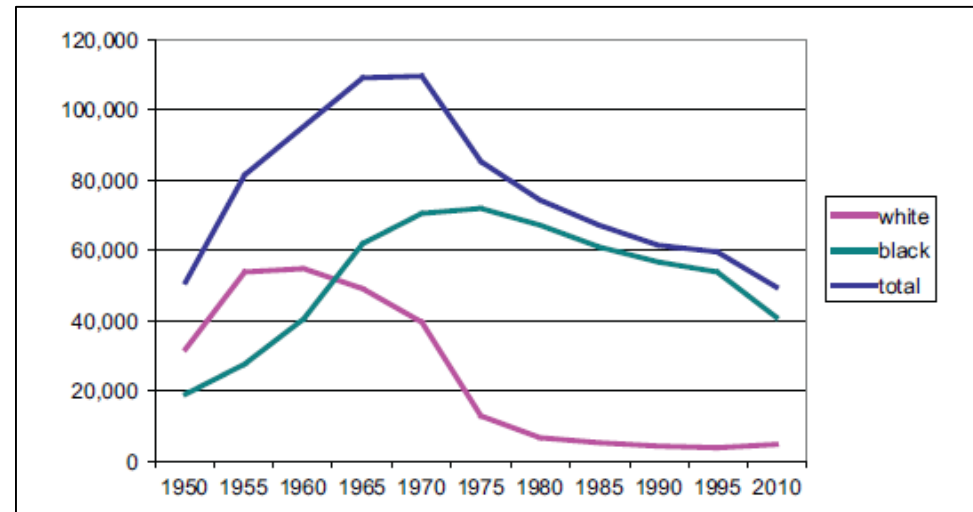# Schools, Neighborhoods, and the Creation of Equitable Urban Communities

Chase M. Billingham
Wichita State University

Equitable Development Strategies for Neighborhoods in Metro Atlanta
Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta
Atlanta, Georgia
September 22, 2015

Desegregation and the Emptying of Urban Public Schools

- 1960s-1970s: Court-ordered desegregation contributed to massive outmigration of families from cities and urban public schools.

Enrollment in APS, 1950-2010

Source: Henry and Hankins (2012)

- Not all white families fled, though.

- A core group of middle-class whites committed to urban public schools in Buckhead and Intown neighborhoods.

WICHITA STATE UNIVERSITY

Middle-Class Return and the Potential for School-Based Urban Revitalization


- These schools have served as community anchors, both building on and facilitating gentrification.

- Similar trends have been documented more recently in cities across the United States.

- Middle-class white families who choose urban public schools often claim to value diversity.

- That desire for diversity has its limits, though.

WICHITA STATE UNIVERSITY

White Parents Value Diversity – Up to a Point

- For white parents, the likelihood of enrolling in a school decreases substantially as the black student proportion increases.

Figure 1. Percentage of Respondents Who Would Enroll in Hypothetical School.
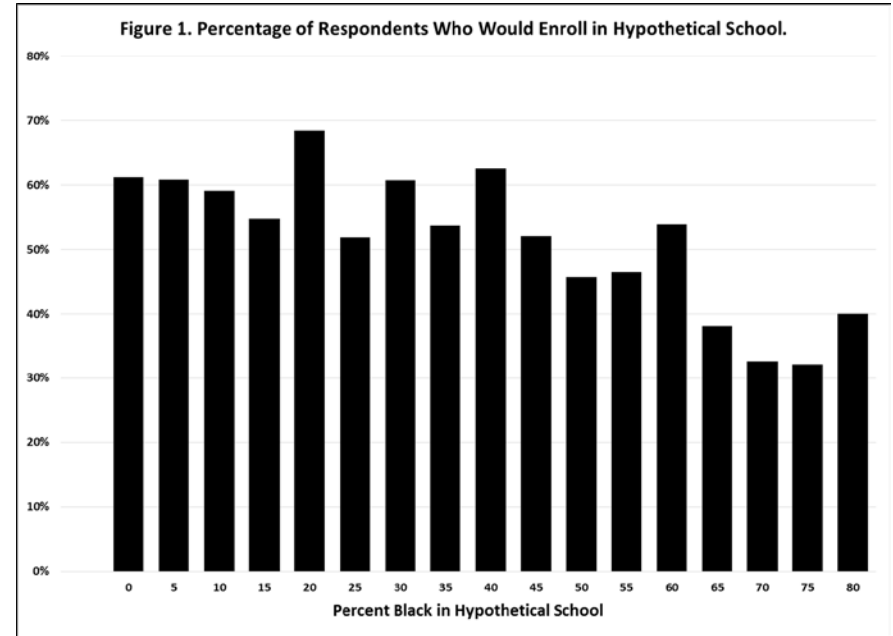
- This negative reaction holds constant, even when controlling for academic quality and other school characteristics.

