A Velvet Rope of Exclusion: The Delmar Divide

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INTRODUCTION

Many reports have been published about the complex topic of segregation in the Greater St. Louis area. However, the effect of years of systemic segregation on education has not been adequately discussed.

The Focus and Purpose of *A Velvet Rope of Exclusion*

This report studies the root causes of the Delmar Divide in an attempt to understand the impact it produced in the educational community. Certainly, St. Louis is a very segregated city, and the public-school system has suffered as a result of educational inequities. This work will focus on how the Delmar Divide created pockets that continue to marginalize residents, particularly students. The effect that purposeful segregation has had on this area and how it places students of color at a disadvantage to their white counterparts in other city neighborhoods is certainly visible through research. There is hope to find a parallel situation in another city where a solution is viable. Perhaps there will be communities who were able to integrate successfully, and St. Louis can emulate their experience. The focus of this report will be around the history that lead to the division of the schools on both sides of the Delmar Divide, comparing their educational realities while attempting to understand why this happened and what can be done to directionally move forward as a community.
St. Louis is considered a historically segregated city. Location seems to be one of the most important factors in determining quality of education, health, housing, and access to jobs. Where people live has been molded by a long history of intentional systemic practices at both the governmental and societal levels. African Americans bear the brunt of this and have been excluded from locations that could provide better opportunities.

In 1877, St. Louis County split from the city and would create “two cities” with resources distributed unequally. (Cambria et al., 2018). During the Great Migration, many black people migrated to St. Louis in the hopes of finding new opportunity. They came to find the roots of the South remained in the Gateway City (Bumpers, 2018). After Brown v. Board, St. Louis schools remained segregated. In 1972, a concerned black mother named Minnie Liddell filed a lawsuit that represented black students and parents in the hopes of further desegregation in the city (Heaney & Uchitelle, 2004).

This case began the practice of voluntary bussing from the city to the county and established magnet schools in the city. The bussing officially began in the 1980s and the Voluntary Interdistrict Choice Corporation reached its height in 1990s (Heaney & Uchitelle, 2004). In 2016, the VICC board met to discuss the option of ending the program (“Voluntary Interdistrict Choice Program”, 2020).

There is a sort of mixed message surrounding this city. Like many places, St. Louis does not have a single story. There is a 1300-acre urban park that is also near the infamous Delmar Divide, a place that displays the history of racial segregation/redlining. The historical bruises that are present in the city are still felt today, and communities of color often occur the weight of that bruising. The St. Louis public school system is suffering the lowest enrollment in its history (Konczal, 2019). As a result, students can seem left behind. In the 1970s, St. Louis Public Schools (SLPS) educated 111,000 children. In 2019, that number fell below 20,000. Due to low enrollment, SLPS has closed dozens of schools (Konczal, 2019). While some city schools are at-capacity, they are exclusively located in the predominantly white south side of the city. In order to consolidate funding, the schools considered under-enrolled must close. The district currently has 17 of these closed schools for sale, sitting vacant, waiting for a buyer (Surplus Properties, 2019).
St. Louisans know that location predicts quality of life. Delmar Boulevard is a physical boundary that sections off prosperity from disparity like a velvet rope. Because of this, the Delmar Divide serves as a starting point for examining disparities in schools based upon racial makeup. This stark division results from years of systemic oppression to the Black community. The BBC shed light on the statistical differences from those who live North of the divide to those who live South when a video that informed the world outside St. Louis went viral (Strasser, 2012). The chart on the right shows the north to be majority black and the south to be majority white. The contrast continues when looking at other demographics such as median home value, median income, highest level of education completed, and life expectancy.

**NORTH OF DELMAR**

98% of population is Black  
Median home value: $73,000  
Median income: $18,000  
% with Bachelor's Degrees: 10%  
Life expectancy: 67 years

**SOUTH OF DELMAR**

73% of population is White  
Median home value: $335,000  
Median income: $50,000  
% with Bachelor's Degrees: 70%  
Life expectancy: 85 years
Given what is known about systemic racism, students of marginalized communities often face many barriers in their process of education. Although over 60 years have passed since Brown v. Board, the nation continues to provide unequal and segregated education. Teachers are an important piece of this systemic puzzle. Educators must have a heightened awareness of racism inside and outside of the classroom to culturally transform society. When educators are unaware of their own racial biases or the institutional racism that permeates society, they are more likely to hold students of color to lower expectations or participate in discipline disparities (Brooks, 2013). "Courageous conversations" is a newer practice that intentionally makes space in the classroom to talk about race-based issues. Brooks (2013) identifies three factors needed to engage in these conversations: passion, practice, and persistence.

