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Table of Contents:

INTRODUCTION	3
SCHOOL DESEGREGATION IN THE UNITED STATES	5
I. AFRICAN AMERICAN ADVOCACY	6
II. BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION OF TOPEKA	6
III. VICTORY FOR INTEGRATION	8
IV. TURNING BACKWARDS	9
FIGURE 1 - NUMBER OF DISTRICTS DISMISSED FROM COURT ORDER, BY YEAR AND REGION	11
V. THE SUPREME COURT RULES ON VOLUNTARY DESEGREGATION	13
VI. RESEGREGATION	16
FIGURE 2 - PROPORTION OF BLACK STUDENTS IN MAJORITY WHITE SCHOOLS IN THE SOUTH, 1954-2011	17
LITERATURE REVIEW	18
I. BENEFITS OF INTEGRATION	18
II. THE ROLE OF POLITICS	21
III. CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS	23
IV. VOLUNTARY DESEGREGATION POLICIES	24
V. CONTRIBUTION TO THE LITERATURE	32
THEORY	33
I. DEPENDENT VARIABLE	34
II. INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	34
III. EXPECTED EFFECT OF VARIABLES (HYPOTHESES)	35
TABLE 1 – SUMMARY OF INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	43
METHODOLOGY	44
I. CONSTRUCTING THE SAMPLE	44
TABLE 2 – LIST OF DISTRICTS IN MY STUDY	49
II. DATA COLLECTION	51
TABLE 3 – DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR EXPERIMENTAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS	57
TABLE 4 – DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR SAMPLE OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS, EXPERIMENTAL AND CONTROL	58
FINDINGS	59
TABLE 5 – PAIRWISE CORRELATION OF FREE & REDUCED-PRICE LUNCH AND RACE OR ETHNICITY VARIABLES	60
TABLE 6 – LOGISTIC REGRESSION OF THE ADOPTION OF VOLUNTARY SCHOOL DESEGREGATION PLANS (NO RACE OR ETHNICITY VARIABLES)	62
TABLE 7 – LOGISTIC REGRESSION OF THE ADOPTION OF VOLUNTARY SCHOOL DESEGREGATION PLANS (RACE OR ETHNICITY VARIABLES INCLUDED)	64
EXTERNAL VALIDITY	66
CONCLUSION	67
REFERENCES	70

Introduction

Various national governments around the world including South Africa, Germany, and the United States struggle with the best way to create fair, effective public schools against a legacy, and in many ways contemporary reality, of institutionalized racial segregation. As public education is an essential function of modern governments, policy makers face a political choice regarding what they should, or should not, do to redress injustice and create a system that best educates all their citizens. These choices represent questions about the agency of marginalized groups in a democracy, and the collective bargaining process that transpires between citizens, local officials, and the courts when such groups seek to effect change.

In the United States, the process of creating more egalitarian schools has meant a long and tenuous process of racial integration. The historical arc of this struggle is characterized by the interaction of individual citizens, who agitated for change, with all three branches of government. The Supreme Court played an indispensable role in determining the trajectory of this issue, as demonstrated by monumental cases such as *Sweat v. Painter* (1950), *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* (1970). Eventually, intervention by federal courts, combined with presidential and congressional power in the form of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, resulted in substantial progress towards school integration. The percentage of black students in majority white schools in the South went from 0 prior to *Brown v. Board*, to 43.5 percent by the peak of integration in 1988 (Orfield, Frankenberg, Ee, & Kuscera, 2014).

By the 1990s however, the process of desegregation entered into an ongoing period of reversal. The Supreme Court began issuing a series of decisions, starting with *Board of Education of Oklahoma City v. Dowell* (1991) that significantly lowered the standards for integration that districts had to meet in order to be returned to local control (Southern Poverty

Law Center, 2004). As more and more schools have been granted “unitary” status, meaning their federal desegregation order has been lifted by the courts, more and more have “resegregated.”

Today, public schools are more segregated than they were in the 1970s (Potter, Quick, & Davies, 2016). This is a high stakes situation because resegregation counteracts the benefits to students that integration provides. No other policy action in the U.S. has been as effective at narrowing the black-white racial achievement gap in public schools or preparing our citizens to flourish in a diverse workplace than racial integration (Hannah-Jones, 2015). Despite this reversal, there are fewer than 100 school districts around the country that are attempting to counteract the resegregation process by voluntarily adopting modern desegregation policies (Potter et al, 2016).

The central question of this thesis focuses on voluntary school desegregation plans and their adoption. With more than 13,500 school districts in the country in the 2013-2014 school year, and less than 100 districts engaged in voluntary desegregation, these districts are extremely rare (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Why is it that some rare school districts choose to adopt voluntary school desegregation policies, while others within the same state do not? It is the goal of this study to better understand the dynamics of communities that have willfully decided to enter into a historically challenging collective bargaining process, and have successfully implemented these policies. It is important to study these school districts because the successful adoption of such strategies may be the nation’s most viable approach to counteracting segregation in the modern era.

Upon consulting several lists of school districts currently engaged in voluntary desegregation created by other researchers, namely the 2016 study by The Century Foundation (Potter et al.), I have compiled a sample of 119 school districts to examine. This sample includes

60 districts engaged in voluntary desegregation, and 59 control districts. By collecting data regarding a range of independent variables, I seek to identify any trends in the ideological, economic, geographic, and social characteristics of the districts that opt-in to voluntary desegregation.

In the following sections, I first provide background information regarding the trajectory of history that connects *Brown* to today's voluntary desegregation. After reviewing the existing theoretical literature on this topic, I will outline the ways in which my research contributes to the existing body of knowledge regarding voluntary school desegregation efforts. Subsequently, I will explain my theory and hypothesis, the methodology of my study, and the data that I have collected. Next, I present my analysis of the data. I conclude by discussing the external validity of my findings and reflecting on the need for further research on this topic.

School Desegregation in the United States

The role of voluntary school desegregation policies is best understood within the larger historical narrative about race in public education that stretches back to *Brown*. The decision that commenced the desegregation movement was *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* in 1954 because it stated that the segregated system of education in place was illegal. The court declared that racially separate schools were “inherently unequal” and violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2004). With this case, the Court unanimously overturned *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896). *Plessy* had declared “de jure,” or purposeful, segregation to be legal, under the claim that schools were “separate but equal.” In a society governed by Jim Crow segregation, the mandate to integrate black children and white children in the classroom sent shockwaves throughout the country (Boger & Orfield, 2005).

I. African American Advocacy

It is critical to point out that the advocacy of the African American community pre-dates, and is indispensable to, the decision by the Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board* (1954). Such a landmark decision would have never come about without individuals who were willing to advocate for change. Further, it required subsequent African American individuals to take their cases to court when *Brown* was violated in order to make sure the law was enforced.

By the early 20th Century, African American communities expressed varying opinions about how to achieve access to quality education within a system that marginalized them, most visibly in the South through Jim Crow (Jirout, 2016). World War I prompted many African Americans to begin organizing for improved education because the war highlighted that although black Americans were “free” and could serve their country abroad, they could not access quality education at home. Through membership in organizations like the NAACP, African Americans in Jim Crow strongholds like North Carolina lobbied for improving the schools that served black children. The government feared that new advocacy by the black community would lead to broad social unrest. For this reason, they made improvements to black schools but perpetuated the idea that black communities needed to lead the charge for improvements, and “help themselves.” In this way, they hoped to channel black activism towards their communities rather than towards the establishment (Jirout, 2016). As a result, there was a rapid growth of school programs and resources funded by African American communities during this time period. This led to such opportunities as vocational training, “which weakened Jim Crow’s ability to dictate a child’s future based solely on skin color” (Jirout, 2016, pg. 459).

II. Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka

Despite African American efforts to make the most of public education resources under Jim Crow, the quality of segregated schools remained vastly unequal. As outcry for integrated

education built, Southern white leaders began improving black schools themselves in an effort to prevent a decision like *Brown* that would mandate integration. In 1954, the University of North Carolina Press published *The Negro and the Schools*, in which Harry Ashmore describes Southern schools as, “a region with... last-minute efforts at equalization under the threat of imposed desegregation but with pervasive... inequality remaining after nearly sixty years of ‘separate but equal’ education” (qtd in. Boger & Orfield, 2014, pg. 1). This description points to the need for *Brown*; however, the reaction to the decision was not monolithic among the black community. For many, integration meant losing the upgrades to their separate education that they had worked hard to attain. Many viewed integration as the process of becoming “second-class citizens” again in white schools (Jirout, 2016). Nonetheless, in *Brown vs. the Board of Education* the Supreme Court called for an end of a system in which there were racially identifiable “white” and “black” schools, and ongoing resource disparity (Holley-Walker, 2010).

Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote in his decision that “separate educational facilities are inherently unequal,” however, the attempts to improve schools by southern officials, discussed above, prevented the issue of resources from being the main focus of his decision. The paramount factor in his decision was what he described as the societal effect of segregation itself. He wrote that to separate black children “from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone” (qtd. in Hannah-Jones, 2014b, pg. 3). He emphasized that school integration was an important step towards integrating society more generally.

The *Brown* decision instructed schools to desegregate, and *Brown II* in 1955 called for desegregation “with all deliberate speed,” (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2004). There was no

accompanying enforcement mechanism, however, so *Brown* had little immediate effect on schools. School officials in the South capitalized on the ambiguous language of the Supreme Court to delay integration through a combination of avoidance and “obstruction politics.” Obstruction politics ranged from acts like lengthy school board votes and prolonged lawsuits, to the Virginia legislature directly threatening to close any school with a desegregation order. A violent resistance also emerged that included campus riots and Alabama Gov. George Wallace’s infamous stand in the schoolhouse door, where he physically blocked two black students from entering the school, proclaiming, “segregation today, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever” (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2014). By 1963, almost a decade after the decision, only 1% of black students were enrolled in majority white schools in the South (Hannah-Jones, 2014a). In this time period, the decision did however, delegitimize segregation and encourage Southern black people to confront racism with a greater level of confidence and optimism. (Boger & Orfield, 2005). Frequently, desegregation only came to a district once an individual or the Department of Justice sued the school district. When found in violation of the Constitution, the district was then given a personalized federal court order to desegregate, complete with a plan and timetable for doing so. These orders gained a true enforcement mechanism with the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Under this law, if school districts did not comply with desegregation mandates they stood to lose the increasing amount of school funding allocated to them under the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act. (Boger & Orfield, 2005).

III. Victory for Integration

Eventually, the power of the Supreme Court and federal district court judges empowered by the Civil Rights Act proved very successful at desegregating America’s schools. In 1968 with *Green v. New Kent County* the Court declared that no more delays to desegregation were

permissible. The decision declared that segregation was to be eliminated “root and branch” from the education system, meaning no schools’ student population or faculty should be “racially identifiable,” and all resources and curriculum should be equalized (The NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. et al, 2005). Change was most dramatic in the American South. Southern schools became the most integrated for a few reasons. It was due, in part, to the extra oversight federal judges had to levy in order to get these districts to desegregate. The courts issued the largest number of district-specific desegregation orders to districts in the South (Frankenberg, 2014). Additionally, many large cities in the South were part of larger school districts that included both city and suburbs, unlike in the North. This meant that, generally speaking, mostly black and Latino students could be bused from low-income, urban areas to attend white-majority schools in the suburbs, without ever having to leave the district. In other parts of the country, many large cities already had few remaining white students, making integration more difficult, short of interdistrict cooperation (Boger & Orfield, 2005). Despite its many challenges, by the peak of integration in 1988, *Brown* seemed to be a proven success. Between 1971 and 1988, the racial achievement gap between black and white 13-year-olds was narrowed by almost half (Hannah-Jones, 2014b). Both high school graduation levels and college-going rates soared among African American students. In the early 1950s, around 25 percent of black students were graduating from high school. Some federal statistics put this number at 75 percent before resegregation began to take hold in the 1990s (Boger & Orfield, 2005, pg. 7).

