

12-1-2010

Inequities in Education: The Case of Fulton County School District

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Inequities in Education: The Case of Fulton County School District

Lyndsay M. Moses

A Practicum Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Master of Public Administration

Kennesaw State University

December 2010

Department of Political Science and International Affairs

Master of Public Administration Program

College of Humanities & Social Sciences

Kennesaw State University

Kennesaw, Georgia

Certificate of Approval

This is to certify that the Capstone Project of

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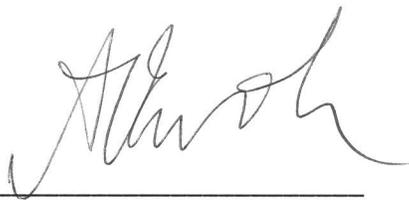
Has been approved by the Program Director

For the capstone requirement for the Master of Public Administration

Professional exercise in the Department of Political Science and International Affairs

At the December 2010 graduation

Capstone Director:



Inequities in Education: The Case of Fulton County School District

Executive Summary

On June 30, 2007, after much dissension the United States Supreme Court came to a final decision that public schools are not allowed to use a student's race or ethnicity as the primary factor in assigning students to particular schools. This ruling comes at a time when there are high levels of residential segregation that are producing resegregated schools. Residential segregation is not only creating racial resegregation, but also a consolidation of poverty. Forty-three percent of African American and Hispanic students attend schools with poverty rates over 80 percent, compared to just 4 percent of Caucasian students (McArdle, Osypuk, and Acevedo-Garcia 2010, 1). Disparities that derive from socioeconomic and racial segregation in schools have expanded the achievement gap, African American and Hispanics students consistently perform at lower levels than Caucasian counterparts. Students below the poverty level have also fallen behind peers of higher economic levels.

The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of socioeconomics and race on student test achievement in Fulton County School District. Acknowledging the effects of socioeconomic and racial segregation on academic success for students will provide a greater understanding and promote awareness in the inequalities that occur in education. Variance calculations were used to test the significance of socioeconomics and race on academic achievement of fifth grade students in Fulton County School District. The research revealed that while the majority of the students met the reading and mathematics assessment requirements on the Criterion Reference Competency Test (CRCT) there were large variations among the races and socioeconomic levels present in Fulton County School District. The results of the various analysis support previous

research findings that students of lower socioeconomic levels and certain minority races, mainly African American and Hispanic, perform at a lower level on standardized test, such as the CRCT. Recommendations to address these issues are to provide economically integrated schools through public school choice and restore low scoring schools with the creation of magnet schools.

This study concludes that inequality in education is obvious not only in local governments and states but also in the nation as a whole. It is important that more studies are conducted, so that educators, public administrators, and policymakers become compelled to promote equality in schools and insure all students excel so they can succeed in an increasingly diverse and ever-changing world.

Inequities in Education: The Case of Fulton County School District

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Acknowledgements

I would like to express my appreciation to Dr. Andrew I.E. Ewoh, for his devotion, guidance and time in the completion of this research. Under his tutelage, I received a greater perspective in the importance of research through his attention to detail and wealth of knowledge. Thank you Dr. Ewoh. I would also like to thank my other professors that have provided insight and expertise in the world of public administration, Drs. Baker, Choi, Foster, Shock, and Zimmermann. You all have truly opened my eyes to the various nuances of public service, I am grateful. Dr. Neuby, a special thank you for all your encouragement and support throughout my matriculation at Kennesaw.

To my family and friends, I am very appreciative of your unwavering support and unconditional love. Mom, Dad, Kelli, and Kevin, words cannot express my gratitude and thanks are not enough, I love you. I am eager to embrace the next phase of my life and feel very confident and prepared to effectively continue to serve in the public sector.

Inequities in Education: The Case of Fulton County School District

Introduction

Education in more diverse and less isolated environments is a benefit both to students and to the community; a benefit which becomes more important as the nation becomes increasingly diverse (McArdle, Osypuk, and Acevedo-Garcia 2010). However, the reality of this situation is that while the majority of Caucasian students attend middle class schools, minority students in racially segregated schools are very likely attending a school located in a concentrated poverty area. These patterns are not limited to cities; increasingly, suburban rings with rising minority enrollment also experience segregation by poverty and race (Stuart 2000). For the past several decades, research has documented the negative effects of racial segregation on education. More recently the negative effects of socioeconomic segregation have been pushed to the forefront in education. These 2 issues are often intertwined in many urban areas throughout the United States.