**Passion**
Teachers who are passionate often describe teaching as a calling. From this calling emerges a drive to make meaningful connections with students. Courageous conversations begin with inviting the stories of each student into the classroom.

**Practice**
Teachers who actively talk about racism and have a sense of their own personal identity are more likely to be aware of social justice issues and have a desire to impact meaningful change in their schools (Jean-Marie & Normore, 2010). Practice is essential to discover how to have productive conversations in the classroom.

**Persistence**
There may be a struggle, whether internal or systemic, when discussing racism in the classroom. Dantley and Tillman (2009) discuss the importance of moving from conversation to activism. Persistence requires action.
HISTORY OF RACISM AND SEGREGATION IN ST. LOUIS
Missouri's constitutional history sheds light on how past legislation and choices impact what systemic racism looks like today. The Constitution is held as the definition of law, but what happens when the law itself is unjust? Looking specifically at two local historical events, it is evident that law is an oppressive system for people of color. The idea of "constitutional evil" refers to civic practices that were designed to be legal but also allegiant to injustices of fundamental rights (Graber, 2006). The Missouri Compromise and the Dred Scott case embody what constitutional evil describes. 2021 will mark Missouri's bicentennial year, but admittance to the United States came with a price.

The Missouri Compromise of 1820 sought to appease the balance of North and South in the Senate. Missouri was acknowledged as a slave state (except for the Bootheel) and Maine was considered a free state. The Constitution at that time said that states were to handle slavery and there would be no federal interference.

The country’s eyes were watching Missouri again in 1856, when Dred Scott, an enslaved black man, entered a courthouse in St. Louis to appeal for his freedom. The case would go to the Supreme Court where a judge would rule that black people, whether free or enslaved, are not considered citizens by the Constitution. Graber (2006) studied the Dred Scott case and writes that the ruling was, "consistent with claimed judicial obligations to respect the majority will, to follow the rules laid down by constitutional framers and previous precedents, or to be guided by fundamental constitutional values" (p. 4). The law was skewed to favor the "majority will", which at that time believed that the Constitution did not include Black people as citizens. Justice John Paul Stevens served on the Supreme Court for 35 years. He wrote a book about the challenges of amending the Constitution and cites that, “...important imperfections in its text were the product of compromises that were certain to require that changes be made in the future” (Stephens, 2014, p. 4). Yet, the Constitution has been challenging to amend given the complex system of checks and balances. Today, Constitutional evil exists for people of color in America in many forms, such as police brutality, environmental racism, and educational inequities.
SEGREGATION AT EVERY TURN

A NEW CENTURY WITH LINGERING PRACTICES

SYSTEMIC DECISIONS

At the turn of the 20th century, St. Louis began to prepare to host the World’s Fair and the Olympics with a "City Beautiful Movement" that included great civic projects (Dowden-White, 2011). The new century also saw the beginning of the fight for civil rights for St, Louis’ black community (Stein, 2002). Despite these "modern" efforts, there was intentional segregation, restrictive racial covenants, and lack of care for historically black neighborhoods.

MODERN IMPACT

The reverberations from systemic segregation can still be felt in St. Louis today. The Land Reutilization Authority manages vacant properties with the intent to sell them. As of June 2020, there are 86 listed properties in the Ville, 16 in Vandeventer, and 0 in the Central West End (LRA-Owned Property Search, 2020). Also, in a report on mortgage lending practices in St. Louis and other cities found an "extensive mortgage lending imbalance in St. Louis, with mortgage credit distribution heavily swayed by income levels and the racial makeup of neighborhoods (Richardson et al., 2016, p. 4).