IV. Turning Backwards

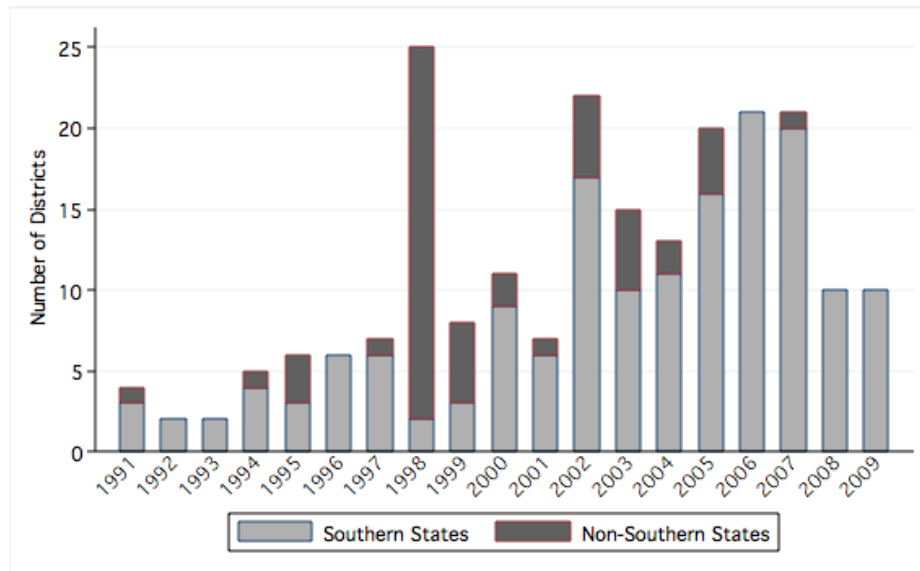
The Supreme Court showed the first signs of retreating from the immense progress made in the way of equal education in 1974 with *Milliken v. Bradley*. In this decision the Court made it harder for district courts to order metropolitan-wide desegregation policies that would

desegregate urban school districts across district lines (NAACP et. al, 2005). This meant that many of those racially-isolated, urban districts in regions outside of the South would never feel the effects of *Brown*. The most significant reversal of integration came in 1991 with *Oklahoma City Board of Education vs. Dowell*. In this ruling the Court seemingly changed its mind about the prior expectations for desegregation, expressed in *Green*. Instead of requiring that schools eliminate traces of racial discrimination “root and branch” from all elements of the school environment, *Dowell* stated that districts have met the goal of integration if they eliminate discrimination “to the extent practicable” (NAACP et. al, 2005). This meant that courts could dissolve a district’s court order and grant them “unitary” status, returning them to local control, if they had complied with it “in good faith... for a reasonable period of time” and if they claimed that they needed to revert to segregated neighborhood schools for “educational [not racial] purposes” (Boger & Orfield, 2005, pg. 11).

The criteria upon which schools are granted unitary status is of critical importance because there is a direct correlation between a district’s court order being lifted, and that district resegregating (Reardon, Grewal, Kalogrides, Greenberg, 2011). Between the *Dowell* decision, *Freeman vs. Pitts* (1992) and *Missouri vs. Jenkins* (1995) the Court continued to make it increasingly easy for school districts to be released from their court order, regardless of whether or not they had successfully reduced racial isolation in their schools (NAACP et. al, 2005). This ideological shift in expectations emerged when seven of the nine members of the Supreme Court had been appointed by Republican presidents with conservative views on civil rights, and under a chief justice who personally opposed *Brown* earlier in his career while serving as a Supreme Court clerk (Boger & Orfield, 2005).

The Court's decisions in the 1990s spurred a host of "unitary" decisions for districts, effectively lifting their court orders. In addition to the ideological shift in the Supreme Court, these decisions can be attributed to blatant suspension of judicial activism, and "integration fatigue" on behalf of district court judges—many of whom had faced death threats for their determination to enforce desegregation (Parker, 2003; Hannah-Jones, 2014a). Under President George W. Bush, the Department of Justice also began taking an active role in ending segregation orders under the claim that they were never intended to be permanent. Between 2000 and 2008, the Bush administration instructed the DOJ to close lingering desegregation orders wherever possible; 60% of the districts that have been granted unitary status since 1967 were released from their orders in this eight-year period. As a result of these multiple factors, there was a large increase in the rate of districts granted unitary status after 1991 and persisting through at least 2007 (Reardon et al., 2011).

Figure 1 - Number of Districts Dismissed from Court Order, by Year and Region



Source: Reardon et al., 2011

Many of these districts have been released from their orders despite the fact that segregation prevails in their schools. This often happens because judges incorrectly interpret the “lack of action” in cases to mean that the problems have been solved. Other times, it is because it is the path of least resistance. Take for example, Gadsden City Schools in Alabama. A judge released them from their court order in 2000; however, at the time they still operated a 90-percent black high school, had not adopted any specific desegregation policy, and still had a school named after the founder of the Ku Klux Klan. When the district court judge in the case was asked why he did not do more to ensure that the district complied with their order before release, he said it “would only invite another dispute” (Hannah-Jones, 2014b).

Wendy Parker (2003) explains the rise in unitary districts by saying, “district court judges relinquished even more power [to the districts] than is compelled by the admittedly pro-defendant standards developed by the Supreme Court” and became willing to accept lingering segregation (pg. 1625). At the height of integration, approximately 750 school districts were under a court order, and around 300 remain under one today (Hannah-Jones, 2014a). A

significant consequence of this process is that once a district has been granted unitary status, it is harder for minority families to win a case when suing for greater integration (Hannah-Jones, 2014a).

V. The Supreme Court Rules on Voluntary Desegregation

Some newly declared “unitary” districts chose to continue pursuing integration of their own accord by maintaining race as a factor for school assignment. Several such plans came to be protested by white families. In 2007, the Supreme Court ruled on one such school district’s voluntary integration plan, that of Jefferson County School District in Louisville, Kentucky, and a similar plan by Seattle School District No. 1. in the case *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1*. Decided in 2007, this case has come to be commonly known as “PICS.” In PICS, the court ruled that these voluntary race-based integration plans were unconstitutional. The Court decided that the district’s use of students’ race in school assignment was not “narrowly tailored” to meet school diversity goals. Justice Anthony Kennedy asserted that the school districts could “achieve their stated ends through different means” (qtd. in Kahlenberg, 2007). Essentially the Court ruled that if districts are not under federal mandate to consider race, they cannot implement race-based school assignment policies without first considering other, race-neutral demographic factors (Hossain & Reed, 2016). This was the first time that the Court went beyond simply ending federal desegregation orders, to limiting the ways in which school districts could voluntarily integrate their students by race (Frankenberg, 2014).

With a judiciary system that no longer enforces integration measures, the PICS decision caused concern about how dramatically it would limit districts from voluntarily pursuing integration (Frankenberg, 2014). Law professor James Ryan asserted that this decision “does not change much on the ground” because the truth is that the majority of schools have stopped

prioritizing integration as a method for school reform a long time ago. He believes that the decision itself does not have as many tangible consequences for schools as it has symbolic impact. To Ryan, the idea that schools should teach students how to cooperate with those of diverse backgrounds while learning and working was “pushed into the background” before PICS, largely because of the reversal in the posture of the Supreme Court itself. For this reason, the consequences of this decision will only affect a small number of schools, because only a few are even attempting to do this. Of those voluntarily desegregating, even fewer are employing broad-based, voluntary integration plans like the ones struck down in the PICS decision. Ryan argues that the main consequence of this decision is that it takes away “hope” that the Court would rule “firmly on the side of school integration,” and it was a missed opportunity for the Court to endorse voluntary integration as a means to pursue the goals of *Brown* in this century (Ryan, 2007, pg. 157). Reardon and Rhodes explain the symbolism of the decision by saying it represented, “the growing societal de-emphasis on race and race-based remedies for racial and social inequality” (Reardon & Rhodes, 2011).

Jefferson County Public Schools, one of the defendants in PICS, has continued to be dedicated to integrated schools since their plan was struck down. They are an example that despite PICS, districts can continue to integrate if they design their plan in accordance with the Supreme Court decision. This district has worked to maintain their integrated schools since they were originally forced to desegregate by a federal court order in the 1970s. They implemented their voluntary desegregation plan when their order was lifted in 2000. After defending their plan to the Supreme Court but having their plan struck down, they have reworked their plan to be legally permissible by using socioeconomic and other considerations in “clustering” students and then busing them to achieve the desired student assignment. Today, they are one of a few

districts in the entire country that still buses students among urban and suburban neighborhoods. Whereas other districts composed of urban and rural portions are plagued by the “struggling inner city schools” and “wealthy suburban schools” dichotomy, the most highly desired high school by parents in Jefferson County is located downtown (Semuels, 2015).

Many graduates of the Jefferson County School system spoke openly in protest of the decision in PICS, including parents who were students at the time of forced busing in the 1970s (Semuels, 2015). Their outrage stemmed from the fact that they learned first-hand that Louisville has benefited from an integrated school system. Gary Orfield (qtd. in Semuels, 2015) points out that while Louisville has similar racial makeup and faces similar urban challenges as places like Detroit and Richmond, Virginia, Louisville has fared much better than the other two cities in certain economic and social ways as a result of their integrated school system. This includes less housing segregation as a result of “white flight,” according to a study by Genevieve Siegel-Hawley (2013), which has kept home values and tax revenues in Louisville stable—not the case for the struggling housing market of Detroit. Siegel-Hawley’s central finding was that in some ways good “school policy can become housing policy,” and good housing policy economically strengthens cities (Siegel-Hawley, 2013). Despite apparent benefits to the community, and improved economic outcomes for low-income students, the persistence shown by Louisville in desegregating its schools is unique (Hannah-Jones, 2014b).

Jefferson County’s dedication to integrated education sparked my interest in the topic of this thesis. Louisville seems to suggest that, especially after PICS, if a district is voluntarily desegregating today they must persist despite legal and social challenges, and have a firm political commitment to preserving integration. Jefferson County’s strong economic and educational attainment indicators led me to want to survey the other districts with such policies,

and learn more about the sources of the persistence in districts that have stuck by the original promise of *Brown*, seemingly against all odds.

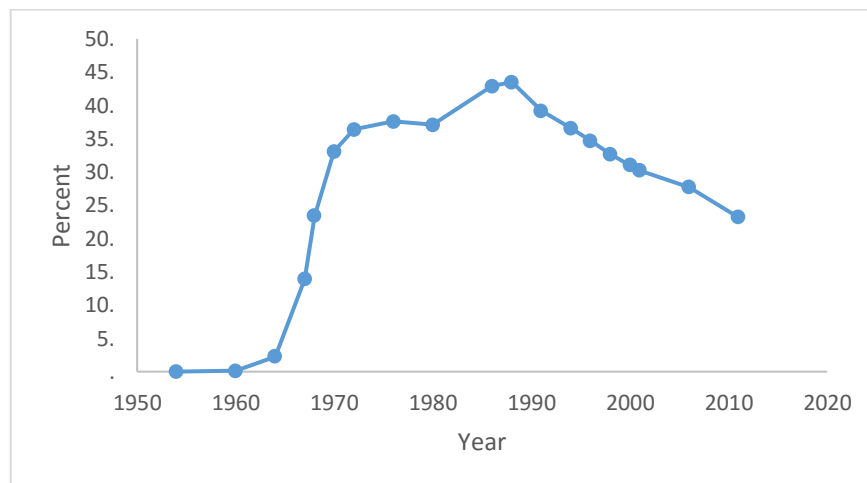
It is unclear how many schools that had not adopted a voluntary desegregation policy at the time of the PICS ruling were deterred from ever doing so because of the decision. In 2011 the U.S. Department of Education and the Department of Justice issued guidance on permissible ways that districts can still pursue racial diversity in schools in the wake of PICS. Despite the opportunity to pursue “generalized race-based approaches,” it is likely that many districts avoid using race as a factor in student assignment all together. Lawyer Roger Clegg commented after PICS that “prudent school districts should shy away from any use of race in assigning students for fear of costly and disruptive litigation” (qtd. in Ryan, 2007, pg. 249). Ryan judges that this fear can serve as both a “real deterrent” or a “convenient excuse for inaction” to districts that are considering voluntary plans (Ryan, 2007, pg. 249). On the other hand, the PICS decision may have the opposite effect on the approximately 300 school districts that remain under a federal desegregation order. PICS has no bearing on the validity of assignment plans that consider race because they were previously mandated to do so by the Court. Ryan estimates that if a district assigns students by race and would like to continue doing so, and the local district court agrees with the goal of racial integration, both parties have an incentive to keep the court order in place. In this way, some districts may opt to “voluntarily integrate” by never petitioning to have their order closed (Ryan, 2007).