The purpose of this study is to identify the effects of socioeconomic segregation and racial resegregation on students' academic achievement in the Fulton County School District. Acknowledging the effects of socioeconomic and racial segregation on academic success for students will not only provide a greater understanding, but will also lay the groundwork for creating solutions and recommendations. Although this research directly pertains to Fulton County, Georgia, educational success should be a goal for the United States.

Immigration has transformed schools in the United States throughout the years as the number of African American students has grown slowly, the number of Hispanic and Asian American students has exploded, while Caucasian student enrollment has steadily declined.

There are twice as many African American and Hispanic students than Caucasian students that attend predominantly minority schools and 3 times as many attend extremely segregated schools (Orfield and Lee 2005, 12).

The questions that were addressed in this research paper are as follows:

1. What effect does socioeconomic segregation have on students' academic achievement in the Fulton County School District?
2. What effect does racial resegregation have on students' academic achievement in Fulton County School District?

Fulton County School District is in the process of phasing out a majority-to-minority program, at the close of the 2011-2012 school year. The majority-to-minority program allows students to transfer from a school in which their race is in the majority to a school in which their race is in the minority. As of the 2009-2010 school year, Fulton County School District was comprised of 42 percent African American students, 34 percent Caucasian students, 11 percent Hispanic students, 9 percent Asian American students and 4 percent Multiracial students (Fulton County Schools 2010).

According to Orfield and Lee (2005), in the southern states of the United States is experiencing an increasing trend of racial isolation in schools and a growing demand among parents for "neighborhood" schools, thus creating residential segregation and fewer children are being able to experience integrated classrooms. Moreover, the U.S. District Court released Fulton County School District from a desegregation decree in June of 2003. As a result of the removal of the desegregation ruling, Fulton County School District will phase-out its majority-

to-minority program. The majority-to-minority program was mainly transporting African American students in south Fulton to primarily high performance Caucasian schools in north Fulton.

Fulton County School District was the last Atlanta metropolitan system under a race-based desegregation court order, which ended federal supervision of school integration in this metropolitan area. Harvard researchers, Orfield and Lee, suggested that metro Atlanta's suburban residential segregation is the reason resegregation is happening in schools. In 2003, the City of Atlanta's Caucasian population represented 33 percent of the total city population, a time when only 7 percent attended Atlanta public schools (Downey 2003, 1). Between 1960 and 1990, private school enrollment declined throughout the United States, with the exception of the south and the southwestern border states (Downey 2003).

In addition to resegregation in southern states' schools, consolidation of poverty has also occurred. The report stated that almost a third of African American and Hispanic children live in poverty, compared to 13 percent of Caucasian children (Downey 2003, 1). Furthermore, middle class parents frequently purchase home based on the quality of the school district, hence high ranking school districts increase real estate prices. In view of this, less wealthy families cannot afford to buy a house in a top-notch school district. The report also acknowledged that parents that pay a lot to live in quality school districts oppose the manipulation of the school's attendance to create racial balance. Other studies show that low-income students achieve higher academic performance when they attend classes with middle class students (Downey 2003). On the contrary, impoverished schools have proven to provide inadequate education for the students (Downey 2003).

With the creation of the No Child Left Behind Act, states are now required to report and monitor student performance. The Georgia Department of Education's report card revealed vast differences in academic achievement between two middle schools in Fulton County, Camp Creek and Crabapple. Camp Creek Middle School is predominantly African American, while Crabapple Middle School has mainly Caucasian students. Additionally, 3 out of the 4 students at Camp Creek are eligible for free or reduced lunches, whereas 17 percent of the students at Crabapple participate in free or reduced lunches. Forty percent of Camp Creek's 6th graders failed to meet standards in reading in 2002 and only 7 percent failed at Crabapple (Downey 2003).

Although, Fulton County School District financially contributes the same amount of money at each of the schools, the Parents Teachers Association (PTA) at Crabapple is very involved in making sure the needs of their students are met and this school also has corporate partners that provide additional goods and services. In addition to receiving support from PTAs and corporate partners, research has shown that predominant Caucasian schools have stable staffing. Teachers that serve higher proportion of African American students are more likely to leave the schools, and this situation creates a revolving door and an opportunity for less experienced teachers. Therefore, elimination of such programs as the majority-to-minority program will increase the academic achievement gap for students of different races and socioeconomic levels in Fulton County School District.

