



## Metro Boston Equity Initiative Issue Summary No. 1

### Segregation in Neighborhoods and Schools: Impacts on Minority Children in the Boston Region

A report by John R. Logan, Deirdre Oakley, Jacob Stowell (September, 2003)

#### **The Issues at a Glance**

**Thirty years after Boston's school desegregation order and busing crisis, metro Boston public schools remain highly segregated by race and ethnicity.**

- Despite growing racial and ethnic diversity in the region, high levels of segregation exist between minority groups and whites across metro Boston. In fact, black-white, Hispanic-white, and Asian-white segregation levels among the region's public elementary schoolchildren are all higher than national averages. Segregation between Hispanic and white public elementary school children is especially elevated.

**High segregation levels largely reflect the fact that white children are heavily concentrated in the suburbs, while minority children are over-represented in the city of Boston and surrounding satellite cities.**

- Almost 90% of public elementary schoolchildren in the region's suburbs are white, while only 13.6% in Boston are white. In contrast, blacks comprise almost 50% of total public elementary school enrollment in the city of Boston, and Hispanic schoolchildren form close to 30% in Boston and over a quarter in outlying satellite cities. White flight to the suburbs and high levels of private

school enrollment within the city contribute to the very low white share in Boston's public elementary schools.

**Segregation brings inequality: racial and ethnic minorities attend schools with higher levels of poverty and live in worse neighborhoods, while whites reap the benefits of more privileged schools and residential areas.**

- Great differences exist in school poverty levels across the metro region. In 2000, the school poverty level (as measured by the percent of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch) was 78% for the average public elementary schoolchild in city of Boston, 53% for those in the satellite cities, and 14% for those in the suburbs.

Because minorities are overwhelmingly located in the city of Boston and satellite cities while white students are disproportionately in the suburbs, minority students are much more likely to attend high poverty schools than whites. Indeed, the average black and Hispanic child in metro Boston attends a public elementary school that is over 60% poor, while the figure for the average Asian child is 40% and for the average white child, 18%.

- Similar to schools, neighborhoods vary greatly in their characteristics and

conditions across subsections of the metro Boston region. On average, neighborhoods in the city of Boston and other satellite cities have much lower median income levels, higher poverty rates, lower percentages of college graduates, and higher shares of residents who speak a language other than English at home compared to suburban neighborhoods. The very high suburbanization of white children, in contrast to minority children, puts them in more desirable residential settings.

- Create more affordable housing in the suburbs
- Monitor, sanction, and ultimately eradicate the presence of housing discrimination, which prevents many minority households from moving to the suburbs
- Continue efforts to understand and remove the hesitation that many feel in crossing historic color lines – divisions that must be bridged if the region is to achieve equal educational opportunity for all.

## **Policy Implications**

**Metro Boston must develop region-wide school desegregation plans to reduce the separate and unequal character of public education.**

- Segregation in metro Boston public schools is much more severe across the subsections of the region than within school districts. Desegregation plans *within* public school districts – while important—will nevertheless have little effect in addressing the broader racial inequality that exists within the region. To be truly effective, educational policies that aim to ameliorate racial disparities throughout metro Boston’s public schools must be regional in scope.

**Policymakers must continue efforts to discover and eliminate barriers that prevent minorities from moving to the suburbs.**

- Where people live largely determines where their children go to school. To reduce racial inequality in educational opportunity within the region, policymakers must work to ensure that all corners of the region’s housing market are truly open to all residents of the region. Necessary steps include:

Without these steps, children from all backgrounds will suffer from the missed educational opportunities that are possible in an interactive, multiracial and multiethnic region, and minority children in metro Boston will continue to pay the highest price.

*A full copy of the report can be found at:*  
[http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/research/metro/housing\\_logan.php](http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/research/metro/housing_logan.php)