VI. Resegregation

Overall, as a result of the uptick in districts being granted unitary status, regardless of whether or not they have eliminated segregation, and the overwhelming likelihood that districts will return to a neighborhood school model once released, America’s current school system is

characterized by dramatic resegregation. Cases like Jefferson County schools in Louisville are the exception. By many measures, schools are more racially segregated now than they were in the 1970s. Indeed, “more than one-third of all black and Latino students attend schools that are more than 90 percent non-white,” (Potter et al., 2016). Resegregation has indeed been the most pronounced for Latino students, particularly those living in the western region of the country (Orfield et al., 2014). An “apartheid school” is defined as one that has a white student population of 1 percent or less. The number of apartheid schools in the U.S. grew from 2,762 in 1988 to 6,727 by 2011 (Hannah-Jones, 2014b). While there were 43.5% of black students in the South by 1988, the peak of desegregation, that number had dropped to 23.2% by 2011, and is projected to continue dropping (Orfield et al., 2014, pg. 10-11).

Figure 2 - Proportion of Black Students in Majority White Schools in the South, 1954-2011



Source: Data from Gary Orfield’s report, *Brown at 60: Great Progress, a Long Retreat and an Uncertain Future* (2014).

Orfield and Frankenberg contend that although progress has been lost, black students in the south are clearly better off now than they were prior to *Brown*. Black students are “ten times

as likely to be in majority-white schools as they were when the 1964 Civil Rights Act was passed” (Orfield et al., 2014, pg. 11). The “progress lost” is that segregation has significantly increased today in comparison to 1970. As Erica Frankenberg summarizes it, although *Brown* did positively impact the South, “the country still has a system of schools in which poor black and Latino students often are not in the same schools as white, middle class students (Frankenberg, 2014).

Literature Review

Historical analysis of school desegregation, as explored above, makes up a good portion of the literature on this topic. There are, however, several additional research areas of note. These include the increasing amount of literature on the benefits and importance of school integration, the merits of the shift from racial integration to socioeconomic integration, the changing demographics of the country, the political nature of desegregation, and emerging research specifically on the prevalence and usage of voluntary desegregation policies themselves. In this section, I review this research and examine how my thesis makes a unique contribution to the literature. Areas of research outside the scope of my study include emerging strategies for encouraging the adoption of voluntary desegregation.

I. Benefits of Integration

This paper relies on the underlying assumption that racial integration of schools is a societal good. This assumption is supported by the documented benefits to both students of color and white students that occur as a result of integration. It is important to note that the benefits of racial integration are not a result of merely putting black students and white students side by side in the classroom (Hannah-Jones, 2015). Rather, the benefits are a result of creating mixed-income classrooms. Schools that are majority black and Latino also tend to be overwhelmingly

low-income, due to the strong relationship between race and socioeconomic status in this country (Orfield et al., 2014). For this reason, minority students in segregated schools are not only segregated from white students, they are isolated from middle-class students. This is detrimental because learning in classrooms with middle-class students is a central predictor of academic success (NAACP et. al, 2005).

Learning in classrooms with middle-class students improves the educational outcomes of low-income students for several reasons. First, white, middle-class students tend to have better facilities and resources (Hannah-Jones, 2015). Second, middle-class students, on average, have more developed vocabularies than low-income children, and higher educational expectations (Kahlenberg, 2001). This creates a more rigorous, engaging classroom environment. When low-income children attend school with middle-class peers, they also benefit from the involvement of middle-class parents. Middle-class parents, who tend to work fewer jobs and own cars, are more likely to volunteer in the classroom, join the Parent-Teacher Association, and hold school officials accountable. Additionally, middle-class schools attract more highly qualified teachers than low-income schools do. These teachers are more likely to be teaching in their field of expertise and have high academic expectations. Not only is the quality of instruction better, but middle-class schools also tend to offer more advanced curriculum, such as Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) classes (Kahlenberg, 2001).

Due to the creation of mixed-income classrooms, researchers have documented empirically that the racial school desegregation of the 1970s and 1980s was the most effective strategy tried yet, or since, in closing the racial achievement gap (Hannah-Jones, 2015). In fact, the rise of alternative strategies to desegregation have sometimes compounded the problem. As an example, the No Child Left Behind Act was championed as a minority equity policy. Rather

than lift up struggling schools, it sanctioned schools who fared the worst in standardized testing, often as a result of racial and socioeconomic segregation, and imposed unrealistic achievement expectations on them (Boger & Orfield, 2005).

The benefits of desegregation are significant for both students of color and white students. Indeed, the literature documents that there were no diminished outcomes for white students during school integration; rather, they experienced improvements in their ability to discuss issues across racial and ethnic lines (Boger & Orfield, 2005). A study by Rucker Johnson, public policy professor at UC Berkeley (2014), found that black Americans who attended integrated schools as a result of federal mandate were “more likely to graduate, go on to college, and earn a degree than black Americans who attended segregated schools” (qtd. in Hannah-Jones, 2016, pg. 7). He also found that they made more money, were less likely to spend time in jail, and were healthier. His findings replicated Orfield’s finding that none of these benefits to black Americans decreased the outcomes of white Americans. White students in integrated schools perform just as well as those who attend segregated schools, despite any logistical burden such as increased travel time to school (Rucker, 2015). Further, white students who graduated from desegregated schools are more likely to live in integrated neighborhoods, work in integrated work places, help break down racial stereotypes, and develop relationships across racial lines (Holley-Walker, 2010). As The Century Foundation phrased it in their report on voluntary socioeconomic integration, “students [of both races] in racially and socioeconomically integrated schools experience academic, cognitive, and social benefits that are not available to students in racially isolated, high-poverty environments” (Potter et al., 2016). These benefits are denied to students when segregation occurs, regardless of whether it is the

result of racism (de jure segregation) or the result of a traditional, neighborhood school model in a racially segregated community (de facto segregation).

II. The Role of Politics

As political scientist Jeffrey Raffel explained in his case study of school desegregation in Wilmington, Delaware, the process of implementing federal desegregation mandates was deeply political. Evidence from the literature suggests that this characterization also holds for voluntary desegregation. In 1980 Raffel argued that desegregation cannot be analyzed through an apolitical framework because at its core, desegregation was a community-wide bargaining process. The Supreme Court ordered the desegregation, but it was up to school districts to figure out how to go about changing the status quo in a way that minimized the disruption of basic community relationships. Although local leaders frequently opposed school desegregation themselves, once their district came under a direct mandate, it was in their best interest to carry out the reorganization of students and transportation in a way that gained popular support. Administrators and school board members alike needed to maintain popular support in order to keep their jobs or be re-elected, respectively, and to increase the likelihood of positive educational results (Raffel, 1980).

The process of gaining popular support in implementing desegregation is challenging because it is characterized by conflicts among the goals and means of different sectors of the community. Raffel's study of Wilmington demonstrated that with court-mandated desegregation, community differences were exacerbated by the fact that national interest groups became heavily involved. Groups such as the NAACP, the National Association for Neighborhood Schools, and the Justice Department vied to influence the bargaining process in hopes of promoting their preferences and swaying the legal precedents that were being formed (Raffel, 1980).

Like federally-mandated desegregation, voluntary desegregation is also highly political. It is political for the very basic premise that it necessitates choices that favor some groups of students and inconvenience others. Decisions must be made about which students (white, black, Latino, low-income, affluent, etc.) get what school assignment, when, and how it will be implemented. Although it is not a claim asserted by this thesis, one could assert that voluntary school integration is actually more political in nature than the federally mandated variety, as it removes the central actor of the federal judiciary, and the bargaining process must be negotiated on a case-by-case basis within the community.

Without the external force of a federally-mandated desegregation order, voluntary desegregation has come about through a variety of piece-meal collaborations. Examples in the literature of actors that advocate for voluntary desegregation range from parents, to superintendents, to mayors, and others. In La Crosse, Wisconsin, one of the first districts to adopt a socioeconomic-based, voluntary integration plan in 1992, the process was set in motion when two new elementary schools needed to be built to relieve overcrowding. Teachers in the district recognized that student outcomes would be improved if they could break up concentrations of poverty in the district. Eventually, the teachers approached their principals, and nine elementary school principals wrote the Board of Education urging them to draw the new boundaries in a way that promoted socioeconomic integration. With support of the teacher's union, the Board approved the plan (Kahlenberg, 2007). Another example comes from Wake County Public Schools in Raleigh, North Carolina. Here, a conservative majority school board ended Wake's longstanding racial integration policy in 2009 after a contentious school board election. Many have contended that the Koch brothers actually helped finance the campaigns of conservative school board members, in order to help them be elected, and make this decision (Keung Hui,

2014). Then, in 2013, Wake returned to their diversity efforts when more progressive school board members “won a political fight,” replacing anti-integration school board members, and creating a new, socioeconomic-based integration plan (Potter et al., 2016, pg. 9).

If policymakers hope to advocate for an increase in the adoption of voluntary desegregation orders over time, it will be important to evaluate the type of advocates and political coalitions that are the most successful at implementing them. It was not feasible in this study to examine the different types of political agency involved in all 60 districts that are voluntarily desegregating, but this is a valuable aim for follow-up research. It is my goal that my nation-wide survey of characteristics will provide some insight into the community-based bargaining process in question by providing an overview of what these rare communities look like, across the board.

III. Changing Demographics

Erica Frankenberg’s analysis of voluntary integration in “Assessing the Status of School Desegregation Sixty Years After Brown,” includes an analysis of the national demographic and the changing context for integration. Although I examine voluntary integration within the narrative of *Brown*, Frankenberg explores how integration is no longer an issue of integrating black students into white schools. The Latino population has grown dramatically in this country since *Brown*. In 1954, 1.5% of the country was Hispanic. By 2010, that number has grown to 16.3% of the population (Frankenberg, 2014). There has also been a growth of Asians and other minority groups in the country. Public school enrollment today is barely majority white: 51.5% of K-12 public school students are white. The South, where the majority of federal court mandates were targeted, and the West are now majority non-white regions in terms of public school, K-12 students (Orfield et al., 2014). Latino students outnumber African American

students in the South, and in the West, Latino students are the largest group, followed by white students (Frankenberg, 2014). This demonstrates that ongoing voluntary integration efforts must be thought of within a more pluralistic framework than the black-white narrative resulting from *Brown v. Board*. This trend also informs another changing factor of the context: the new research on the harms of segregation. Though previously discussed above, this growing research has grave implications for the growing Latino population. Civil rights researcher Gary Orfield has documented how the combination of linguistic segregation and high-stakes testing in English has negatively impacted the educational outcomes of Latino students in a unique and detrimental way (Boger & Orfield, 2005).

IV. Voluntary Desegregation Policies

Below, I will discuss the literature that specifically pertains to voluntary desegregation orders. This literature ranges from researchers who have written about the legality of voluntary orders post-PICS, to information on the most popular approaches to voluntary desegregation.

i. The Post-PICS Legal Landscape

Understanding the legal landscape of school desegregation post-PICs is essential to understanding the seeming shift to socioeconomic integration strategies. In the wake of PICS, “the use of individual student race in voluntarily adopted school assignment plans... is no longer legally permissible in most cases” (qtd. in Reardon & Rhodes, 2011). Despite the turn away from explicitly race-based measures, it is still possible to consider race in voluntary desegregation plans if carefully ensuring that the districts first consider suitable race-neutral approaches to integration. If the race-neutral approaches are not suitable to “effectively achieve diversity” or require “sacrificing particular educational missions or priorities,” then policies that consider race are permissible. To avoid the threat of legal action, however, the few school systems that are

practicing voluntary integration are mainly turning to socioeconomic integration, or consider race as one of many other considerations (Potter et al., 2016).

ii. Benefits of Socioeconomic Integration

Because many districts fear legal objection under the above restrictions, the majority of voluntary desegregation plans today avoid race altogether and utilize socioeconomic measures for integration. Such plans classify students by factors like neighborhood poverty rate, free or reduced-price lunch eligibility, or parental education level for the purpose of school assignment in order to ensure diverse student enrollments at each school in the district. The goal is for each school's student population to be roughly socioeconomically representative of the district's socioeconomic composition as a whole (Reardon & Rhodes, 2011).

Many scholars, including Richard Kahlenberg, argue that socioeconomic measures like family income are ideal race-neutral means that school districts should turn to in consideration of this legal landscape. For one thing, socioeconomic class is not a protected class under the Fourteenth Amendment, making SES-based school assignment policies perfectly legal (Reardon & Rhodes, 2011). It is clearly very appealing for school districts to avoid lawsuits. Secondly, there is strong evidence that SES-based integration will produce racial desegregation, whether purposed to do so or not, given the strong correlation between race and class in the U.S (Kahlenberg, 2007). Thirdly, as discussed above, the reason that the mandated racial integration of the 1970s and 80s produced such salient benefits for African American students was because racial integration resulted in the creation of mixed-income classrooms. Kahlenberg explains: "Breaking up concentrations of poverty is not, as one judge suggested, a 'clumsier proxy device' for obtaining a certain racial result; it is a powerful educational strategy for raising student achievement" (Kahlenberg, 2007, pg. 3). Findings from the 1966 federally commissioned

Coleman Report support Kahlenberg’s claim—it found that “the social composition of the student body was the most influential school factor for student achievement,” not racial diversity (Potter et al., 2016).

