

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL

# Benefits and Consequences of Racial Segregation in Early Childhood?

## Improving Classroom Quality

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Presentation for Early Childhood Investigations  
 March 30, 2023



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**SPEAKERS**  
**Dr. Iheoma U. Iruka**  
 &  
**Dr. Stephanie M. Curenton**



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## Honoring Native Lands

I acknowledge that I live, work, and build my families' economic wealth on the lumbee tribe taken through colonization and attempted eradication by settlers.

LUMBEE TRIBE provides programs and services to all tribal members within the areas of Cumberland, Hoke, Robeson, and Scotland Counties in NC.



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## Honoring Black Bodies

- Many parts of the US were built by enslaved Africans and their enslaved descendants, and only within the past generation were Black people afforded full rights.
- Today, Black individuals and People of Color disproportionately work as service staff across the country. This community is largely responsible for the maintenance of our daily lives, the food and food service available, child care, health care, and many other basic necessities that make our lives easy. The wealth of our nation is due to the forced free labor of these Africans.

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## About the Equity Research Action Coalition



- University collaborative at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at UNC-Chapel Hill
- focuses on **co-constructing** actionable research and evaluation with practitioners and policymakers to support the optimal development of Black children prenatally through childhood.
- works at the intersection of research, program, and policy through **anti-racist and cultural wealth frameworks**



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- Context of schooling matters for child outcomes
- Many early childhood programs are segregated by **race/ethnicity & income**
- Quality of Educare schools don't vary by racial/ethnic composition
- Some child outcomes vary by racial/ethnic composition
- High quality early education is important but **not sufficient** in addressing disparities



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## Introduction

- Focus on recently published paper
- High quality early education seen as strategy to address opportunity gaps
- Characteristics of the ECE environment linked to child outcomes (e.g., composition)
- Studies on school racial/ethnic composition and child outcomes mostly focused on K-12



### Early Education Program Racial and Ethnic Composition and Associations with Quality and Children's Language and Social-Emotional Development

Iheoma U. Iruka, Kirsten Kainz, Laura Kuhn, Shannon Guss, Stephanie Tokarz, Noreen Yazzejan & Silvia Niño

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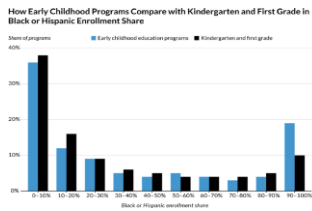
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## School racial/ethnic & economic segregation



- 13% of U.S. public schools are 91–100% Black or Latine, and the majority of Black and Latine children are attending schools with similar racial groups and no White children
- over 50% of Black and Latine preschool children in public school-based programs are in racially/ethnically homogeneous + economically segregated schools



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## Link between racial/ethnic composition and child outcomes

- Studies show a relationship between school socioeconomic and racial/ethnic composition and student achievement outcomes
- Mixed findings
  - ❖ Some studies show protective nature of Black and Latine students attending racially/ethnically homogeneous schools because it provides them with a solid self-identity, cultural congruence, and high expectations
  - ❖ Some studies find that schools with large proportions of students from poor households and Black and Latine students have lower academic performance and growth rates than schools serving larger proportions of White students and students from high-income households.



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### Some environments may be promotive or inhibitive

- Promotive environments nurture children’s social, emotional, and cognitive needs
- Inhibitive environments often have inadequate and limited resources that limit children’s learning opportunities.



- Can racially/ethnically homogeneous environments be promotive?
- Can racially/ethnically homogeneous environments be inhibitive?



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### Environments serving Black and Brown children often low quality.

- Studies have shown that programs serving **high rates of children of color and low-income homes are less enriching** and engage in more routine-based activities
- States with the **highest level of residential segregation** had more White children in higher quality programs than Black children.
- Racial/ ethnic homogeneity harms minoritized children’s outcomes because racial/ethnic segregation is an **indicator** children’s exposure to concentrated poverty



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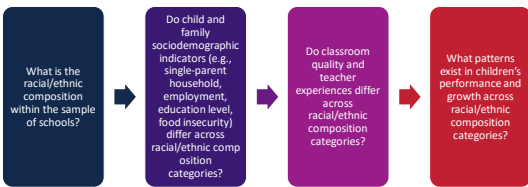
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### Research questions guiding this paper



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### Setting and sample for study

- Study based on 2016-17 Educare school year
- Educare Schools are public-private partnerships with public partners (e.g., Head Start, Early Head Start, or a combination with local PreK programs)
- 1,521 children in 259 classrooms across 19 Educare schools
- ~12.8 years of maternal education, ~30.3 months for child age, and ~2.3 years for program retention



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### Project gathered language and socio-emotional outcomes

- **Preschool Language Scale 5<sup>th</sup> edition:** provides standard scores for auditory comprehension, expressive communication, and total language
- **Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test 4<sup>th</sup> edition:** assesses children's understanding of the meaning of words
- **Devereux Early Childhood Assessment:** measures within-child protective such as *Initiative and Self Regulations & Behavioral Concern*



