SEPARATE & UNEQUAL:
The Interactive Effects of Housing and Education Policies on School Segregation in Connecticut

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JUST FACTS
Ranked number three according to the Annie E. Casey 2020 Kids Count, Connecticut is lauded as having one of the best education systems in the country. But the education system is also highly unequal. On average, white children thrive while Black and Latinx children are left behind. As noted by the Kids Count Data Center, 53 percent of white fourth graders in Connecticut read proficiently, compared with only 17 percent of Black fourth graders, and 20 percent of Latinx fourth graders. Connecticut’s school policies and housing policies interact to create these inequities.

This report highlights two key findings.

• First, when there are more restrictions on the construction of multi-family housing, towns are more exclusionary—residents are wealthier, schools have more funding, and the student body within schools is whiter. Towns that allow multi-family housing by right, as opposed to by exception or not at all, have more affordable housing, smaller lot sizes, and more diverse schools. Students in towns with less zoning restrictions also experience larger student-teacher ratios and less per pupil funding, and thus do not receive the same educational opportunities as students in towns that restrict the construction of multifamily housing.

• Second, zoning laws and school attendance zones, in combination, can contribute to school segregation within Connecticut’s towns. This report examines both statewide data and then deep-dives into four Fairfield County towns—Greenwich, Stratford, Trumbull, and Weston—due to the county’s highly segregated schools, high levels of income inequality, the ongoing conversations regarding exclusionary zoning in the area, and the growing population. When examining the four town maps together, we see that the schools with the largest populations of minority students tend to be in school attendance zones that overlay areas with the least restrictive zoning regulations.

Our goal is to shed light on the ways municipal housing and education policies interact to impede and improve opportunity for and investment in Black and Latinx communities.

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First, of the 11 elementary schools in Greenwich, two have current racial imbalances, and an additional three have impending racial imbalances. The elementary schools with current racial imbalances, as well as the highest population of minority students, are located in areas zoned for multi-family housing. The school with the smallest population of minority students, which has an impending racial imbalance, is located in the most restrictive zone.

Stratford, in comparison to Greenwich, has less restrictive zoning, with smaller minimum lot size, and a larger portion of the town that allows for multi-family housing. However, we see that the least restrictive zoning is concentrated in the center of the town, along with the schools with the largest populations of minority students.
Of the four towns reviewed, Weston has the most limiting and restrictive zoning regulations. The entire town is zoned for single-family housing, and the minimum lot requirements are all two acres or above. There are no impending or current racial imbalances to observe in Weston. However, the overall population of minority students in the district is small.

Trumbull contains several school attendance zones, almost all of which allow for some multi-family housing. In addition to multi-family housing being dispersed throughout the town, we also see that there are no impending or current racial imbalances in Trumbull. It is important to note that the entire town overall has high minimum lot requirements. As mentioned earlier, these higher minimum lot size requirements increase property prices and create barriers to affordability for Black and Brown families.

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Currently, Connecticut’s housing and education policies interact to disrupt opportunity for and investment in Black and Latinx communities by failing to mitigate residential and school segregation. In order to improve opportunity for and investment in Black and Latinx communities, desegregation of Connecticut’s neighborhoods and schools is critical. The policy recommendations following were co-created in partnership with an array of community practitioners and advocates in the housing and education sectors through a Data Walk. Recommendations are categorized into three areas: housing, education, and other structural considerations.

First, to create more affordable housing, we recommend the following policy changes:
- Municipalities should allow multi-family housing by right
- Municipalities should enable accessory dwelling units (ADUs)
- Municipalities should reduce excessive parking requirements
- Municipalities should standardize permitting and hearing procedures
- The State should remove reference to maintaining the “character” of a neighborhood from statute
- The State should remove jurisdictional authority for public housing authorities (PHAs)
- The State should strengthen Section 8-30g of the Connecticut General Statutes:
  - Let desegregation determine the dollars
  - Create an appeals process for decisions from water and sewer commissions
  - Adopt a bedroom mix policy

Second, we recommend addressing segregation from the educational standpoint:
- The State should continue its push for regionalization
- The State should look to the January 10, 2020 Sheff v. O’Neill “Stipulation and Proposed Order” for an array of viable education recommendations, specifically:
  - Impact and efficacy of expanding regional pre-kindergarten centers in Hartford and suburban towns with themes that would attract students across the region
  - Identify school facilities that are underutilized or slated to close in Hartford or Sheff region suburban districts to repurpose the facility or facilities as “regional Open Choice schools” or “regional Interdistrict magnet schools” or “regional Sheff CTECS schools”

Third, we recommend considering other structural issues, specifically as it relates to income and wealth equality:
- Connecticut needs a fair tax system that works for everyone
- Connecticut needs a minimum wage in line with Connecticut’s living wage
- Connecticut needs to create additional pathways for minority homeownership:
  - Continue to Test Lenders
  - Improve Access to Credit
  - Make Reparations to Black Residents
- Connecticut needs to invest further in urban communities