It is unclear and/or highly variable whether or not SES-based integration strategies truly produce increased racial desegregation. A study by Sean Reardon and Lori Rhodes suggests (although the sample was small) that the effects of socioeconomic school integration plans on racial school integration levels are dependent on the strength of the mechanism employed to produce socioeconomic integration, whether there was previously a race-based integration plan in place, and whether the plan augments or supplants a race-based integration plan (Reardon & Rhodes, 2011). Although the racial implications of SES-based plans are not fully understood, it is clear that the limited number of districts that continue to pursue integration after the PICS decision do so using SES-based strategies. These policies are sometimes implemented in conjunction with race-based considerations, and sometimes not (Potter et al., 2016). There are specific benefits to race-based integration, discussed above, including the fact that students gain an increased understanding and respect for racial and ethnic groups other than their own; however, SES-based integration may be the most legally-viable strategy for breaking up concentrations of poverty and increasing educational outcomes for minority students, to-date (Potter et al., 2016).

iii. Clarifying the Designation “Voluntary”

For a school district to adopt a desegregation policy “voluntarily,” they cannot remain under a federal court mandate, or their decision is not unconstrained. Unfortunately, there is a lack of knowledge about which districts were under federal court order, and which remain under court order. Up-to-date information about the status of both federal desegregation mandates from

district courts, and voluntary desegregation orders issued by the U.S. Department of Education, are essential because they clarify which districts are actually doing this *voluntarily*.

Districts that are engaged in a “voluntary desegregation order” with the Office for Civil Rights at the Dept. of Education are not enacting these policies on their own accord, despite the confusion of the name. These districts have agreed to implement desegregation policies because they know that if they do not, they can be stripped of their federal funding by the Department of Education. Therefore, they enter into “voluntary” agreements proactively in order to avoid having their funding removed. In order to compile an accurate list of districts engaged in voluntary desegregation, I needed a list of who is still under court or Dept. of Education order.

Investigative journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones of the *New York Times* has done considerable work organizing the incomplete records of federal desegregation orders. When Hannah-Jones began looking into desegregation orders, she found that, “this once-powerful force [for integration] is in considerable disarray” (Hannah-Jones, 2014a). Working with ProPublica, Hannah-Jones found that “scores of school districts do not know the status of their desegregation orders, have never read them, or erroneously believe that orders have been ended” (Hannah-Jones, 2014a). She found that one contributing factor to this chaos was that federal agencies had allowed some orders to go unmonitored for decades. Using legal databases, academic studies, and contacting over 160 school districts around the country, ProPublica compiled the most comprehensive and accurate data on desegregation orders currently available. Hannah-Jones, Jeff Larson, and Mike Tygas with ProPublica created and published a tool in which one can search for any school district that was once under a desegregation order and learn what year their order was lifted, or whether it remains active (2014). Of critical importance to my thesis, Hannah-Jones and Yue Qiu published a national survey of desegregation orders, in which one can view

the open court desegregation orders and the active Department of Education voluntary orders, by state (Qiu & Hannah-Jones, 2014). This tool allowed me to eliminate all non-voluntary districts from my thesis sample, as discussed in the methodology section. My thesis would not have been possible without Hannah-Jones' contributions to the literature through these tools.

iv. Prevalence of Voluntary Integration Policies

According to Reardon and Rhodes, voluntary SES-based integration policies are relatively new, but do pre-date PICS. Many districts engaged in voluntary desegregation did so as a means of warding off resegregation after their court order was lifted, and elected to implement SES-based strategies over race-based ones prior to the PICS ruling. Reardon and Rhodes attribute this to the same growing “societal de-emphasis on race” that resulted in the PICS decision. For this reason, the majority of districts engaged in SES-based desegregation actually implemented their plans prior to 2007 (Reardon & Rhodes, 2011).

Holley-Walker (2010) surveyed the prevalence of certain student assignment plans being implemented across districts in the South that have recently become unitary. Her piece examines districts in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina and South Carolina that have become unitary after 2004. Holley-Walker summed up the post-PICS legal landscape saying, “Without those court orders, the school districts are faced with choices about whether to continue to make racial integration a priority and what legally permissible strategies the school districts may employ” (Holley-Walker, 2010, pg. 877). Reading this analysis allowed me to narrow in on the question that interests me: why certain districts choose to continue making racial integration a priority and others do not. Holley-Walker's study identifies the districts in these seven southern states that have been granted unitary status, analyzes the trends among those who are granted this status by the courts, and surveys the student assignment plans

adopted by these districts and the trends therein. Interestingly, Holley-Walker's study progresses from which districts are obtaining unitary status, to the type of voluntary desegregation used by districts who elect to adopt them. It does not investigate the considerations for *why* some districts adopt them, and others do not. This study attempts to answer this question.

Erica Frankenberg published a study analyzing current voluntary integration efforts, titled "Assessing the Status of School Desegregation Sixty Years After Brown" (2014). Attempting to estimate the number of districts who are currently voluntarily desegregating, she considered and synthesized multiple estimates on the number of districts engaged in voluntary desegregation. She explains that similar to how there is no clear number of districts still under court orders, "there is no authoritative source about how many districts employ voluntary integration policies." Frankenberg utilized several estimates of districts either engaged in race-conscious integration policies, or socioeconomic integration. Among them were James E. Ryan (10-30 districts), Sean Reardon and Lori Rhodes (40 districts), and Richard Kahlenberg (more than 80). From a rough list of 100 possible districts, Frankenberg and her research assistant investigated each, sometimes by calling the districts, finding out how they conceptualized diversity, and what policy they used. They then researched to make sure they weren't still under a court order, meaning they truly were voluntary. Because Frankenberg aimed to study voluntary *racial* desegregation, as she was interested in the legacy of *Brown*, she considered whether each district still had the intent of reducing racial isolation (Frankenberg, 2014).

Eventually, they determined that 69 districts are engaged in voluntary desegregation with the purpose of reducing racial isolation, and that the principal way in which they are doing so is through (1) diversity priority for transfers; (2) magnet school criteria; (3) district-wide controlled-choice policies; or (4) establishing attendance-zone boundaries (Frankenberg, 2014).

Although I did not hear back from Frankenberg about the possibility of utilizing her database of 69 districts for this study, her methodology provided me with insight about steps to take when constructing my sample.

Also of critical importance to my study, as it provided the starting point for my sample, was The Century Foundation's report on schools engaging in socioeconomic integration, "A New Wave of School Integration," published in February 2016. This report provided me the most up-to-date starting point regarding the number of districts engaged in socioeconomic desegregation. As I will explain in my methodology section, it became apparent as I began conducting my research that my study would have to examine voluntary socioeconomic integration. This report identified 83 school districts and 8 charter schools or networks that use socioeconomic status as a factor in student assignment, for a total of 91 entities who are doing this. The districts and charters that The Century Foundation (TCF) identified are distributed across 32 states, with the leading states being California, Florida, Iowa, New York, Minnesota, and North Carolina. The Century Foundation also reported the rate of increase in the use of voluntary desegregation orders over time. In 1996, TCF researchers found two districts engaged in socioeconomic integration; by 2007, the number had risen to 40, and by 2016, it had risen to 91 (Potter et al., 2016).

v. Strategies for Integration

The TCF report identified five main strategies for socioeconomic integration that districts are currently employing. TCF was able to divide the policies in place into five categories: (1) attendance zone boundaries; (2) district-wide choice policies; (3) magnet school admissions; (4) charter school admissions; and (5) transfer policies. These are the same strategies that Erica

Frankenberg identified in her study of districts desegregating along racial or socioeconomic criteria, referenced above, plus the inclusion of charter school admissions.

Attendance zone boundaries is a policy in which district lines are redrawn with consideration for socioeconomic balance among the schools. This is the most common strategy used by districts and charters within the TCF sample. According to Frankenberg, this strategy may also be the most “far-reaching” in terms of creating diversity, as the redrawing of district lines affects the base assignment for every student, not just those who apply for a transfer, or opt-in to a magnet school (Frankenberg, 2014, p. 698). The second most popular strategy was district-wide choice policies, also called “controlled-choice.” In this policy, families rank their school preferences. The district assigns students to a school by considering these preferences in combination with how to best balance socioeconomic diversity. Because this assignment process relies heavily on the research and advocacy of parents, as well as their ability to meet deadlines, low-income students may still be disadvantaged with the use of this policy, in comparison to their peers whose families have more resources (Frankenberg, 2014).

Redrawing attendance zone boundaries and district-wide controlled choice policies are the only two categories of socioeconomic integration strategies that directly impact all students in the district. Magnet school admissions, charter school admissions, and transfer policies impact a lower proportion of the district’s students. The only magnet schools and charter school networks included in TCF list are those that expressly consider socioeconomic diversity in admissions. Having integration as a part of their school mission was not enough to be included in this sample. This stipulation is intended to ensure that only magnets and charters that have a clear integration strategy are included. Research shows that magnets and charters that do not expressly consider diversity in admissions do not necessarily increase the school’s diversity, despite being well-

positioned to do so because they draw students from around the district. In fact, if not well-designed to enroll a diverse student population, research shows that magnets and charters can actually have a segregating effect on schools (Kahlenberg & Potter, 2014; Betts, Kitmotto, Levin, Bos, & Eaton, 2015). That being said, magnet schools and charter schools can be used as successful tools for choice-based desegregation. Two school districts in the sample, Santa Rosa City Schools (CA) and District of Columbia Public Schools (DC) operate charter schools that reserve seats for low-income or at-risk students that otherwise would have had below-average enrollment of these two student populations (Potter et al., 2016).

Lastly, transfer policies are plans that give preference to school transfer requests that would “increase the socioeconomic diversity of affected schools, or give a priority to economically disadvantaged students when reviewing transfer requests” (Potter et al., 2016, pg. 17). As with magnets and charters, TCF took care to only include districts with transfer programs in their sample that specifically consider socioeconomic status. In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act began requiring schools to provide intradistrict transfer options to Title I students in failing schools (Potter et al., 2016). It turned out that more-advantaged students were more likely to participate in this program, transferring out of failing schools, and further isolating low-income students. In this way, transfer programs that are not designed to promote socioeconomic diversity can increase school segregation. (Phillips, Hausman, & Larsen, 2012). TCF identified 17 districts with transfer policies that consider SES (Potter et al., 2016).

V. Contribution to the Literature

My research is a contribution to the body of research on voluntary desegregation plans because this study examines not only which districts are pursuing a voluntary integration plan across the nation, but a systematic analysis of the characteristics of these districts. Although

Reardon and Rhodes did provide analysis of the districts engaged in SES-based desegregation in regards to size and demographic trends, I have provided this information about a more up-to-date sample. As expounded upon in the subsequent methodology section, I constructed a new, nationwide sample of districts and charters engaged in voluntary desegregation, which I believe represents the most up-to-date list available. In all previous nationwide samples, including that of Reardon and Rhodes and The Century Foundation, I found districts included that are in fact still under a court order, according to ProPublica.

Further, up until this point, certain characteristics of these districts, including political attitudes and budgetary measures, have only been studied using select case studies. My study analyzes the impact of these factors as predictors of adoption across a quantitative, nationwide sample. While some studies have analyzed the political bargaining process necessitated by a community engaged in voluntary desegregation through case studies, my study is the only one I know of that investigates the relationship between political party affiliation in a community and support for voluntary desegregation.

Lastly, using my sample I calculated the percentage of districts engaged in voluntary desegregation that were formerly under a federal order, again using ProPublica's records. This metric has not previously been calculated to my knowledge. The proportion of districts desegregating today that were once mandated to by the courts provides information about the legacy of *Brown v. Board* era desegregation, and the lasting impact of the federal judiciary.

Theory

The purpose of this study is to examine whether any attributes, or combinations of attributes, characterize the set of districts that are choosing to desegregate their schools today. It may be that contextual factors like the size of a school district, the size of the minority student

population, or the monetary resources among parents are salient predictors of whether or not a district elects to voluntarily adopt desegregation (the dependent variable). Additionally, it may be that institutional factors like whether the district was previously under a court order influence whether or not a district voluntarily desegregates. This section will consider several claims regarding which attributes of a district explain its willingness to adopt voluntary desegregation.