This paper is composed of seven distinct sections. To begin, a background of the Fulton County School District is presented, which provides the school district's history, progression into desegregation and evolution into becoming a unitary status district. Next, is a presentation of relevant literature on government educational policies created to promote academic success and

the outcome of socioeconomics and race on student achievement. Following that selection is methodology, which explores the effects of socioeconomics and race on students' achievement in Fulton County School District. Then, the results and evaluations are explained in the findings section of the paper. Lastly, the paper makes recommendations on how to resolve the identified effects of socioeconomics and race on student achievement in the Fulton County School District.

Background

Fulton County School District, Georgia

Fulton County School District was established in 1871, and is one of the oldest and largest school districts in Georgia and is comprised of the cities of Alpharetta, Chattahoochee Hills, College Park, East Point, Fairburn, Hapeville, Johns Creek, Milton, Mountain Park Palmetto, Roswell, Sandy Springs, and Union City. In 1932, Campbell and Milton counties consolidated into Fulton County, therefore the schools within Campbell and Milton became a part of the Fulton County School District. The City of Atlanta, located in Fulton County, maintains its own separate school district.

Fulton County School District is the fourth largest school system in Georgia and has 59 elementary schools, 19 middle schools, 16 high schools that includes 2 open campus high schools and 7 charter organizations. The district is racially mixed and has a projected enrollment of 92,000 students as of the 2010-2011 school year. African Americans encompass 42 percent of the student body, Caucasians 34 percent, Hispanics 11 percent, Asian American 9 percent, Multiracial 4 percent and Native Americans comprise of less than 1 percent of the total student body. In addition, 43 percent of the total students in the school district are eligible to receive free or reduced meals, these students are referred to as economically disadvantaged (Fulton County

Schools 2010). The free or reduced meals program is a part of the National Child Nutrition program, which is available to qualifying households. The qualifications to participate in this program are based on the gross income of all household members and the number of persons residing the house.

Based on the 2009-2010 State of Georgia Report Card provided by the Governor's Office of Student Achievement the Fulton County School District did not meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) Report which is required by the No Child Left Behind Act. AYP measures student participation and achievement of statewide assessments and other academic indicators annually. In order to meet the AYP a school system must have 95 percent of the schools meet test participation, academic performance and a second indicator which is either attendance rate or graduation rate (Georgia Department of Education 2010a). Each school in the school district must have a participation rate of 95 percent or above on selected state assessments in Reading/English Language Arts and Mathematics to meet the test participation indicator.

The academic performance indicator is measured by each school meeting or exceeding the State's Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) regarding the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced on selected state assessments in Reading/English Language Arts and Mathematics. The second indicator requires each school to meet the standard or show progress on an additional indicator, which was attendance rate for the 2009-2010 school year. In addition, this indicator also measures student groups with at least 40 members. Student groups are defined by the various races that attend Fulton County School District as well as students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged or have limited English proficiency. The student groups identified in Fulton County School District are African American, American

Indian/Alaskan, Asian/Pacific Islander, Caucasian, Hispanic, Multiracial, Economically Disadvantage, English language learner (ELL) and Students with Disability (SWD).

Fulton County School District had 78 schools meet AYP or 78.8 percent of the total schools and 21 schools that did not meet AYP. The schools mainly did not meet AYP due to academic performance, however a several schools did not meet the second indicator of attendance and a couple of schools did not meet the test participation indicator. The student groups that did not meet AYP are African American, SWD, ELL and Economically Disadvantage due to academic performances and attendance rate for ELL and Economically Disadvantage groups (Georgia Department of Education 2010a). In addition, Fulton County School District has only met AYP in the 2004-2005 school year since the inception of the performance measurement in the 2003-2004 school year.

Desegregation of Fulton County School District

There were large disparities in education spending during the 1920s in Georgia; Caucasian students received almost 8 times more than African American students in funding for education (Carson, Evers-Williams, and Mauerlein 2003). In 1954, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* led to the establishment of desegregation of schools throughout the nation by declaring that racially segregated schools violated the 14th Amendment's equal protection clause. Nevertheless, Georgia public officials were reluctant and resisted desegregation originally. The Georgia General Assembly amended the state constitution to force the governor to suspend state funds going to any public school that were integrated (Georgia Advisory Committe to the United States Commission on Civil Rights 2007). While running for governor of Georgia, Ernest Vandiver campaigned to maintain segregation in state public schools.

However, in 1959, the U.S. District Court ruled Atlanta's segregation of public schools unconstitutional and ordered integration immediately (Roche 1998).