- White parents value some diversity, but do not want their children to be in the minority.

WICHITA STATE UNIVERSITY

Hypersegregation in APS

- In Atlanta, the schools that white families attend are very heavily white.

  - 80% of APS schools have fewer than 10 white students.

  - Of all white students in APS, more than half attend just 5 schools, all in the "North Atlanta Cluster."

  - In these schools, fewer than 20% of students come from low-income families (75% across APS).

- Among the public school districts of the 100 largest American cities, APS is the *most* segregated.

Racial Segregation in Atlanta Public Schools, 1993 - 2013
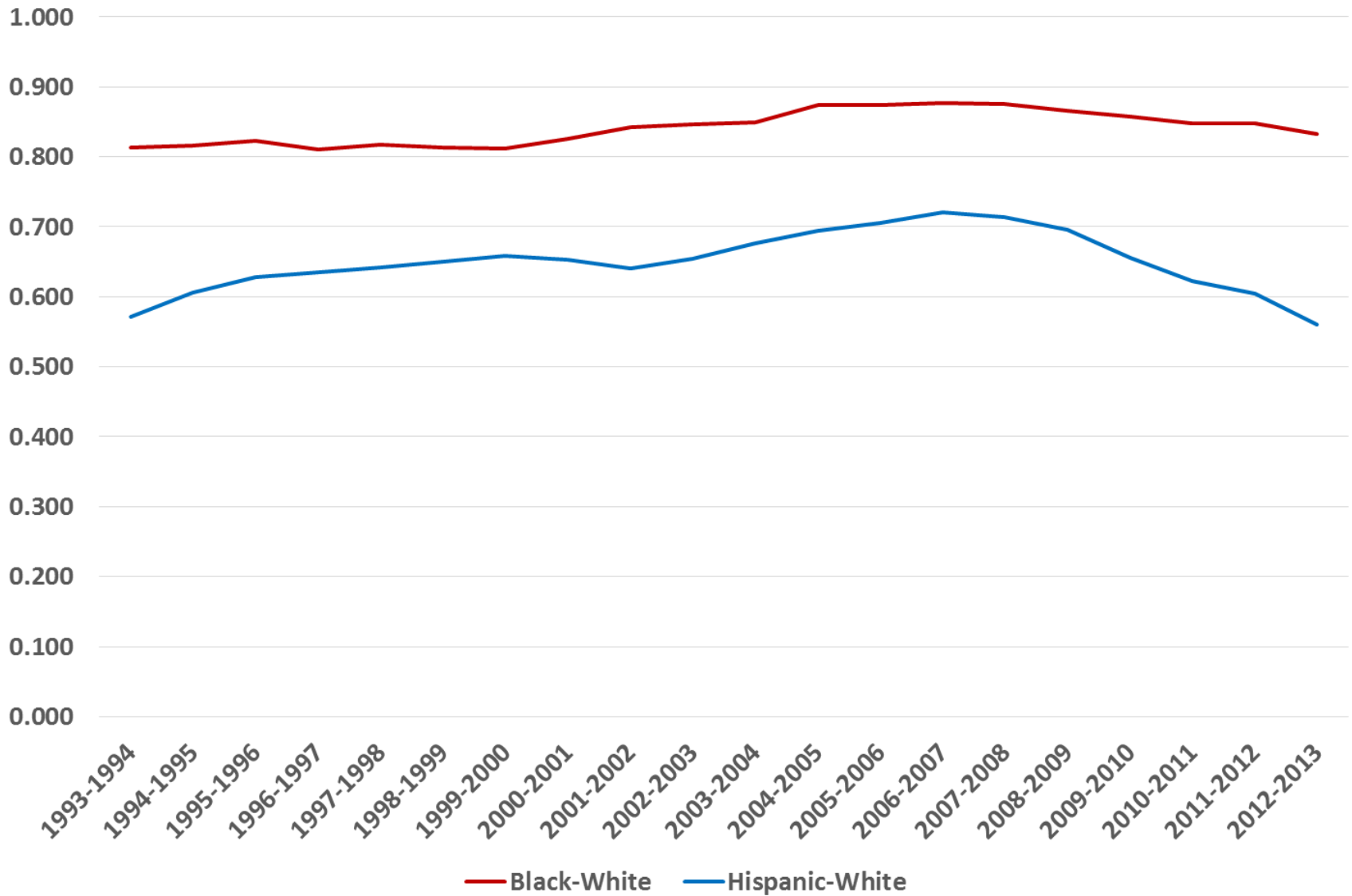
Relying on Schools to Revitalize Urban Neighborhoods