I. Dependent Variable

The dependent, or outcome variable, in this study is whether or not a school district voluntarily adopts school desegregation. This is a dichotomous variable. This variable is coded as 0=the district has not adopted a voluntary desegregation policy, and 1=the district has adopted a voluntary desegregation policy.

II. Independent Variables

The independent variables that I use in this study, discussed in further detail in the methodology section, include the following contextual variables: the size of the district, the geography of the district, the budgetary resources available to the district, the level of poverty in the district (as measured by the percentage of students who qualify for free and reduced-price lunch), the racial makeup of the district, the political ideology of the district, and the educational attainment of the parents in the district. The institutional variable that I use is whether or not the district was previously under a federally-mandated court order to desegregate. I surveyed more independent variables than those listed; however, some variables could not ultimately be taken into account due to the amount of missing data in my study. I will only discuss in detail the supporting theory for variables that I could account for in my study.

Within the list of independent variables, some depend on the attitudes of the parents in the district, and some do not. The measures of free and reduced-price lunch eligibility, racial

makeup, educational attainment, budgetary resources, political ideology, and previous court order pertain to the attitudes of parents. I argue that the variables that pertain to the attitudes of parents are the most influential in the decision that a school district makes regarding voluntary integration. I do not expect that variables like size of the district or geography will influence the decision. I generally believe that because districts engaged in desegregation exist in many different parts of the country, if a district wants to desegregate in accordance with their attitudes, they will find a way to do so—regardless of size or location.

It is my theory that variables related to the attitudes of parents are the most important in influencing the adoption of school desegregation plans because school board members and superintendents are accountable to the voting adults that reside in their district. School board members and superintendents can only be elected and/or hired, and remain in their role, if they generally have popular support of the parents. There are numerous examples in the literature in which parents, displeased with actions taken by school board members on the issue of desegregation, replaced them in popular elections, sending a strong message about their preferences. The public school district in La Crosse, Wisconsin is an illustrative example of this. After the school board voted to approve the redrawing of elementary school district boundaries to promote socioeconomic integration in 1992, seven incumbents were replaced in the election later that year by anti-integration candidates. It also looked as though the superintendent, who was supportive of the plan, would be replaced (Kahlenberg, 2007, pg. 20).

III. Expected Effect of Variables (Hypotheses)

Each of the variables discussed below may impact each district differently, depending on what kind of desegregation plan a district is considering implementing. For example, if a district is considering implementing a district-wide choice policy in which they must provide

transportation, the level of budgetary resources may significantly affect the feasibility of the plan. However, if the district is considering reserving seats for low-income students in the admissions process of their existing magnet schools, this may not present a new budgetary challenge. For this reason, only general ideas about the impact of each variable can be discussed below.

The percentage of students that qualify for free and reduced-price lunch is expected to have a positive relationship to the decision to desegregate. The theory for this goes hand in hand with the theory behind racial makeup of a district. First, socioeconomic integration theoretically has the effect of integrating students by both race and class, due to the strong relationship between race and wealth in the U.S. (Kahlenberg, 2007). If there are too few minority students, or students experiencing poverty, in the school district, the district would have no impetus to integrate. Improving the outcomes of low-income students and racial minorities that are frequently isolated in low-performing schools is the whole point of voluntary integration; therefore, I expect that a sizable population of these students must be present in the district for officials to feel that integration is necessary. Low income schools and schools with large minority populations are going to act as some of the biggest proponents of such policies, and mobilize popular support for integration. Students of color experience more direct benefits from integrated education than white students, and therefore, racial minorities have been more supportive of diversity-based school assignment models than white people (Bobo, 2001). Further, white people tend to be more supportive of integrated education when they are from diverse neighborhoods and have a higher number of interracial friendships—factors positively associated with large low-income and/or minority populations in the district (Parcel, et al., 2016).

It is further expected that school officials at low-income schools will encourage integration because if middle-class students enroll in their schools, they bring increased resources with them.

These factors considered, there is also evidence that increased low-income and minority populations encourage desegregation only up to a point. There may be a point at which these populations surpass a certain level, and support for integration decreases. This is because districts may be hesitant to integrate if integration has the potential to radically change the composition of their schools. While a community may theoretically believe in the principal of integrated education, there are degrees of support. Nikole Hannah-Jones reflects on the “integration” in New York City public schools, where her young daughter is enrolled, as “carefully curated integration.” Liberal-leaning white parents are pleased when their children’s schools “have some students of color, but not too many.” She describes it as a kind of integration that allows “public schools [to] look like the United Nations, [but] comes at a steep cost for the rest of the city’s black and Latino children” (Hannah-Jones, 2016). This tokenized integration has a historical precedent. Before the court really began enforcing district-specific desegregation orders, this type of token integration emerged in which there were few all-white schools, but all-black schools were still common. White, middle-class parents, who are typically more likely to advocate on behalf of their preferences to elected officials, may be more favorable of tokenized integration.

There is supporting theory for why white parents may be unfavorable of integration if it radically changes their schools. Some researchers (Branton & Jones, 2005, Taylor & Mateyka, 2011) have found that lower income whites oppose government attempts to promote racial integration more strongly than their wealthier counterparts because integration results in higher competition for resources. This is connected to the racial threat theory, or group threat theory,

posited by social scientist, H.M. Blalock Jr. (1970). The theory states that as “larger outgroup size increases” anti-outgroup attitudes increase “mediated by perceptions of threatened group interests” (Schlueter, 2010, pg. 1). Essentially, low-income whites are increasingly unfavorable of integration when it means that there is increased competition for resources with low-income racial minorities.

The expected drop-off in support for integration after the low-income, or racial minority population reaches a certain level is also likely explained by racial prejudice. When studying resegregation in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, Hannah-Jones found a school board report from 2000 that indicated that white parents would “not want their children to attend schools once they turned 70 percent black” (2014b, pg. 11). Yet, most low-income white students still attend mostly middle-class, white schools (Garcia & Weiss, 2014). This demonstrates that the attitudes of white, middle-class parents are likely more favorable to integrating their children’s schools with low-income white students than with high levels of racial minorities.

Educational attainment levels of parents should have a positive relationship with support for school desegregation. Elevated levels of education are associated with more liberal racial views (Parcel et al., 2016). This may be the result of attending college outside of conservative communities in which individuals grew up, resulting in greater exposure to diverse perspectives and the formation of friendships with people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. If parents have increased critical thinking skills, familiarity with people from diverse backgrounds, and decreased economic insecurity, all factors associated with higher levels of educational attainment, it is more likely that they will have positive attitudes toward desegregation.

Budgetary resource level may influence parental attitudes and it also reflects a district’s ability to afford a complex school assignment policy. It influences attitudes because if a district

is anything short of exceptionally wealthy, parents tend to be unfavorable of added spending. When La Crosse Public Schools redrew its school boundaries in 1992, the cost of required new buses was \$150,000. In reality, \$150,000 only represents one-third of one percent of annual spending by the La Crosse district—so not very costly. However, opponents of the plan attacked school board members and the superintendent by labeling them “big spenders.” The negative electoral outcomes for school board members that supported the plan were likely the result of being portrayed as fiscally irresponsible (Kahlenberg, 2007). It is my assumption that if the district has more fiscal resources to work with, deciding to integrate may have lower political stakes, but if a district is already struggling financially (many of the districts in my sample were found to be running a deficit) it will likely be costlier politically and logistically to implement a program. Budgetary level is also an objective indicator of whether or not a district has the fiscal resources to finance any student assignment plan other than a simple, neighborhood school model. Many desegregation plans can be costly, especially those that involve bussing, or building a new charter or magnet school. As budgetary level increases, support for desegregation should increase.

I expect that if a district is more conservative in political ideology, then it will be less likely to adopt a desegregation policy than a majority liberal-leaning district. Parcel and Taylor (2015) find that “traditionally, it has been Democrats who have been favorable toward diversity-based school assignment models and Republicans who have advocated assignments on the basis of neighborhoods.” This likely is related to the ideological split between the parties regarding trust for government programs and government intervention to assist low-income populations. Additionally, as before mentioned, the large ideological shift away from support for

desegregation that occurred on the Supreme Court in the 1990s took place when seven out of nine justices were appointed by conservative presidents (Boger & Orfield, 2005).

Lastly, there are no existing published theories that I am aware of regarding the relationship between previously being under a federal court order and the decision to desegregate. Logically, it seems that having been under a court order would make it less costly to adopt a voluntary plan because the infrastructure is already in place for desegregation. For this reason alone, I expect that previously being under an order has a positive relationship to adopting a voluntary plan.

Additionally, previously being under a court order likely influences parents' overall favorability of desegregation. Parental attitudes about desegregation in Jefferson County Schools in Louisville were a key factor in this district defending voluntary school desegregation all the way up to the Supreme Court, and fighting to keep their policy even after it was struck down. As reporter Alana Semuels found, it was not initially popular when the district was forced to desegregate in the 1970s. In fact, the governor of Kentucky had to call in the Kentucky National Guard to supervise forced bussing because residents were protesting and vandalizing police cars. But as Semuels says, "something strange happened as the integration plan continued. Many of the residents' fears failed to materialize, and after a few years the protests ceased." (Semuels, 2015). Gary Orfield adds, "It's as though 'people are amazed to discover that people from another race or ethnic group are actually pretty similar to them... There's a tremendous deflation of protests when almost all the stereotypes people hold aren't true'" (qtd. in Semuels, 2015). The same thing happened in La Crosse after the initial negative reaction died down, in which school board members lost their seats. In less than a year, political candidates who supported the redrawn boundary lines began winning elections again, and public polling showed a dramatic

increase in support for the integration plan. Residents of the district explain the turnabout in a few ways. First, one school principal remarked that “the problems that opponents of desegregation forecasted did not materialize.” As University of Wisconsin professor, Joseph Heim stated, “La Crosse residents found out that kids were not destroyed while riding buses.” In fact, many parents noted that their kids were happy under the plan, and they liked that their kids were gaining perspective from classmates that lived within a different economic reality than their own (Kahlenberg, 2007). It *can* be that negative experiences with forced bussing negatively impact parents’ support for desegregation (Hannah-Jones, 2015); however, the literature suggests that in the majority of districts, the reality of desegregation counteracts stereotypes once residents are forced to comply. This breakdown of stereotypes contributes to popular support for voluntary desegregation today.

There is also supporting theory for how the control variables (size and geography) may influence the decision to desegregate. Intuitively, it seems that having a large school district would dissuade school officials from adopting such a policy. The more students in a district, the tougher the logistical process of desegregation will be. When using certain methods, desegregation requires dividing students into “nodes” or “clusters” before assigning them to different schools, such as with Jefferson County School’s plan (Semuels, 2015). It often requires complex transportation plans. If employing a district-wide control choice policy, it means an extensive amount of paperwork and coordination is required to try and assign each student in accordance with their preferences. The more students, the more logistically challenging these plans may be. On the other hand, if measuring the size of a district by number of schools, it may prove easier to desegregate. With more schools, it is more likely that there will be a number of schools in relative proximity to one’s residence. In this way, if a student is assigned to a school

other than their neighborhood school, it may not necessarily mean that they must drive across the county to get there. The relationship between “district size” and the decision to desegregate is unclear, although it may vary according to whether one considers the number of students or the number of schools.

Locale refers to whether a district is characterized as an urban area or a rural area. When examining Wake County Public Schools, Richard Kahlenberg found that as the suburban sprawl in Raleigh, NC increased, lengthening bus rides for students, the district’s voluntary desegregation plan faced increased opposition and greater logistical challenges (2007). The relationship between suburban sprawl and the categories “urban” and “rural” is unclear; however, it is clear that these two locales face a different set of unique challenges that make desegregating a different process in each. I expect that urban districts will be more likely to desegregate because of increased public transportation options that may ameliorate some of the burden on families facing long commute times. Also, there are associated factors that may make urban areas more likely to desegregate—they tend to have more residents who advocate progressive ideas (Graham, 2017) and more diverse racial compositions. Rural areas face the hurdle of spread out districts, and tend to have more conservative residents ideologically, who may be less favorable of engineering an alternative to neighborhood schools.