The newly elected Governor Vandiver employed John Sibley to head the General Assembly Committee on Schools, which became known as the Sibley Commission. The Sibley Commission was established to gather state residents' opinions on desegregation, and was often thought of as a way to stall for time rather than cut off state funds to the schools as well as put the decision of segregation in the hands of people instead of Governor Vandiver. Additionally, in an attempt to prevent massive resistance to integration, Sibley generated support for a "local option" concept whereby school boards could make desegregation decisions. Through this local option, Sibley was not violating the U.S. District Court's ruling. As a result, there were several hearings arranged to allow witnesses to state their choice of integration resistance at the expense of the school system or amending the state law to allow minimal integration while keeping segregation intact. Sixty percent of the witnesses favored total segregation which disrupted Sibley's efforts to minimize support for resistance of integration (Roche 1998).

Thus, Sibley disregarded the results from the hearings and presented his recommendation to the Georgia Legislature that supported the U.S. District Court's ruling by creating several measures that would allow schools to remain segregated. Specifically, the report suggested that: (1) a freedom of association amendment be added to the state constitution to guarantee each student the right to transfer schools or receive tuition credit for private school if that student's school was forced to integrate; (2) a second constitutional amendment to offer each community an opportunity to choose for itself through a local election what to do when faced with the prospect of desegregation; and (3) legislation for tuition grants if a student wanted to transfer

from a desegregated school or if a local school system decided to close rather than integrate (Roche 1998,162-166).

Nevertheless before the Legislature had a chance to vote on Sibley's report, Governor Vandiver had to make a decision about segregation because a federal judge ordered that two African American students be admitted to the University of Georgia. Governor Vandiver ordered the university to close. However, a federal judge reversed the governor's decision and to avoid further confrontation, Governor Vandiver abandoned the massive resistance to integration and introduced a bill that repealed cutoff funds laws for both the university and public schools, and adopted the recommendations from the Sibley Commission. On January 31, 1961, the bill was passed and the Atlanta school system officially desegregated following that school year. Although, the Sibley Commission prevented the violence that was associated with integration, it still provided strategies that local school boards utilized to slow down the desegregation process until the late 1960s (Roche 1998). It was not until 1970 that Fulton County School District was placed under a court order to integrate. The actual initiating case was *Calhoun v. Latimer*, which was a class action suit filed in 1964 for the desegregation of Fulton County School District (Georgia Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights 2007).

Although the *Brown v. Board of Education* removed segregation in schools, other barriers were created to make desegregation hard to implement such as white flight. White flight from urban metropolitan areas and the migration of middle class from central to inner cities created resegregation of schools. In addition, the 1974 case of *Milliken v. Bradley* also aided in the resegregation of schools by finding that suburban districts do not have to be involved in desegregation of schools.

The Unitary Status of Fulton County School District

Fulton County School District remained under a court order to desegregate for 39 years, until obtaining a unitary status from the United States District Court in June of 2003. In the 1980s, desegregation litigation shifted as school districts began to seek relief from court supervision through the achievement of a unitary status. A unitary status removes the school desegregation order from a school district that has demonstrated its good faith effort with the elimination of a dual system and its ability to operate a unitary school system where improving achievement for all students is a top priority. Through the United States Supreme Court decisions in the early 1990s on cases such as the *Board of Education of Oklahoma City Public Schools v. Dowell (1991)* and *Missouri v. Jenkins (1995)*, school districts were achieving unitary status much easier which resulted in more school districts having their desegregation decrees lifted (Georgia Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights 2007).

Under the settlement terms of becoming a unitary school system, Fulton County planned to phase out the district's majority-to-minority program over a period of nine years, which is expected to end at the close of the 2011-12 academic year (Downey 2003). The majority-to-minority program allows students to transfer, with the aid of free transportation, from a school where their race is in the majority to one where their race is in the minority.

School districts that are seeking a unitary status are also facing resegregation within the district because of residential patterns. Fulton County School District is among the districts that, prior to becoming unitary, had difficulty integrating schools when patterns of residential segregation exist, which brought about the majority-to-minority program that bused students to schools outside their neighborhoods (Sullivan 2006). The majority-to-minority program not only provided an effective way to integrate the Fulton County School District but also aided in

helping the school district's removal from the tutelage of the federal court and obtained a unitary status. Fulton County School District, as a unitary system, is experiencing a greater shift in racial imbalance in the schools and with the elimination of the majority-to-minority program will only elevate the racial disparities in the district.