HOUSING

Residential segregation was an intentional practice in St. Louis. Racial covenants prevented certain groups of people from living in areas. After World War II, many new blocks were open for Black residents, although these areas were already in dismal conditions (Lipsitz, 1995). The Pruitt Igo buildings are an example of promised modernity that crumbled from lack of care.

POLITICS

St. Louis is divided into 28 wards. This structure allowed some degree of black representation but it "offered no real seat at the table" (Stein, 2002, p. 125). Even in the 21st century, the struggle for Black political representation remains. In 2020, Ella Jones became the first Black mayor of Ferguson, a town that is primarily black and known for the shooting of Michael Brown.
THE CREATION OF THE DELMAR DIVIDE
As former enslaved people and their families began to flee the Jim Crow laws of the South, “the white-controlled St. Louis real estate industry employed a system of racial covenants and steering to drive the city’s growing black population to neighborhoods north of Delmar, while driving white families to the south” (Abello, 2019). Mortgage denial was a common practice for black families trying to buy homes in the city. Due to intentional civic planning, these residents were subject to redlining practices that restricted access to certain neighborhoods. As white families began to move to South City or St. Louis County, black families primarily remained in the north. Appraisal gaps are a modern struggle for those current residents of blighted neighborhoods like the Ville. "Areas of vacancy or hypervacancy today were often the thriving black neighborhoods of yesterday. That’s not a coincidence. It’s by design” (Abello, 2019). The current home values north and south of Delmar Blvd speak to this design. For instance, "many homes north of the Delmar Divide that are valued at $2,000 are structurally identical to those south of the divide that are worth hundreds of thousands of dollars” (Abello, 2019).

The history of mortgage lending displays that race was a key factor in where residents would live. However, "if you make a transparent map of racial segregation and lay it over other maps—political power, cultural influence, health, wealth, education, and employment—the pattern repeats" (Cooperman, 2014). It is necessary to connect these patterns to fully understand the larger scale of systemic racism that is being perpetuated today. Where students go to school is typically based on the neighborhoods they live in. If that neighborhood is north of Delmar Blvd, generations of redlining, inequities, and disparities will seep into the school. St. Louis schools are funded based on property taxes, among other sources. In communities with low property values, available resources to students are effected.
The lending disparities that have been exacerbated by mortgage lenders is displayed in the map below.
MAPPING HOUSING DISPARITIES

Moskop (2016) used census and survey data to further display the stark contrast from city to county in homeownership and rate of vacancy.

63107 (Fairground) - 42%
63113 (Vandeventer) - 44.7%
63110 (The Hill) - 42%
63116 (Tower Grove South) - 57.5%
63117 (Clayton) - 53.3%
63131 (Town and Country) - 92.2%
63017 (Chesterfield) - 77.9%

63107 (Fairground) - 38.7%
63113 (Vandeventer) - 35.8%
63110 (The Hill) - 10.2%
63116 (Tower Grove South) - 13.4%
63117 (Clayton) - 12%
63131 (Town and Country) - 3.4%
63017 (Chesterfield) - 5.1%
Given the information presented thus far, segregation in housing in the 20th century has created shockwaves of systemic racism that are still felt today. Students go to the school located in their neighborhood by default. If that child lives in a zip code that was intentionally redlined, then the school will most likely be under resourced, underfunded, and understaffed. Research shows that black children are five times as likely than their white counterparts to go to a highly segregated school (Garcia, 2020). Furthermore, Less than one in three white students (31.3%) attend a high-poverty school, compared with more than seven in 10 black students (72.4%). (Garcia, 2020). The chart below displays the differences in education and how connected race is to poverty.

**Black children are highly likely to be in high-poverty schools with a high share of students of color, but white children are not**

Share of black and white eighth-graders attending low-poverty mostly white schools and and high-poverty schools with high shares of students of color, 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Low-poverty and mostly white</th>
<th>High-poverty and mostly students of color</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** Schools with a high concentration of students of color are those in which 51–100% of students are black, Hispanic, Asian, or American Indian. Mostly white schools are those in which more than 75% of students are white. High-poverty schools are schools in which 51–100% of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL). Low-poverty schools are those in which up to 25% are FRPL-eligible.