Table 1 – Summary of Independent Variables

Variable	Variable Coding	Expected Relationship to Decision to Voluntarily Desegregate
Free and Reduced-Price Lunch	Quantitative	Positive
Percentage Minority	Quantitative	Positive
Educational Attainment	Quantitative	Positive
Difference in budget (Revenue - expenditures)	Quantitative	Positive
Political Ideology	Democratic=1 Republican=0	Positive
Previous Order	Yes=1 No=0	Positive
Size	Quantitative	Negative
Locale	Urban=1 Rural=0	Positive

Based on the preceding discussion of the expected effect of each independent variable, I will test the following hypotheses:

H1: The percentage of students that qualify for free and reduced-price lunch in a school district is positively related to the adoption of a voluntary school desegregation plan.

H2: The percentage of students that are racial minorities [black, Hispanic, or Asian] in a school district is positively related to the adoption of a voluntary school desegregation plan.

H3: The educational attainment level of the adult population in a school district is positively related to the adoption of a voluntary school desegregation plan.

H4: The level of budgetary resources in a district is positively related to the adoption of a voluntary school desegregation plan. In other words, districts operating a surplus are more likely to adopt a desegregation plan.

H5: Districts that are liberal-leaning in terms of political ideology are more likely to adopt a voluntary school desegregation policy.

H6: School districts that were formerly under a federal court order to desegregate, but are now unitary, are more likely to adopt voluntary school desegregation than those that were not previously under a federal court order.

Methodology

I. Constructing the Sample

In order to collect information on different variables for all the districts engaged in voluntary desegregation, I first had to confirm the list of districts with such policies. One of the largest obstacles in conducting this study was the fact that there is no authoritative list of which districts have these rare policies. I hoped to limit my sample to districts that were pursuing voluntary desegregation, by racial or socioeconomic criteria, with the purpose of reducing racial isolation. As before mentioned, this is how Frankenberg constructed her sample; however, her list is not available to the public. In fact, I could not find any published list of schools that are employing generalized race-based desegregation policies after the PICS decision in 2007. Frankenberg found that it was difficult to confirm whether some districts were including racial integration as a goal for their student assignment policy or not, and suggested in her report that this may be due to legal concerns. She states: “Due to the larger political and legal landscape, it is understandable that a district may not want to call widespread attention to their voluntary integration efforts” (Frankenberg, 2014, pg. 697).

Before resorting to studying exclusively socioeconomic-based voluntary desegregation, I looked into the sources that Frankenberg listed as her starting point, to see if I could find any districts to include that used generalized race-based strategies. Of her sources, Kahlenberg and Reardon and Rhodes considered strictly socioeconomic plans. James Ryan estimates that there are between ten and thirty districts, not under court order, that use race-based student assignment plans; however, he does not name them. Her other sources include a piece called “The Integration Report” by Philip Tegeler, Saba Bireda, and Genevieve Siegel-Hawley, which I did not find to include the names of any districts using race-based strategies, and “discussion with experts in the field”—which I of course did not have access to. It is my thought that the majority of the districts in her sample are also socioeconomic integration plans because most of the sources she pulled from are studies on SES-based integration, many districts are not forthcoming about their use of race, and the fact that the number of districts using socioeconomic plans is on the rise.

For this reason, I decided to work from the sample compiled by The Century Foundation (Potter et al., 2016). Although I am unsure whether every district in their sample has a clear intent to reduce racial isolation, it was the best starting point I could access once I realized that I would be studying socioeconomic integration. It is the most recently published nation-wide sample of voluntary, socioeconomic integration, published February 2016. TCF found that 91 different school districts and charter networks have voluntary desegregation policies. I first eliminated the charter networks from my sample, including Citizens of the World Charter School (CA), Community Roots Charter School (NY), Compass Charter School (NY), Brooklyn Prosper Charter School (NY), Larchmont Charter School (CA), Blackstone Valley Prep Mayoral Academy (RI). I did so because charter schools are independently-run public schools located

within a school district. Since “charter school admissions” is one category of desegregation policy, it made sense to me to study the districts that offer charter school admissions to its students, not the charter school population itself. Because I am studying the likelihood of a decision by a district, each unit in my sample needed to be a district. All of the districts in which the charter networks that I eliminated are located are included in my final sample, as long as they are not under a federal court order or engaged in a voluntary agreement with the U.S.

Department of Education. Blackstone Valley Prep Mayoral Academy (RI) was further eliminated because it was founded by the Rhode Island legislature for the purpose of interdistrict integration. While this is a valuable model, my goal is to study the attitudes of school districts, not an entire state.

Next, I cross-referenced TCF’s list with the ProPublica database titled, “A National Survey of School Desegregation Orders,” compiled by Yue Qiu and Nikole Hannah-Jones. I eliminated any district from the sample whose federal court desegregation order is still active, or who is bound by a “voluntary” desegregation agreement with the U.S. Department of Education (ED). As discussed, although ED orders are called “voluntary,” districts enter into them with the understanding that if they do not agree to them, they will eventually be stripped of their federal funding. Therefore, the decision of districts to desegregate who are engaged in such agreements with ED does not reflect anything unique about their attitude toward desegregation.

Of the districts on TCF’s list, I found 21 districts who I would not consider engaged in voluntary desegregation because they were included in ProPublica’s database, and excluded them from the sample. One may make the argument that due to the lack of enforcement of court orders that are still on the books, districts desegregating under a decade-old court order are indeed self-imposing desegregation on themselves to some extent, because they likely would not

face consequences if they did not have a desegregation policy. That being said, it makes the most sense to me when doing a study of “voluntary” desegregation to only include districts who are free of any federal mandate. After these actions, my sample included 62 districts; however, Hamilton County Public Schools (TN) and Troup County School District (GA) were subsequently eliminated; when I called the districts to clarify part of their policy, I learned that their socioeconomic desegregation policies were no longer in place.

As a result of these steps, my study has 60 experimental districts, compared to TCF’s 91 districts and charter networks. TCF reported enrollment data for its sample from one uniform period of time—the 2012-2013 school year. While choosing one period of time for examination is convenient, I wanted to study the characteristics of a district as they were when the district made the decision to desegregate, in order to gain insight into the decision making process. For this reason, I collected the data for each district according to the year that the district adopted the policy. TCF report provided me with the implementation year for all but nine of the districts in my sample. From there, I tracked down the year of implementation for these districts by searching the district websites and/or calling them. I ultimately learned all of their implementation years. In the case of La Crosse, WI, TCF recorded their implementation date as 1979; however, Reardon and Rhodes referenced this district in their report as having adopted their policy in 1992. I was in touch with Sean Reardon to clarify—he pointed me to the report by Richard Kahlenberg that specified that district lines were redrawn for the district high schools around 1979, but that a controversial board vote was later taken to redraw the attendance boundaries for the elementary schools in 1992 (Kahlenberg, 2014, pg. 16). I used 1992 for the implementation year because this was the most recent occurrence in which the district made a decision on this matter, and because more data was available for 1992 than 1979.

Next, I selected control districts—districts not engaged in voluntary desegregation—to survey as a point of comparison to my experimental districts. For these, I examined all of the contiguous districts to each of my experimental districts, and selected the one most similar in number of students. My rationale was that selecting districts that were similarly placed, and similarly sized, would cut down on confounding variables and help me narrow in on what made the experimental districts different. For this process I used the MapEd tool via the National Center for Education Statistics and displayed the boundaries of school districts according to the American Community Survey data from 2010-2014. I was able to use one set of boundaries to locate all of the contiguous boundaries, regardless of implementation years, for a few reasons. First, if a school boundary was different in the year of implementation that what was reflected in 2010-2014 map, it was usually because of a merger. In this case, I would know because the unified district I was looking for would not be found using the search engine and it would show up as two different, smaller districts. For example, when searching for Williamsburg-James County Public Schools (VA), the search engine could only find Williamsburg City Public Schools (VA) and James City County Public Schools (VA). In cases like this, I called the district or the state department of education for that state and clarified the district's contiguous districts in the implementation year. I spoke with Andrea Conver, a data expert at NCES, to confirm that this was a reliable method, and she believed that the surrounding districts of a particular district would have only changed dramatically as the result of a merger, so it was reliable to use the 2010-2014 map for all of my cases. The only district that I was ultimately unable to find contiguous districts for by the time I ran my data was Santa Rosa City Schools; therefore, I do not have a control district that borders this experimental district.

I labeled each control district with the corresponding implementation year of the experimental district that it bordered. I did this so that I could compare its data to the experimental district in the same year, to make the most appropriate comparison. I then compared the “Total Students, All Grades (Excludes AE) [Public School]” data point from the NCES data, discussed below, and compared it to the same metric for all of the contiguous districts in the same year. Once I found which district was the most similarly sized, I made sure that the proposed control district was not in ProPublica’s database of districts that are currently under a court order or engaged in an agreement with the Dept. of Education. I did this because if any district was under a court order or an ED agreement, they should be desegregating to some extent. In this way, they could not be a control district because they would have been taking the same action as the experimental group. I found that ten different districts’ most similarly sized district was in the ProPublica database under one of these two stipulations. Further, five districts had natural control districts that were already in the experimental sample (meaning two districts that are currently voluntarily desegregating were geographic neighbors). In both of these cases, I included the next most similarly sized district in the control group. The resulting sample of districts used for my study is listed below.

Table 2 – List of Districts in My Study

	State	Experimental District	Control District
1.	AR	Springdale Public School District	Rogers School District
2.	CA	Berkeley Unified School District	Albany City Unified School District
3.	CA	San Jose Unified School District	East Side Union High School District
4.	CA	Fresno Unified School District	Clovis Unified School District
5.	CA	Moorpark Unified School District	Fillmore Unified School District
6.	CA	Redlands Unified School District	Colton Joint Unified
7.	CA	San Diego Unified School District	Poway Unified School District
8.	CA	San Francisco Unified School District	Alameda City Unified School Districts
9.	CA	Napa Valley Unified School District	Vallejo City Unified

10.	CA	Santa Rosa City Schools	Unavailable
11.	CO	Denver Public Schools	Cherry Creek School District 5
12.	CT	Stamford Public Schools	Greenwich School District
13.	DE	Brandywine Public School District	Red Clay Consolidated School District
14.	FL	Miami-Dade Public School District	Collier County School District
15.	FL	Lee County Public Schools	Collier County School District
16.	FL	St. Lucie County Public School District	Martin County School District
17.	FL	Seminole County Public Schools	Volusia County Schools
18.	FL	Palm Beach County School District	Martin County School District
19.	FL	Alachua County Public Schools	Columbia County School District
20.	FL	Hillsborough County Public Schools	Pinellas County Schools
21.	FL	Polk County Public Schools	Osceola County School District
22.	IA	Postville Community Schools	Central Community School District
23.	IA	Burlington Community School District	Fort Madison Community School District
24.	IA	Waterloo Community Schools	Cedar Falls Community School District
25.	IA	West Liberty Community School District	Columbus Community School District
26.	IL	Champaign Community Unit School District Number 4	Urbana School District 116
27.	IL	Chicago Public Schools	Evanston Community Consolidated School District 65
28.	KS	Salina Public Schools	Southeast of Saline Unified School District
29.	KY	Jefferson County Public Schools	Bullitt County School District
30.	LA	Rapides Parish Schools	Vernon Parish School District
31.	LA	Lafayette Parish School System	Iberia Parish
32.	MA	Cambridge Public School District	Somerville School District
33.	MA	Amherst-Pelham Regional Public Schools	South Hadley School District
34.	MD	Montgomery County Public School District	Prince George's County Public Schools
35.	ME	Brunswick School Department	School Administrative District 75
36.	MN	Eden Prairie Schools	Eastern Carver County Public Schools
37.	MN	Burnsville-Eagan-Savage Ind. School District 191	Lakeville Public School District
38.	MN	Bloomington Public Schools	Edina Public School District
39.	MN	Robbinsdale Area Schools	Wayzata Public School District
40.	MN	St. Paul Public School District	South Washington County School District
41.	NC	Guilford County Public School District	Winston Salem/Forsyth County Schools
42.	NC	Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools	Chatham County Schools
43.	NC	Lee County Schools	Chatham County Schools
44.	NC	Wake County Public School System	Johnston County Schools
45.	NE	Omaha Public School District	Millard Public Schools
46.	NJ	Newark Public Schools	Elizabeth City School District
47.	NY	Rochester City School District	Greece Central School District
48.	OR	Eugene School District 4J	Springfield School District 19

49.	OR	Portland Public Schools	Beaverton SD 48J
50.	PA	Pittsburgh Public Schools	Mt. Lebanon School District
51.	SC	Rock Hill Public School District of York County	Lancaster County School District
52.	SC	Greenville County Schools	Pickens County School District
53.	TX	McKinney Independent School District	Frisco Independent School District
54.	TX	Beumont Independent School District	Port Arthur Independent School District
55.	TX	Allen Independent School District	Lovejoy Independent School District
56.	TX	Ector County Independent School District	Midland Independent School District
57.	VA	Williamsburg-James County Public Schools	York County Public Schools
58.	VT	Burlington School District	South Burlington School District
59.	WA	University Place School District	Steilacoom Historical School District
60.	WI	La Crosse School District	Onalaska School District

II. Data Collection

To collect data for my now 119 districts, I utilized four main sources. These were the database of open and closed desegregation orders compiled by Nikole Hannah-Jones, Jeff Larson, and Mike Tigas for ProPublica (2014), the Elementary/Secondary Information System run by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), American Community Survey data, collected by the U.S. Census Bureau and retrieved from the National Historical Geographic Information System (NHGIS) using the IPUMS tool (“data integrated across time, space and scientific domain”), and the CQ Voting and Elections Collection.