- These types of parent-initiated neighborhood-based urban school turnarounds are often viewed by municipal leaders as keys to urban revitalization.

The New York Times

Parents' Real Estate Strategy: Schools Come First

The Boston Globe

School makeovers, fueled by the middle class

As parents raise funds, standards, some fear impact on diversity

PlanCharlotte

Information, news and analysis to help citizens shape growth in the Charlotte region

Neighborhood schools? More city parents are taking a fresh look

WICHITA STATE UNIVERSITY

Limits to School-Based Community Development Campaigns

- But these strategies contain the potential for widening inequality, as gentrification-fueled success leads to an accumulation of advantage.

- It can lead to a widening gulf between advantaged schools and disadvantaged schools – in APS, attended almost exclusively by low-income African-American children.

- **How do we preserve and encourage parental engagement and school success while striving to reduce stratification and segregation?**

WICHITA STATE UNIVERSITY

Education and Equitable Communities: Neighborhoods, Transit, and Schools

- In districts with strict school attendance boundaries, segregated neighborhoods lead to segregated schools.

- Expanding low-income families' choices and access to high-achieving schools may help.
  - But this strategy is limited in its effectiveness, as the highest-performing schools are already the most oversubscribed.

- Promoting and supporting parent-driven reforms in inner-city neighborhoods may help.
  - But this strategy is also limited in its effectiveness, as these efforts have often relied upon substantial capital investment for their success.

WICHITA STATE UNIVERSITY

Education and Equitable Communities: Neighborhoods, Transit, and Schools

- In a neighborhood-based school system, desegregating schools requires desegregating neighborhoods.

- Thus, *housing* policy must also be thought of as *school* policy.

- Policies should promote new investment, new businesses, and new residents in isolated, low-income communities.

  - Simultaneously working to prevent the displacement of current residents.

- Meanwhile, policies should promote the construction of new affordable housing and public transit in affluent neighborhoods.

WICHITA STATE UNIVERSITY

THANK YOU

Chase M. Billingham
Department of Sociology
Wichita State University
1845 Fairmount St.
Wichita, KS 67260-0025

Phone: (316) 978-7144
E-mail: chase.billingham@wichita.edu

WICHITA STATE UNIVERSITY