**Source:** Author’s analysis of microdata from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).
ATTEMPTS AT INTEGRATION
After the Liddell v. Board case, St. Louis needed to form a plan to strive for equity in education. St. Louis began bussing students between the city and county in the 1983-84 school year.

St. Louis took an ambitious approach to integration that “was by far the largest and most comprehensive plan in the nation” (Heaney & Uchitelle, 2004, p. 129). In this plan, born from a court case, the state would be required to pay the entire cost of transporting students as well as pay the county schools the cost of educating the students. Individual Black families were given three choices: stay in their neighborhood school, choose an integrated city magnet school, or participate in the transfer program (Heaney & Uchitelle, 2004, p. 129). This effort was coordinated by the Voluntary Interdistrict Choice Corporation. The program itself had its peaks and valleys. Survey results suggest that some families saw a rise in student achievement while others felt racially isolated (Heaney & Uchitelle, 2004).

For more information, call the VICC, 314.721.8422.

www.choicecorp.org

2,886 students transferred to the county in 1983 (the first year)

14,500 students transferred to the county in 1998 (the maximum number)
Research shows us that children of color are positively impacted from integration while the achievement rates for white children are unchanged.

Wages for Black Students in Desegregated Schools

Results from a five-year exposure to court-ordered desegregation showed there was an average of a 15 percent increase in wages for black students who attended integrated schools. "That probability, represented below along the vertical axis, amounted to an extra $5,900 in annual family income, and an 11-percentage point decline in yearly incidences of poverty" (Barkhorn, 2016). In addition to positive financial outcomes, “…for children from low-income families, a 10 percent increase in per-pupil spending throughout one's K-12 years leads to 0.46 additional years of completed education, 9.6 percent higher earnings, and a 6.1 percentage-point reduction in the annual incidence of adult poverty” (Johnson, 2011, p. 33). These findings came from a longitudinal study that followed students for more than four decades.
THE CURRENT STATE OF ST. LOUIS SCHOOLS
Lawsuits were filed and buses were sent out to integrate students into the County. The experiences of those African American students who made the trek from St. Louis to their corresponding county schools varied. "While many students were successful, the majority in the 1990s had lower standardized test scores and lower participation in advanced placement courses in integrated settings because they were not given the same opportunities and challenging curricula...Implicit bias was an issue that faced all educators, and the lack of training impacted outcomes" (Anderson, 2019). Racism permeated the county schools where many black students described feeling alienated or isolated (Heaney & Uchitelle, 2004). District accountability tapered off as time went on. It was found that “between 1990 and 2009, courts released 45 percent of school districts under court oversight” (Breslow, Wexler, & Collins, 2014). Following Brown v. Board, many school districts waited to integrate until they were court-ordered to do so, despite direction from the court to desegregate "with all deliberate speed".

Fast-forwarding to modern times, these released districts often stop actively integrating schools now that the court is no longer watching them. There is a strong tie to educational outcomes when students are integrated. “Integration doesn’t just mean access to better schools, it can also mean a better chance of earning a degree...for every year a black student attended an integrated school, their likelihood of graduating went up 2 percentage points. The longer that student stayed in school, the greater his odds” (Breslow, Wexler, & Collins, 2014). A crucial element to discuss when talking about integration is the terminology we use to describe it. Using the word "desegregation" may invoke feelings of antiquity tied to the Jim Crow era. Cobb (2014) says, “to the extent that the word ‘desegregation’ remains in our vocabulary, it describes an antique principle, not a current priority. Today, we are more likely to talk of diversity—but diversification and desegregation are not the same undertaking. To speak of diversity, in light of this country’s history of racial recidivism, is to focus on bringing ethnic variety to largely white institutions, rather than dismantling the structures that made them so white to begin with”. What Cobb describes reflects the persistence of white supremacy systematically while ignoring the root source of it upstream.

While we use a softer term like "diversity", this is simply adding in black or brown children physically without regarding their social, cultural, or emotional needs. Diversity is measurable, but inclusion is a feeling. The question remains: is today really all that different from 1954? “For the tragedy of this moment is not that black students still go to overwhelmingly black schools, long after segregation was banished by law, but that they do so for so many of the same reasons as in the days before Brown” (Cobb, 2014).
The state and federal government as well as school districts fund schools using a formula, yet those schools in North St. Louis are chronically underfunded.