Resegregation in school districts because of residential patterns has been identified by the Supreme Court as de facto segregation, whereby racially identifiable populations result from changes in housing patterns rather than government policy (Sullivan 2006). Moreover, school districts, such as Fulton County School District, that have de facto segregation communities will not have to incur legal responsibility to integrate populations. In *Freeman v. Pitts*, the Supreme Court ruled that DeKalb County School District is not required to provide racial balance in the schools where imbalances were not a result of prior de jure segregation (Sullivan 2006). DeKalb County School District's racial composition has changed drastically from less than 6 percent African American students prior to the desegregation order to 47 percent in 1992, at the time of the *Freeman v. Pitts* case, therefore the Supreme Court found that racial disparities were not attributable to the school district before the desegregation order (Sullivan 2006).

Literature Review

No Child Left Behind

President Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 on January 8, 2002. The NCLB was passed for the reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act mainly to raise the expectations for states, school districts, and schools that require all students to meet or exceed state standards in reading and mathematics within the time period of 12 years. Furthermore, the NCLB requires all states to establish academic standards

and a state testing system to meet federal requirements. The State of Georgia received the approval of its state academic standards and testing system from the United States Department of Education on May 19, 2003.

The NCLB also contains several components that are also required from all the states. A progress report has been mandated, such as the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) report that measures the yearly student achievement on statewide assessments. When a public school fails to make an AYP for two or more consecutive years, students have the options of relocating to a higher performing public school through the Public School Choice program. The Public School Choice program is also offered to students that have been victims of criminal offenses or those that attend a school that meet the definition of a persistently dangerous school. In addition, the schools that need improvement and failed to meet the yearly progress report receive supplemental services from the NCLB program. The supplemental services consist of tutoring and remedial classes in subjects such as language arts, math, and reading. The NCLB also guarantees that students with disabilities will not be left behind. In Georgia, the proficient level of academic achievement must be met by the 2013-2014 for students with disabilities (Georgia Department of Education 2010a).

Additionally, in the same academic school year, Georgia must meet the proficient level of academic achievement for students with limited English Language Learners (ELL). ELL students are to become proficient in English and obtain high academic standards through the NCLB, at minimum these students should attain proficiency or become better in language arts, reading, and mathematics. The ELL program in Georgia is known as English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). ESOL is a state funded instructional program for students in kindergarten through twelfth grades. The ESOL program provides standard based curriculum

with an emphasis on social and academic language proficiency (Georgia Department of Education 2010a).

Title I, Part A, is also a part of the NCLB. It provides federal funds for public schools with high percentages of impoverished children to assist in meeting the student academic achievement standards and state academic content. Furthermore, it supplies technical assistance, resources and program monitoring to guarantee that all children have an opportunity to obtain a high quality education and develop the aptitude to achieve high academic standards.

Economic Segregation in Education

Research has discovered that economic segregation in public schools could be more harmful than racial segregation. In fact, studies have provided evidence which shows that educational opportunities are reduced for students attending extreme high poverty schools (Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity 2005). Furthermore, research has shown that this phenomenon occurs for middle class students that attend high poverty schools as well. The gap is widening between high performing schools and low performing schools, and the majority of the low performing schools are located in urban areas. Data collected from Ohio illustrate segregation of schools by income and the impact on student performance by the Kirwan Institute. The researchers gathered data from the 6 largest urban metropolitan areas in Ohio: Cleveland, Columbus, Cincinnati, Toledo, Dayton, and Akron. In these 6 urban areas, over half of the poor student population attended high poverty schools. The study defined schools as high poverty when more than 60 percent of the student body is economically disadvantaged. Additionally, extreme high poverty schools have been defined as schools where about 80 percent of the student body is economically disadvantaged. In the Cleveland region, nearly two-thirds of

the poor students segregated into high poverty schools (Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity 2005, 4). The Ohio research was conducted during the 2004-2005 academic year.

When the study was conducted, about 40 percent of the students in the 6 urban areas attended high poverty schools (Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity 2005, 5). The Ohio public schools have a classification system to evaluate the performance levels for the schools. The classification system comprised of the following categories: effective, excellent, continuous improvement, academic watch, and academic emergency. Ninety-four percent of the high poverty schools in Ohio are classified in 1 of the 3 lowest categories, academic emergency, academic watch or continuous improvement, and 42 percent of the extremely high poverty schools were categorized as academic emergency (Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity 2005, 5). The extreme high poverty schools' standardized test scores were more than 40 percent lower than the test scores in non-high poverty schools. On the contrary, 27 percent of the non-high poverty schools in Ohio fell into the 3 lowest categories. Moreover, in the 6 metropolitan areas, none of the high poverty schools outperformed the non-high poverty schools (Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity 2005).