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### Study also conducted classroom observation and demographics

- **Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale- Revised:** assesses classrooms' structure, provisions for learning, and teaching and interactions
- **Classroom Assessment Scoring System Pre-K:** assessment quality of teacher-child interactions (i.e., Emotional Support, Instructional Support & Classroom Organization)
- Parents responded to questions about highest educational level, marital status, date of birth, immigrant status, employment status, and whether attending school



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### Constructing a racial/ethnic composition variable

- Proportion for each of the four race/ethnicity category:
  - ❖ Count the number of Black, White, Latine, and Other (i.e., multi-racial) children within a classroom,
  - ❖ Then divide that number by the total number of children within a classroom
- Classrooms proportions were then aggregated to the school level and four designations of densities were created:
  - ❖ Majority Black school = 75% or more
  - ❖ Majority Latine school = 75% or more
  - ❖ Majority Minority (i.e., Black or Latine) school = 75% or more of both groups; and
  - ❖ Diverse school = not one racial/ethnic group is a majority



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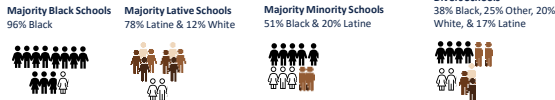
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### ➤ Majority of 19 Educare schools are segregated by race/ethnicity

- ❖ 5 (26%) Majority Black (MB), 5 (26%) Majority Minority (MM), 7 (37%) Diverse (Div), and 2 (11%) Majority Latine (ML)



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### Were there differences in parent and child sociodemographic factors by racial/ethnic composition? **Yes**

- Children in Majority Black schools = have better health, live in single parent households with younger mothers at their birth, have lower school attendance rates, and parents report more depressive symptoms
- Children in the Majority Latine schools = have parents who are immigrants, employed, and attended school
- Children in Majority Minority schools = experience food insecurity
- Children in Diverse schools = highest parental education

\*\* no differences in the percentage of children with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) or report housing insecurity.\*\*



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Were there differences in classroom by racial/ethnic composition? **Somewhat**

- There were **no** differences in classroom quality – measured by CLASS or ECERS-R – by racial/ethnic composition.
- There were **no** differences in teacher education by racial/ethnic composition.
- There was differences in teachers' years of experience by racial/ethnic composition.
  - ❖ Majority Latine classrooms had teachers with less experience than Majority Black classrooms (~8-year difference)



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Were there differences in children's language and socioemotional outcomes by racial/ethnic composition? **Yes**

- Children in Majority Black schools **scored lower** than children in Diverse schools on Vocabulary measure (PPVT; ~3 points).
- Children in Majority Black schools were **rated lower** on Self-regulation than children in Majority Latine schools (DECA; ~3 points).
- Children in Majority Latine schools were **rated higher** than children in Majority Black (~4 points) and Diverse (~5 points) schools on Initiative



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Does the link between racial/ethnic composition and outcomes differ by child race? **Somewhat**

- Black children in Majority Latine schools were rated as having **more initiative** over time than those in Black Majority (~6.5 points) and Diverse (~8 points) schools
- White children in Majority Black schools were rated as having **fewer problem behaviors** compared to those in Diverse (~13 points) and Majority Minority schools (~12 points)



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### Key Takeaways

- Majority Black schools are **hyper-segregated** followed by Majority Latine schools
- Except for years of teaching, rating of classroom quality and teacher education were, relatively, **the same** across schools
- Diversity of challenges and resilience in each type of school
  - Majority Black schools – single parent, depressive symptoms, & healthier children
  - Majority Latine schools – older, immigrant, & employed



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### Key Takeaways cont'd

- Children in Majority Latine schools rated high on socio-emotional outcomes, and no differences on other outcomes
- Interaction of context and race, especially for Black children – not benefiting from being in Majority Black schools compared to others
- Potential impact of cumulative historical and current injustices and concentrated disadvantage on Black children and Majority Black schools' ecosystem.



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### Caution!#%

- Racial/ethnic composition may be a marker for other things – unmeasured variables (e.g., mixed income, dual immersion).
- Majority White or Native American site not part of this study
- No measure of culturally salient and racialized classroom processes (e.g., bias, expectations)
- No information about the level of disadvantage/advantage at each Educare School site and neighborhood



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### Conclusion

- **Investments** in early childhood programs can generate more equitable educational experiences for young children.
- However, high quality early education programs are **not sufficient** (i.e., no silver bullet) to meet complex needs of children and families living in low-wealth communities.
- ECE needs **culturally responsive, anti-bias, and anti-racist quality practices & policies**, to meet the educational needs of children, especially Black children, who often experience anti-Black racism.



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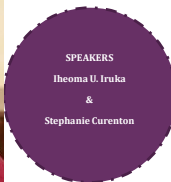
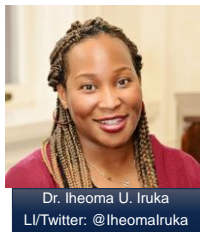
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