"At any given poverty level, districts that have a higher proportion of white students get substantially higher funding than districts that have more minority students" (White, 2015). The racial composition of a school is the indicating factor for funding gaps. In Missouri, the state does not provide increased funding for individual students from low-income households. Rather, the funding goes to the district based on the concentration of low-income students. The map above displays the funding metrics surrounding St. Louis Public Schools (SLPS) as well as the poverty level of students in the area. While this data does not display the area North and South of the Delmar Divide, note that the majority of nonwhite students in poverty live north of Delmar Blvd.
Compared to SLPS, the Clayton school district displays much lower rates of poverty, reduced lunches, and nonwhite students. Simultaneously, the population is smaller but the revenue per pupil is 43% higher. These districts are immediately next to one another yet display stark contrasts in student funding. “White flight has left low-income, minority students in failing urban public schools. The compounding issue of low-income neighborhoods and scarce (or biased) funding leaves such schools with little money or resources to educate their students, and thus little hope of breaking the poverty cycle” (White, 2015).
Given what we know about the Delmar Divide, there is great variation within the City's distribution of wealth. This pattern continues when zooming out to compare the City with the County. This map shows the differences in median property values across individual school districts. The dark turquoise area includes both the Clayton and Ladue School Districts. This metric is important to include because it reflects a source of funding for these districts. As Anderson (2019) explains, "Viewing school segregation from a racial perspective rather than an economic and equity perspective limits our understanding".
The state and federal government as well as school districts fund schools using a formula, yet those schools in North St. Louis are chronically underfunded.

There are over 40 distinct school districts in the Greater St. Louis Statistical Metropolitan Area. Research shows that “racial imbalance tends to exist between school districts, rather than within them. This chart shows how different factors have contributed to racial isolation over the past decade. Racial imbalance between districts (the black bar) has consistently played the most significant role in nearly all forms of racial isolation" (Barkhorn, 2016). This chart also notes the differences between public and private schools as less contributing to racial isolation. Many districts are underfunded and underresourced and cannot provide basic materials for students or teachers.
The following section will present three schools in different locations around the Greater St. Louis Area. Using the school's population demographics, zip code information, test scores and other values, each school will be compared. Given the previous information in this report, racial makeup and poverty seem to be two factors that coincide with location to predict the quality of schools in each area. Bryan Hill is a North St. Louis City Public School, Maplewood- Richmond Heights Elementary school is in the MRH school district, and Chesterfield Elementary is in West St. Louis County. These three schools were selected due to available information, personal connection, and variety in distance.
BRYAN HILL ELEMENTARY
ST. LOUIS CITY PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT

LOCATION
Bryan Hill is located in the College Hill Neighborhood. There are 176 students enrolled with a capacity of 292 (60.3%).

ZIPCODE DEMOGRAPHICS: 63107
- Population: 11,912
- Median household income: $23,911
- Unemployment rate: 4.0%
- Life expectancy: 68

100% of students are from low-income families
100% of student population is students of color
4.6% English proficiency rate
The metrics on the following pages capture the scores in three subject areas that are often assessed by achievement tests. The legend below displays what each color represents on the bar.

**Status Expectations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Floor</th>
<th>Approaching</th>
<th>On Track</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>229.7</td>
<td>205.9</td>
<td>208.2</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Score Values**

- **English Language Arts**: 229.7
- **Mathematics**: 205.9
- **Science**: 208.2

Note: Only one metric is represented on this page because Bryan Hill has a student body that is 100% minority.
MRH ELEMENTARY
MAPLEWOOD RICHMOND HEIGHTS SCHOOL DISTRICT

LOCATION

Maplewood Richmond Heights (MRH) Elementary is located in the city of Richmond Heights. There are currently 435 students enrolled.

ZIPCODE DEMOGRAPHICS: 63117

- Population: 9,163
- Median household income: $63,438
- Unemployment rate: 3.2%
- Life expectancy: 77.9 years

Figure 18. Which St. Louis area schools have the highest and lowest proficiency ratings?