I used the ProPublica database for my “Previous Order” variable. I coded each district as 1 or 0, with 1=yes, this district was formally under a federal court order to desegregate and it is now closed, and 0=this district has never been under a court order. If the district was formerly under an order, I also recorded the year that the order was closed.

For the region variable, I simply coded each variable according to the four census regions designated by the U.S. Census Bureau (Geographic Products Branch, 2015). The four regions are Northeast, Midwest, South, and West. Each state belongs to one of these four regions. The

Northeast, coded as 1, encompasses Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont, Delaware, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania. The Midwest region, coded as 2, is made up of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota. The South, coded as 3, includes Florida, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, District of Columbia, West Virginia, Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, Tennessee, Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas. Lastly, the West, coded as 4, is comprised of Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, Wyoming, Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon, and Washington.

I used the table generator within NCES's Elementary/Secondary Information System to collect data on several of my variables. First, I selected district as the unit of measure and the year of implementation for the year. I then requested that the columns include the following data: County Name [District], Total Number of Public Schools [Public School], Urban-centric Locale [District], Lowest Grade Offered [District], Highest Grade Offered [District], Total Students, All Grades (Excludes AE) [Public School], Free and Reduced Lunch Students [Public School], American Indian/Alaska Native Students [Public School], Asian or Asian/Pacific Islander Students [Public School], Hispanic Students [Public School], Black Students [Public School], White Students [Public School], Hawaiian Nat./Pacific Isl. Students [Public School], Two or More Races Students [Public School], Total Race/Ethnicity [Public School], Total General Revenue (TOTALREV) [District Finance], and Total Expenditures (TOTALEXP) [District Finance].

As clarification, wherever I was presented with the option to select public school-specific data, I chose that over district-level data because I believe school officials would be considering

their public school students when making the decision to adopt such a policy or not. Up until 2006, NCES labeled the district geography as “Locale [District]” rather than “urban-centric locale.” The prior classification was made based on a school’s metro status, whereas starting in 2006, the classification was made based on the urbanicity of the school location. These classifications are made according to the physical address of the district agency and its location relative to populous areas. Prior to 1997, locales were divided into seven categories ranging from rural to large city; from 1998 to 2006 there were eight categories ranging from rural, inside CBSA/MSA to large city; from 2007 forward the locales have been divided into 12 categories, ranging from Rural: Remote to City: Large. I included lowest grade and highest grade in order to discern whether the school district was an Elementary District, a Secondary District, or a Unified District (includes elementary primary schools and high schools). The term “excludes AE” pertaining to total students means that this count of student population does not include any adult education programs that the district may sponsor.

The race categories “Hawaiian Nat./Pacific Isl.” and “Two or More Races” were not included until 2010. I used the total race category to examine whether or not students that belong to these categories were left out of the student count prior to 2010. If the number reported for “Total Race/Ethnicity [Public School]” matched the “Total Students, All Grades [Excludes AE]” number, then I assumed that the district had no students belonging to this omitted category and recorded a 0. These two metrics are equal to each other when the Hawaiian and two or more categories were reported in later years; therefore, I know that with complete information these two numbers are equal to each other. In cases prior to 2010, when these numbers did not match each other, I recorded “not available,” as I am unsure of which students, in which racial category, comprise the difference. For total revenue, this includes all local, state, and federal revenue

sources. I used the total expenditures data point as opposed to a specific line-item in the budget, such as transportation funding or student services funding, because many districts put resources together in unique ways to fund any cost associated with their student assignment plan. Total revenue minus expenditures is the best way to assess how much discretionary funding the district has available to implement non-mandated policies. The table generator provided me with raw numbers and in most cases, I converted the numbers to percentages of the total student population for the purpose of my variables. The budgetary variable, “Difference,” is an indicator of whether the budget has a surplus or deficit of fiscal resources, calculated as the revenue minus expenditure.

A few districts were not included in the table generator results for the year needed. These included Santa Rosa City Schools (CA, 2014), Newark Public Schools (NJ, 2013), McKinney Independent School District (TX, 1995), Frisco Independent School District (TX, 1995). For the Texas districts and Newark, I used data tools on the Texas Education Agency and the New Jersey Department of Education websites, respectively, to fill in the missing data. These resources supplied me with some of my data points, but were missing some racial categories or free and reduced-price lunch numbers, etc. I filled in all the data that I could, but this resulted in some missing data points. All data points retrieved from a source other than the NCES table generator for these categories are notated in my database.

The NHGIS census data provided me with information about the educational attainment of the adult population in the district, and the racial makeup of the district as a whole (whereas the racial data from NCES only included the student population). I elected to measure educational attainment as the percent of the total district population, ages 25 years and over, with a Bachelor’s degree. Unfortunately, the American Community Survey was the first census

survey to gather data on a school district-level basis. This survey began in 2005; however, due to the sampling method, the estimates for school districts are not very reliable until the Bureau could compile five years' worth of data to make an estimate. Further, the one-year estimates only include geographies with 65,000 people or more, and the three-year estimates only include geographies with 20,000 people or more. Many rural districts would have missing data if I used one or three-year data. For this reason, I only have reliable data for educational attainment and total district race and ethnicity variables from 2009 forward. With control districts included, only 48 out of 120 districts in my sample have implementation dates from 2009 forward. This resulted in a significant amount of missing data in my sample. I supplemented the educational attainment variable, called "Percent with Bachelor's Degree," with some 3-year estimates (recorded for years 2008 and 2007), and 1-year estimates for two districts from 2006 and three from 2005, for which the data was available. These 31 districts, therefore, have larger margins of error for the educational attainment estimates.

Lastly, I collected the "Election Outcome" variable as a measure of political ideology in the district. I was unable to find a feasible way to measure the political ideology of the school district itself. There is no centralized database of local elections, such as school board elections, that I know of, and the time constraints of this study did not permit me to investigate these outcomes on a district-by-district basis. When conducting a few test calls and emails to districts to see if I could readily ascertain the needed data in an individualized way, I found that, especially for older cases, many districts have had employee turnover that made it difficult for personnel to access the information I sought. The CQ Voting and Elections Collection supplied me with county-level presidential election results from 1789-2012, which included all of my cases. I used the presidential election year that most recently preceded the year of

implementation. For example, I used the 2008 election results for cases with years 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011. I coded each district according to whether the plurality of their county voted for the Democratic or Republican candidate; 1=Democrat, 0=Republican.

Below, I have included descriptive statistics for both the entire sample (Table 4), as well as just the districts that have adopted voluntary desegregation plans, or the experimental districts (Table 3). Because this study is concerned with exploring the characteristics of the 60 school districts that voluntarily adopting school desegregation plans, it is important to examine the characteristics of these districts by themselves. In comparing these two tables, a few things are clear. The percentage of the adult population with a bachelor's degree remains relatively unchanged at 21 percent even once adding in control districts in Table 4. There is a significant difference in the mean of the number of schools—this means that the districts that are adopting a desegregation plan tend to have significantly more schools than the overall sample that includes control districts. On average, the school districts that are adopting plans are running a significant budget deficit. Further, 71 percent of the school districts that are adopting desegregation plans voted for the Democratic candidate in the most recent election before making their decision. For the purposes of this study, this means we can conclude these districts are liberal-leaning ideologically. Additionally, 42 percent of the 60 school districts who are voluntarily desegregating are located in the South. This number does not change in Table 4 once adding control districts because the control districts were selected to geographically border the experimental districts. Moreover, the school districts that are voluntarily desegregating, on average have a student population that is 18 percent black.

Table 3 – Descriptive Statistics for Experimental School Districts

Variable	Observations	Mean	Std. Deviation	Min.	Max.
Voluntary Desegregation	60	1	0	1	1
Percent of Adults w/ a Bachelor's Degree	60	.21	.06	.09	.41
Free & Reduced-price Lunch	60	.45	.17	0	.80
Previous Order	60	.35	.48	0	1
Number of Schools	57	76.09	107.89	2	633
Locale	57	.74	.44	0	1
Difference (Revenue – expenditures)	58	-2.02e+07	5.56e+07	-2.60e+08	9.20e+07
Black Students	57	.18	.15	0	.6
White Students	57	.44	.21	0	.9
Asian Students	56	.03	.07	0	.4
Hispanic Students	57	.14	.17	0	.6
South	60	.42	.50	0	1
Election Outcome	59	.71	.45	0	1

Table 4 – Descriptive Statistics for Sample of School Districts, Experimental and Control

Variable	Observations	Mean	Std. Deviation	Min.	Max.
Voluntary Desegregation	120	.5	.50	0	1
Percent of Adults w/ a Bachelor's Degree	117	.22	.07	.07	.41
Free & Reduced-price Lunch	116	.41	.19	0	.85
Previous Order	116	.27	.44	0	1
Number of Schools	113	53.45	83.52	2	633
Locale	113	.67	.47	0	1
Difference (Revenue – expenditures)	115	-1.26e+07	4.30	-2.60e+08	9.20e+07
Black Students	113	.13	.15	0	.7
White Students	113	.49	.24	0	.9
Asian Students	111	.03	.08	0	.4
Hispanic Students	113	.14	.18	0	.8
South	120	.42	.50	0	1
Election Outcome	115	.67	.47	0	1

My dependent variable is whether or not the district adopted a voluntary desegregation plan, coded as 1=adoption, 0=otherwise. Because my dependent variable is dichotomous, I ran logistic regression models to discern whether each variable is important in explaining the adoption of voluntary school desegregation plans. I ran one logistic regression without race and ethnicity variables, and then one in which I controlled the results for race and ethnicity variables.

In Stata, I used linear multiple imputation to estimate data points for the missing cases in my free and reduced-price lunch variable and my educational attainment variable, called “Percent with Bachelor’s Degree.” Despite utilizing linear multiple imputation to estimate data for some of the variables, I was still limited regarding the number of independent variables I could include in each model due to a having a relatively low number of cases.

For use in the models, I created an interaction variable, called “South Free & Reduced-Price Lunch” by multiplying the free and reduced-price lunch variable by the region variable, when region=south. I did this to test for the potential effect of combining the impact of region with poverty on the outcome. Additionally, I created an interaction variable called, “South & Previous Order.” This interaction variable accounts for the relationship between the American South and previous court orders. As mentioned, the South has a unique history pertaining to desegregation because it was the location of more federal desegregation orders than any other region. Such desegregation litigation produced the largest gains in desegregation in the South, but also allowed for the most pronounced resegregation trend once the orders began to be lifted (Orfield & Lee, 2007). This interaction variable is designed to capture the impact of this unique trend. I also created an indicator variable for region so that 1=South, and 0=all non-South regions. Before running the logistic regressions, I did a pairwise correlation test to examine the relationship between race and eligibility for free and reduced-price lunch.

Findings

The pairwise correlation reported in Table 5 confirms what other researchers have previously found: that the two largest populations of minority students, black students and Latino students, are more likely to be eligible for free and reduced-price lunch. The table shows that according to the data, school districts with large populations of white students have a negative

relationship to qualifying for government subsidized lunch (-0.62) $p \leq .01$. Conversely, the correlation coefficient for black and Hispanic students is positive. School districts with large Hispanic populations are slightly more likely than school districts with large black populations to qualify for free and reduced price lunch.

