

EDUCATIONAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE END OF COURT-ORDERED SCHOOL DESEGREGATION

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Abstract:

The Supreme Court issued three decisions in the early 1990s that dramatically altered the legal basis for court-ordered desegregation (1991 *Board of Education of Oklahoma City v. Dowell* ruling (498 U.S. 237); 1992 *Freeman v. Pitts* decision (503 U.S. 467); 1995 *Missouri v. Jenkins* (515 U.S. 70)). These decisions collectively made it easier to terminate court-mandated plans, and led to the stated goal that all long-running desegregation cases should be moved to closure and return school control to local authority. School districts under a court-ordered desegregation plan are monitored by the courts with regard to minority student performance. By removing the external monitoring, dismissal may reduce the effort expended on minority students and time-consuming bus rides may be replaced by neighborhood school attendance. Furthermore, prior research has shown that the process of release is not tightly linked to the success of the court order in producing integration (in particular, dismissal and non-dismissed districts have similar characteristics prior to release) (Reardon et al., 2011). In the aftermath of these rulings, more than half of all districts ever under court-ordered desegregation have been released from court oversight.

Recent research has shown the integrative effects of court-ordered desegregation plans erode following the end of the plan, as dismissal causes a gradual, moderate increase in segregation levels (Reardon et al., 2011; Lutz, 2011; Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor, 2006). Moreover, Reardon et al. using the most comprehensive data of court release dates that have been compiled to study this question find that this pattern is most pronounced in districts where pre-release school segregation levels were low relative to residential segregation patterns.

However, the end of race-based busing not only changed schools' racial composition, but was also often accompanied by *increases* in district resource allocation to schools in high poverty, minority neighborhoods. There is evidence that dismissed school districts sometimes engage in capital investment in minority neighborhoods, which has mitigated negative impacts on minority students. Districts often paired the new student assignment policy with programs to provide additional funds for lower student-teacher ratios, school renovation projects, learning equipment and supplies, and bonuses for teachers in high poverty schools to attempt to prevent the flight of effective teachers from inner city schools (Mickelson, Smith and Southworth 2009). Southern school districts have taken compensatory actions (investments in poorly performing neighborhood schools) to blunt the impact of dismissal on black students.ⁱ

The present paper combines this comprehensive data on the timing of court releases from desegregation plans of more than 200 school districts that occurred since 1990 (obtained from Reardon et al.) with

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nationally-representative longitudinal micro data of children born since 1980 followed through 2009. In particular, I use the Panel Study of Income Dynamics and its Child Development Supplement (PSID-CDS) matched to children's school and neighborhood characteristics and school desegregation policy variables. Using an event study framework and difference-in-difference model, I examine the impacts of the termination of mandated desegregation plans on academic achievement outcomes, including cognitive test scores, high school graduation rates, educational attainment, and non-cognitive behavioral outcomes, separately by race. Preliminary results show that the increased allocation of school resources to those in high poverty, minority neighborhoods following the release of continued court oversight actually served to mitigate the potential negative impacts of resegregation on black student achievement (at least in the short-run).

ⁱ e.g., Pinellas (St Petersburg, FL) County School Board invested \$159 million in school facilities in African-American neighborhoods after being declared unitary (Elizabeth Delay-Pelot 2007). The Nashville, Tennessee school district pledged to build 11 new schools, many in predominately black neighborhoods, when it was released from its desegregation plan (Education Week 1998). The Lafayette Parish, Louisiana school board upgraded predominantly black schools in the period immediately before its desegregation plan was dismissed (NAACP 2006).