

There are 3.6 million public school students in the six counties that make up Southern California – Ventura, Los Angeles, Orange, San Diego, San Bernardino, and Riverside. One-fifth of all Latinos in the United States attend school in Southern California.

In the last twenty years, the characteristics of the student population in Southern California have shifted dramatically. Most dramatic has been the increase in Latino students so that by 2008 one out of every two students in California schools was Latino. One in ten students in the region was Asian. Black students represent 8% of the student population. LAUSD has the highest enrollments of Latino and Black students. In 1970, the average Latino student went to an LAUSD school that was about 45% white. By 1980, the proportion of white students had decreased to 21% and, more recently, the typical Latino student in LAUSD goes to a school where 6% of the students are white. The demographics have shifted just as dramatically for areas of LAUSD where predominantly black students reside and go to school and today most black students attend a school that is around 6% white as well. By the start of the 21st century, more than two out of five Latino students and one-third of all black students in the region enrolled in intensely segregated schools – schools where 90-100% of the students were of minority backgrounds.

Race isn't the only indicator of segregated schools though. Poverty and language play key roles as well. More than half of Southern California's students are eligible for free and reduced price lunch, a rough indicator of student poverty in the area. Poor children are much more likely than non-poor children to attend schools with higher populations of black and Latino students. The same is true of linguistic ability as Latino students are most likely to attend schools with high concentrations of English Language Learners, as much as 30% of the total enrollment of their school being ELLs.

Teacher quality is a major factor in indicating students' academic success. Students in intensely segregated schools like many in LAUSD were close to three times as likely to have a teacher lacking full qualifications than those students attending majority white and Asian schools.

Why does any of this matter? For one, if you want to graduate and go to college you need access to college preparation courses (A-G requirements) and highly segregated schools experience a greater shortage of A-G courses being offered compared to white and Asian schools. Less than 50% of black and Latino 9th graders graduate on time whereas 81% of white and Asian 9th-graders graduate on time. The continued segregation of Southern California schools hurts everyone. Desegregation is a critical element in developing the region's human capital and preparing students for collaborative work and community life.

(Source of Information: The Civil Rights Project, Harvard University, March 18, 2011)