Table 5 – Pairwise Correlation of Free & Reduced-Price Lunch and Race or Ethnicity Variables

	Free & Reduced-Price Lunch Imputed	White	Black	Hispanic
Free & Reduced-Price Lunch Imputed	1.000			
White	-0.62*	1.000		
Black	0.48*	-0.49*	1.000	
Hispanic	0.51*	-0.65*	-0.13	1.000

*= $p \leq .001$

This is an important finding because as TCF reported, school segregation is currently empirically proven to be a process of “double segregation,” by which socioeconomic and racial segregation are “related and overlapping phenomenon” (Potter et. al, 2016). For my data to be accurate, it should reflect that minority students are overrepresented in low-income student populations, and it does so. Further, the pairwise correlation demonstrates the usefulness of socioeconomic integration for the schools in my sample. The basis of socioeconomic integration is that it can improve student outcomes while also diversifying the racial makeup of schools, providing students with the benefits of learning alongside peers of different racial backgrounds. If the schools in my sample were integrated socioeconomically, they would likely be integrated racially as well, to an unknown extent.

The logistic regression models below find that several variables are statistically significant in explaining why some districts adopt voluntary desegregation policies, and others do not. When not controlling for race and ethnicity variables, level of educational attainment, percent eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, whether a district was under a previous order, the number of schools in the district, and the interaction between a district being under a previous court order and being located in the South are all statistically significant at the 95% confidence interval, or above. This means that these factors are all important factors in school districts deciding to adopt a voluntary desegregation policy or not. Of note, both contextual and institutional variables prove to be important factors, since being under a previous court order, the only institutional variable, is indeed statistically significant. Of these variables, percent of adults 25 and up with a Bachelor's degree and being under a previous order have the highest odds of having an effect on the adoption of a desegregation policy, as demonstrated by the odds ratio. The odds are 948 times higher that school districts with a high proportion of adult residents with college degrees will adopt desegregation plans to the odds that they would not, all else equal. Impressively, the odds are 10200000 times higher that school districts that were previously under a court order will adopt a voluntary desegregation plan to the odds that they would not, all else equal. In other words, when translating this number to a probability using the divide by four rule, the probability is approximately 400 percent that schools that have previously been under federal desegregation plans will voluntarily adopt school desegregation. The wald χ^2 of the model shows that the model itself is statistically significant. The pseudo R^2 , or "goodness of fit" measure, indicates that the explanatory capacity of the model is 14.6 percent.

Table 6 – Logistic Regression of the Adoption of Voluntary School Desegregation Plans (No Race or Ethnicity Variables)

Independent Variable	β	Robust Std. Error	Odds Ratio
Percent with Bachelor's Degree	6.85**	3.07	948.34
Free & Reduced-Price Lunch Imputed	4.81**	2.09	122.5
Previous Order	16.14***	.91	1.02e+07
Number of Schools	.007***	.002	1.01
Locale	.25	.404	1.29
Difference (Budget)	-0.00	0.00	1
South	1.02	.92	2.78
South Free & Reduced-Price Lunch	-3.6	2.48	.03
South & Previous Order	-15.4***	1.26	0.00
Election Outcome	-0.14	.48	.87
Constant	-3.85***	1.4	.02
Number of cases = 107			
Pseudo $R^2 = .146$			
Wald $\chi^2 = 2509.63$, $p = .0000$			

Note: The dependent variable is the adoption of voluntary desegregation plans, coded as 1=adoption, 0=otherwise. The regression is clustered on year of adoption.

** $p \leq .10$; ** $p \leq .05$; *** $p \leq .01$ one-tail test*

When controlling for race and ethnicity variables, I chose percent of the student population that identifies as black to be the omitted race variable in the model. This is because due to the unique legacy of anti-black racism in the history of school desegregation efforts, it makes the most sense to compare the remaining race and ethnicity variables to this variable. In this model, the outcome is slightly different, because six independent variables are statistically significant in explaining the decision to adopt a desegregation policy or not, in comparison to only five in the previous model. In the below model, educational attainment, previous order, number of schools (size of district), difference (level of budgetary resources), the interaction

variable between living in the South and having been under a previous court order, and percent student population that is Hispanic are all statistically significant. Again, both contextual and institutional variables are important in explaining a district's decision to adopt or not adopt. The previous order variable persists as the statistically significant variable with the highest odds of influencing the districts' decision. Interestingly, the budgetary measure, "Difference (budget)" that represents the difference between the district's revenue and expenditures, becomes statistically significant when it was not before, as does Percent Hispanic. Although percent free and reduced-price lunch was statistically significant in the model that did not control for race, it is not when controlling for race. This model explains a little more of the variance in the decision making process, as the Pseudo R^2 is 17 percent, as compared to 14 percent. Again, the model itself is statistically significant.

Table 7 – Logistic Regression of the Adoption of Voluntary School Desegregation Plans (Race or Ethnicity Variables Included)

Independent Variable	β	Robust Std. Error	Odds Ratio
Percent with Bachelor's Degree	6.16**	3.1	472.41
Free & Reduced-Price Lunch Imputed	3.77	3.06	43.59
Previous Order	14.5***	1.2	1984590
Number of Schools	.008***	.003	1.01
Locale	.26	.46	1.3
Difference (Budget)	-0.00*	0.00	1
South	-.53	.62	.59
South & Previous Order	-14.6***	1.25	0.00
Election Outcome	-.42	.58	.66
Hispanic	-3.32*	2	.04
White	-1.9	2.14	.15
Asian	-4.22	4.87	.01
Constant	-1.46	3.13	.23
Number of cases = 104			
Pseudo $R^2 = .17$			
Wald $\chi^2 = 4001.78$, $p = .000$			

Note: The dependent variable is the adoption of voluntary desegregation plans, coded as 1=adoption, 0=otherwise. The regression is clustered on year of adoption.

** $p \leq .10$; ** $p \leq .05$; *** $p \leq .01$ one-tail test*

Based on the empirical results discussed above, I find that in my first model, my hypotheses about the relationships being positive between educational attainment, free and reduced-price lunch and being under a previous order, and the outcome variable, respectively, are all confirmed. This is evident from the positive beta coefficients for these statistically significant independent variables. I cannot confirm the direction of the relationship between race and the outcome variable in this model because I did not include the race variables in this model. I also cannot confirm my hypotheses for level of budgetary resources (difference), and the

election outcome variables because these two variables are not statistically significant in the model. This means that regardless of the direction of their relationships with the outcome variable, they do not affect the results of the model.

For the second model in which I controlled for race variables, my hypotheses about the relationships being positive between educational attainment, being under a previous order, the level of budgetary resources, and the outcome variable, respectively, are all confirmed. Again, this is given by positive beta coefficients for these statistically significant variables. Interestingly, the results demonstrate that school districts with a large percentage of Hispanic students, relative to its black students, are less likely to adopt a desegregation plan, given by the negative beta coefficient. This means in this instance my hypothesis about the effect of race is not confirmed. I cannot confirm or reject the relationship between free and reduced-price lunch or election outcome, and the dependent variable, because these variables are not statistically significant in the model. Contrary to my expectation that my control variable of district size would not be very influential, number of schools in both models is significant at the 99% confidence interval. These findings suggest that it is important for a district to have a good number of schools in the district amongst which to distribute students and create socioeconomic balance.

Overall, it appears that factors related to parental preferences *do* matter, but they are not the only variables that matter. It is undeniable that the opinion of parents may persuade or dissuade school officials to desegregate because the officials are beholden to the public. That being said, these variables are not the only ones that matter. Size of the school district and region are also important variables in explaining why some school districts voluntarily desegregate, and others do not. As demonstrated through the comparison of the two different logistic regressions,

size of the district is a pertinent factor when controlling for race and ethnicity, and when not controlling for race and ethnicity.

Another key finding of this study is in regards to the lasting effects of the actions of the federal judiciary. On one hand, out of 13,500 school districts in the United States, I only found 60, based on the existing literature, that are voluntarily engaged in school desegregation today. This metric, taken in combination with the fact that the nation's public schools have experienced sharp resegregation, indicates that *Brown v. Board* may not have had a lasting impact. Alternatively, it is clear that of the districts trying to combat the change in national sentiment towards desegregation and voluntarily integrate, many were formally under court orders. Of the districts in my sample, 31 were previously under a federal desegregation order. Of those 31, 21 (or approximately 68 percent) are engaged in voluntary desegregation. Nationally, the majority of districts who were under federal court order are not engaged in voluntary desegregation (Boger & Orfield, 2004). But of those who are led to desegregate by other factors, being under a court order is not a discouraging factor, and may be positively associated.

External Validity

The external validity of this study is high because I did not use a sampling method to select my experimental districts. This is a nationwide study in which I did my best to take into account every single district in the country that is currently voluntarily desegregating. This means that my results should be applicable to any school district that is voluntarily desegregating, not just one or two districts as may be the reality with a case study. However, as mentioned in the methodology section, some of the educational attainment data retrieved from American Fact Finder had a larger margin of error than ideal. Unfortunately, my results are the best estimates we may have on the influence of this variable because there is no better data

available. More accurate estimates for educational attainment only became available in 2009.

Further research may attempt to study the experimental districts as they are now, using data from a recent year like 2014. Such a study would not provide as much insight into the decision-making process, but it would allow one to have more reliable data for educational attainment and not have to use linear multiple imputation to estimate missing values.

There is unavoidable sampling bias in my study regarding which districts are included, and which are not. Despite ProPublica's best efforts, there is not a precise record of which districts are still under court order or not. For this reason, it is likely that some districts may have been excluded from the sample who are in fact, no longer under an order, or vice versa. Further, as Erica Frankenberg explained, our estimates of the prevalence of districts engaged in voluntary desegregation is likely understated, since many districts do not want to draw attention to their efforts for fear of a legal challenge (Frankenberg, 2014). With more accurate court records or a changing legal landscape, this bias could potentially be eliminated in future research. An additional way that my study could have increased validity would be to include a larger number of cases, by studying two contiguous control districts per experimental district. That additional research was not feasible during the course of my senior year, given the time constraints, but it may be a valid goal for further research.

Conclusion

The Supreme Court justices that heard *Brown v. Board* over 63 years ago noted that education was “perhaps the most important function of state and local governments” in a democratic society (qtd. in Hannah-Jones, 2014b, pg. 3). It remains so today. The trend towards resegregation in the U.S. is empirically undeniable (Boger & Orfield, 2004; Orfield et al., 2014) and threatens the ability of the government to fulfill the function of public education on a fair

and equal basis for all students. As Potter et. al describe, “the democratic principles of this nation are impossible to reach without universal access to a diverse, high quality, and engaging education” (2016, pg. 3).

Despite the phenomenon of resegregation, there is a small group of school districts around the country who, for various reasons, remain committed to the original goals of *Brown v. Board*. These goals include ensuring that all students, regardless of their background, have access to quality educational instruction, learn to interact with individuals of different backgrounds, prepare to function tolerantly in a globalized society, and gain confidence that they can succeed educationally and in the workforce. At a time when the United States has seemingly become more polarized politically and ideologically than it has been historically, the ability of citizens to communicate and empathize with each other from a young age is more important than ever. Districts that voluntarily adopt a desegregation policy today recognize this valuable goal and are continuing to work towards it.

This study has attempted to explain why certain, rare districts around the country adopt voluntary desegregation policies, and other, similarly situated districts do not. This study finds that both contextual variables and institutional variables play a role in the decision-making process of districts when they decide to implement voluntary desegregation, when not controlling for the race or ethnicity of the students in the district, as well as when controlling for these variables. Of the variables that are important in explaining the decision to adopt such a policy when controlling for race and ethnicity, five variables that reflect the attitudes of the adult population are important: educational attainment, whether a district was formerly under a federal desegregation order, the level of budgetary resources available to the district, the interaction of a district being in the American South and formerly under a court order, and the percent of the

district student population that is Hispanic. One variable that does not reflect the attitudes of parents, the number of schools in the district, is also a key variable in explaining the decision to adopt a voluntary desegregation policy.

Further research on this topic is warranted in order to better understand why some districts opt to desegregate and some do not. A study with a larger sample, meaning two control districts per experimental district, would be more reliable. Also, it would be interesting to account for more of the institutional variables at work in school districts in order to further analyze the role of institutional variables in this district-wide bargaining process. It was difficult for me to gather information about school board members and other district-specific institutions because that data is not in a centralized database. Federal court orders were the only institutional variable that I could account for. A researcher with either more time, or a smaller selection of districts, could better assess the role of institutions. Nonetheless, studies like this one will hopefully allow policymakers and social scientists to continue learning about voluntary desegregation policies, as they may be the best hope for continuing school desegregation in to the future.

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