44% of students are from low-income families
38% of student population is students of color
58% English proficiency rate
MRH ELEMENTARY
MAPLEWOOD RICHMOND HEIGHTS SCHOOL DISTRICT

SCHOOL SCORE VALUES

English Language Arts
Mathematics
Science

NO DATA AVAILABLE - FIELD TEST ONLY

Note: There is no data available for Social Studies because it is field test only

SCORE VALUES FOR MINORITY STUDENTS

Are all students achieving at high levels at this point in time?

English Language Arts
Mathematics
Science

Zip Code 63117 Race/Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>7058</td>
<td>78.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Or African American</td>
<td>1052</td>
<td>11.64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>2.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian Or Alaskan Native</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>490</td>
<td>5.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian &amp; Other Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Race</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Or More Races</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>2.05%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LOCATION

Chesterfield Elementary is located in the city of Chesterfield. There are currently 394 students enrolled and it is at maximum capacity.

ZIPCODE DEMOGRAPHICS: 63005

- Population: 17,753
- Median household income: $165,197
- Unemployment rate: 2.5%
- Life expectancy: 82.1

Figure 18. Which St. Louis area schools have the highest and lowest proficiency ratings?

Source: Common Core of Data (school addresses and enrollment, 2011-2015); Great Schools (Proficiency data, 2011-2015); SABINS (attendance boundaries, 2011-2013)

12% of students are from low-income families

29% of student population is students of color

78% English proficiency rate
CHESTERFIELD ELEMENTARY
ROCKWOOD SCHOOL DISTRICT

**SCHOOL SCORE VALUES**

- **English Language Arts**
  - Score: 413.7
- **Mathematics**
  - Score: 412.4
- **Science**
  - Score: 434.6

**NO DATA AVAILABLE - FIELD TEST ONLY**

Note: There is no data available for Social Studies because it is field test only

**SCORE VALUES FOR MINORITY STUDENTS**

- **English Language Arts**
  - Score: 351.9
- **Mathematics**
  - Score: 350.2
- **Science**
  - Score: 354.9

**Zip Code 63005 Race/Ethnicity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>%</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>15608</td>
<td>87.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Or African American</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>1.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>610</td>
<td>3.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian Or Alaskan Native</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>1154</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian &amp; Other Pacific Islander</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Race</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Or More Races</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>0.86%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Pie Chart**: 87.9% White, 6.5% Other Race, 6.5% Two Or More Races, 6.5% Asian, 0.08% American Indian Or Alaskan Native, 0.06% Native Hawaiian & Other Pacific Islander
The zip code where a student lives is a great predictor. It will likely predict the child’s race, the family’s income, and education levels. The interesting thing is, the St. Louis community knows that zip codes are predictive. Leaders in government and organizations see the inequities and know the school that has enough textbooks, desks, and teachers is a primarily white school. The Delmar Divide is a barrier that is bigger than the individual zip codes. This not-so-imaginary line defines the boundaries between race and class. Let’s make one final comparison from immediately south and north of Delmar Blvd.

Captain Elementary
Clayton School District
1.15 miles South of Delmar Blvd.

- White: 72%
- Black: 15%
- Asian: 6%
- Hispanic: 3%

Free or Reduced Lunch: 14.2%
Gifted: 6.3%
Homeless: 0%
Staffing Ratio: 12:1
Total expenditures per pupil: $17,351

Ford Elementary
St. Louis Public Schools
1 mile North of Delmar Blvd.

- Black: 100%

Free or Reduced Lunch: 100%
Gifted: 0%
Homeless: 29.9%
Staffing Ratio: 18:1
Total expenditures per pupil: $16,217
EQUITY IN EDUCATION
Many terms are thrown around to describe positive recommendations for schools. Some include equality, diversity, social justice, restorative justice, and equity. I choose the word equity because it goes beyond equality and diversity. Equality is treating everyone the same and diversity is the physical presence of people of color. These optical examples will no longer suffice to serve students of color. Equity is a shared value of justice so that students are given what they need.

