

From Integration and Neo-Segregation in Minnesota

by Myron Orfield

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a) Charter Schools

Charter schools facilitate segregation in a number of ways. First, as schools of choice, they have proven convenient vehicles for white flight from diverse traditional public schools. Although all children are equally eligible to enroll in a charter, not every child is equally able to attend, due to practical obstacles such as transportation or curricular concerns. As a consequence, heavily white charters have experienced very rapid growth in Twin Cities suburbs, where traditional schools are quickly becoming more diverse.

In addition, charters are forced to recruit their student bodies from the student population, and many have opted to do so by billing themselves as racially targeted or culturally focused. Minnesota is home to Afro-, Hmong-, Latino-, and Somali-centric charter schools, which explicitly recruit students on claimed commonalities.⁹ Although there are no *explicitly* white segregated white segregated charter schools, there are a number of European-oriented schools, such as a Russian language charter (96 percent white) and a classical academy (76 percent white). In one particularly egregious case, a German immersion charter, which was 88 percent white, opened nine blocks from a traditional public school serving the same grades, which was only 8 percent white.

b) Open Enrollment

The policy of open enrollment was exempted from desegregation rules in 2001. Prior to that, certain enrollments could be rejected if they had a segregative effect.

A 2013 study examined the effect of open enrollment on district demographics. In the 2000-2001 school year, 12 percent of white students' open enrollment moves were integrative in effect, and 20 percent were segregative in effect. The remainder were neutral (i.e., between two similarly composed school districts). By 2013, over a third – 36 percent – were segregative in effect, while 19 percent were integrative in effect.

The school districts most affected by open enrollment are those in rapidly diversifying suburbs, where the policy provides an escape route for white families concerned about integrated schools. These communities include Richfield, Columbia Heights, Osseo, and Robbinsdale. Meanwhile, a number of districts serve as white flight “hubs,” receiving a significant portion of their overall student body as open enrollees from neighboring districts. These include St. Anthony, Mahtomedi, Edina, and Minnetonka.

Some districts have utilized open enrollment and diversifying neighborhoods as a strategy for recruiting wealthier student bodies. For example, four districts bordering the Minnetonka district have officially considered or implemented integrative boundary changes.

While its neighbors considered these plans, the Minnetonka school district launched an expensive and unusual paid advertising plan in local newspapers, television, and radio. According to superintendents of neighboring districts, the Minnetonka district was engaged in an

active effort to recruit skittish parents. Not only could these efforts increase white segregation in Minnetonka schools, but they undermine attempts by neighboring districts to maintain demographically balanced schools. Despite all this, the Minnetonka district is one of a handful of districts that does not accept low-income Minneapolis students through a state program called “Choice Is Yours.”

Orfield, Myron and Luce, Thomas (2014) "Charters, Choice, and the Constitution," *University of Chicago Legal Forum*: Vol. 2014: Iss. 1, Article 7.

Available at: <http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol2014/iss1/7>

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