscue, 2019; Stillman, 2012). It should be noted, however, that both charters and TPSs across the district still remain intensely segregated despite the creation of pockets of near-desegregation in some schools. As school choice expands in DC and other districts across the nation, and schools become less connected to their neighborhoods, it is possible that gentrification is being fueled; affluent families see that there are "better" public school options when there are fewer ties between neighborhoods and schools in the district (Pearman & Swain, 2017). Thus, the expansion of school choice initiatives may indeed lessen de facto residential segregation in previously low-income urban neighborhoods without having the effect of desegregating the local schools.

In addition, some of our findings seem to correspond with recent evidence suggesting that charters may be more segregated than TPSs (Cheng, Hitt, Kisida, & Mills, 2017; Frankenberg et al., 2011; Whitehurst, Reeves, & Rodrigue, 2016). As has been found in districts across the nation, charters in Washington, DC's, gentrifying areas are more segregated than TPSs. Despite having the potential for creating greater desegregation, given that the link between residential and

school segregation has been severed for charter schools, charters do not appear to be facilitating greater desegregation in Washington, DC's, gentrifying areas. Perhaps this result is not surprising given that charters remain an unregulated form of choice that often does not include diversity goals.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND RESEARCH

Over the past two decades, gentrification has become undeniable in the “return to the cities,” with redevelopment and investment in many central cities across the nation (Hwang & Sampson, 2014; Hyra, 2016). At the school level, efforts to integrate primarily gentrifying families into high-poverty and racially segregated schools must include policies, practices, and effective leadership to attract these new families. A recent study highlighting the tension in gentrifying urban schools suggests the importance of leadership training to work more effectively with new gentrifying parents, as well as longtime resident parents, because few can navigate the tensions that accompany a rapid demographic transition (Siegel-Hawley et al., 2017).

As schools begin to desegregate, teachers and leaders also need training in how to prevent and address inequities as well as facilitate integration within a racially diverse school. Schools that appear desegregated often experience second-generation segregation (Mickelson, 2001), in which students are segregated within the school through tracking (Oakes, 2005; Welner, 2001) and disproportionality in gifted and talented programs (Roda, 2015) and special education programs (Losen & Orfield, 2002; Sullivan & Bal, 2013).

Relatedly, managing the process of rapid demographic transformation such that it supports school desegregation requires coordinated and targeted policies that underscore the fundamental relationships among housing, communities, and schools. These recommendations include preserving existing affordable housing through rental assistance demonstrations, housing choice vouchers, preservation-friendly incentives, and creating realtor outreach programs to start to bridge the “perception” gap between schools and the real estate community. In addition, greater development of rental units at all levels can reduce pressure on the rental market, lowering housing costs and expanding housing choice for residents, particularly in gentrifying areas with significant rent growth (Mordechay & Ayscue, 2018). One concern is that without a broader set of policy solutions, many of these gentrifying neighborhoods will quickly re-segregate in one direction or another. This dynamic can happen through a process of “pass-through” diversity, in which communities

become diverse at the forefront of neighborhood change, followed by a process of resegregation.

At the school level, one possibility is to create more urban magnet programs with strategies and guidelines for racial and income diversity. Studies have suggested that magnet programs with unique educational offerings not only can provide improved academic outcomes for students but also, with appropriate civil rights protections, can play a role in fostering integration (Siegel-Hawley & Frankenberg, 2012). Magnet schools have greater flexibility than TPSs in their curricula, admissions standards, and freedom to draw students from different geographical areas, presenting an opportunity for desegregation and educational equity. One recent study of school gentrification in Portland, Denver, Berkeley, Cambridge, and Dallas found that some districts that developed new programming to attract gentrifier families had equitable diversity policies, ensuring that all schools across the district, rather than a select few, remained diverse. On the other hand, other districts had diversity plans that did not include equitable policies (Diem et al., 2018). This disparity across contexts raises questions about whether school gentrification changes the distribution of opportunity *among* schools within districts.

Although research on urban school gentrification is growing steadily, much work remains to be done. With this in mind, we suggest several promising avenues for future research. First, extending this research to other gentrifying cities is necessary to draw more robust conclusions about the general processes related to urban school gentrification. In addition, comparisons are needed between cities with less restrictive school choice/open enrollment policies (e.g., Washington, DC) with those that are more restrictive in order to explore how school choice expansion might increase the likelihood that higher SES White households move into low-income communities of color. Furthermore, previous studies have shown that although gentrifiers may bring with them new resources to schools that previously lacked them, they can accentuate class- and race-based inequities in ostensibly diverse schools (Posey, 2012). Qualitative research is needed to investigate diversifying and demographically stabilizing schools located in gentrifying neighborhoods in order to identify factors that mediate the relationship between neighborhood and school gentrification. Last, little is known about what happens to children who are victims of displacement. Additional research is needed to explore the ways in which their schooling and neighborhood opportunities change after their displacement.

CONCLUSION

As cities and neighborhoods across the country experience an influx of largely White and high-SES residents, new opportunities for urban school and neighborhood integration emerge. Therefore, the findings from this case study have broad implications for other places that have experienced massive urban-core revitalization and demographic transformations. Given barriers to school desegregation efforts (Le, 2010), gentrification is offering a unique opportunity to create racially and economically diverse schools. Thus, expanding our understanding of the gentrification process is critical for honing our education and urban policy tools to foster school desegregation efforts.

Despite the substantive research that points toward integration as the best way to improve the life chances of poor and minority children, policy makers have, for the most part, abandoned this aspect of schooling (Mordechay & Orfield, 2017). Attracting families in a gentrifying area to the local schools can potentially create sites of integration. These families have the potential to increase support for the schools, foster more stable neighborhoods, and create peer groups that will accelerate educational gains for poor children and provide numerous positive outcomes for all children. However, crucial challenges persist; therefore, successfully managing the gentrification process is essential to ensure that it creates inclusive communities rather than displace low-income residents and residents of color.

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