Students of color often need more than white students because “schools where poverty is concentrated are systematically associated with numerous barriers to educational equity, including high rates of teacher and staff turnover, outdated and unchallenging curricula, limited extracurricular offerings, low achievement and poor graduation rates” (Orfield et al., 2012, p. 39). This is not to say that we are powerless to assist in equitable education. There is hope.

Orfield et al. (2012) argue that “many things can be done, at all levels of government and in thousands of communities, to move towards a new vision of educational and social equity” (p. 84). To overcome years of systemic racism in housing and education requires a lot of passion, practice, and persistence.

One of the first steps is creating awareness. This will lead to advocacy and ideally will change policy at the local, state, and federal level to support these students. Our students should all have a right to a quality education. The fight for equity will involve schools, teachers, families, churches, non-profits, community institutions, organizations, foundations, neighborhoods, and government to all come together and find the same courage that created this system to dismantle it.

On a macro level, we cannot be surprised that this educational system benefits the wealthy and white children when it was created to serve those very people foundationally. On a mezzo level, the "achievement gap" is perpetuated by a lack of resources to primarily black and brown schools. These schools often rely on the generosity of others to supply their classrooms with desks, books, and basic supplies. Property tax-based funding exacerbates this gap. On a micro level, school is the first institution that children experience. Historically, this institution was not created equal, or with black and brown children in mind. Every individual child should have the right to an equal education, otherwise we cannot describe our system as democratic, public, or just. One mile should not determine the quality of a child’s life.
Brown v. Board (1954) was a landmark case that envisioned educational equality for all students. Unfortunately, our schools today are more segregated now than they were in 1968. How did this happen? This report has hopefully painted the picture of where we are now and how we got here. It should not be a surprise that a system that was created to benefit some and exclude others has continued to fulfill its original goals.

Integration alone is not sufficient. Bussing did not remedy the situation, and when the courts stopped watching, it stopped happening. It’s also important to note that the bussing was a one-way street, sending children of color away from their neighborhoods for a "better education".

Housing is another area where reparations are needed. The Delmar Divide is a visual reminder of the barriers that exist for African Americans in St. Louis. We need housing policy that prohibits this racial segregation. Funding seems to be a large issue for schools in primarily Black communities. Data has been shared that shows how wealthier school districts receive more funding per pupil than impoverished districts despite higher need for those schools in poverty.

We need to address the inequities that are perpetuated by property values as the framework for school funding. The state and federal government can change where that funding comes from. Additionally, the teacher workforce is primarily white. In fact, 80 percent of teachers are white. Representation and identification is important for students of color. Furthermore, systemic racism and implicit bias contribute to discipline disparities and cause harm to students of color. I would love to see community organizations, non-profits, and neighborhood groups coming together to provide resources for all students.
THE BIG PICTURE: AFTERWORD
I would be remiss if I did not address the events that occurred in America as I worked on this report. Following the release of video footage that showed a Minneapolis police officer kneeling on the neck of an unarmed George Floyd and killing him, the nation rose up in protest. The list of those unarmed Black men and women who have lost their lives rises again.

The systemic racism and white supremacy that publicly occurs in our nation sparked an interest in this topic and ultimately, this report. This report is embedded in this context, for it is nearly impossible to research without admitting my own cultural framework. I am white, and therefore my experiences are limited to that construct. I have benefitted from the very system that I have criticized in this report. I selected to focus on the educational inequities that students of color face and how that is directly connected to housing. Because of redlining, Black folk were locked into certain neighborhoods. The government did that intentionally and purposefully. This leads me to believe that the government will play a vital role in addressing it. There are clear disparities that springboard from where people live including limited access to healthcare, food, and transportation.

People protested in the streets as I wrote this report pleading that Black Lives Matter and asking for police reform. I believe the issue of racial inequity is so interconnected to other factors that it cannot be singularly limited. However, it is beneficial to hone in on one facet in the hopes of a deeper understanding. There were many questions that were left unanswered. Do ISS/OSS rates correlate with incarceration rates? If we know segregation exists, why don’t we do anything? Has anything really changed? My hope is that this report expands the field of vision for those in positions of power or privilege to see how the modern St. Louis is not that different than it was sixty years ago.

George Floyd was killed during the writing of this report on May 25, 2020.
References


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