The study also consisted of the relationship between economic and racial segregation. In Ohio, the researchers found a link between economic segregation and racial segregation in public schools. The public schools are largely segregated by race and the majority of the schools that are heavily populated with students of color are high poverty schools. The African American students in the 6 urban areas attend schools that are 2 to 3 times more impoverished than those of their Caucasian counterparts. In the 6 areas, the average Caucasian students attend schools with student poverty ranging from 23 to 30 percent, whereas the average African American students attend schools with student poverty ranging from 61 to 78 percent (Kirwan Institute for the Study

of Race and Ethnicity 2005, 5). There is a prevalence of high poverty and extreme poverty schools located in African American neighborhoods in Ohio's 6 urban areas. Furthermore, the researchers found that between 1990 and 2000, African American student segregation increased in all of Ohio's 6 urban metropolitans (Brown University and Lewis Mumford Center 2004).

The researchers also highlighted the consequences of racial and economic segregation, and how it is leaving a large portion of students behind. According to the 2001 Urban Institute Education Policy Center report, 38 percent of the students in 5 of the Ohio 6 urban areas would graduate on time. The Akron public schools graduated more than 54 percent of students on time. Additionally, economic segregation is also affecting middle class students that attend high-poverty schools (Swanson 2004, 78). Ohio students that live above the poverty line represent 20 to 40 percent of the children that are being deprived by attending high or extreme high poverty schools. With education being vital to economic advancement, this disparity can negatively affect the achievement of these students. The Kirwan Institute report concluded that it is imperative to continue to study the effects of economic and racial segregation, and recommended integration so that all the public schools could be more diverse and victorious in academic achievement.

Racial and Ethnic Achievement Trends

Educational achievement gaps narrowed considerably in the 1970s and 1980s among the racial and ethnic groups in the United States were compared; however, some of the gaps widened in the 1990s. A study by Lee (2002) looked at the achievement trends between African American and Caucasian students, and between Hispanic and Caucasian students over the past 30 years; and found that achievement gaps tapered among these groups in basic skill levels in the 1970s

and early 1980s. The racial and ethnic achievement gaps grew at the advanced skill levels in the late 1980s and the 1990s (Lee 2002). Lee found that the achievement gaps between African American and Caucasian students, and between Hispanic and Caucasian students were significantly larger with the range of the gaps falling between 0.5 and 1.0 in standard deviation units (Lee 2002, 10). In further detail, the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) displayed how African American and Caucasian test score gaps in reading and mathematics fell by 20 to 40 percent over a period of three decades, between 1970s through 1990s (Lee 2002, 3). Conversely, the Hispanic and Caucasian test score gaps for reading and mathematics dropped relatively little, thereby illustrating inconsistent patterns of gains and losses throughout the time period of the 1970s through 1990s (Lee 2002, 4).

The research revealed that factors attributed to the narrowing of the racial and ethnic achievement gaps in the past do not provide an explanation for the widening gap in the trend analysis. In the past, studies of racial and ethnic achievement gaps focused on the dichotomy between the student's home environment and school environment effects, and assumed that the effects of certain factors on a student achievement remained constant throughout the decades (Lee 2002, 3). Therefore, Lee (2002) looked beyond conventional measures of racial and ethnic inequities to develop a new framework for further empirical research on the achievement gap patterns. In Lee's (2002) study, the following factors were identified as contributing to the racial and ethnic achievement gaps: socioeconomic and family conditions (educational attainment, income, poverty, and single household), youth culture and student behaviors (motivation and effort for learning, alcohol and illicit drug usage, and crime), and schooling conditions and practices (instructional resources, teachers, course taking, dropout, and segregation).

Lee's study illustrated that further examination is required across multiple fields to reveal the factors that might reduce or increase the racial and ethnic gaps. In addition, Lee (2002) concluded that all racial and ethnic groups besides African Americans and Hispanic students should be included when examining achievement levels. Moreover, the educational gap should also be examined at all achievement levels. By exploring the achievement gap for various minority groups through cross-examination, factors affecting the gaps will provide further knowledge of educational conditions and practices that could be effective in reducing the achievement gaps for certain racial and ethnic groups (Lee 2002).

Parents Involved

On June 28, 2007 the United States Supreme Court ruled that race could no longer be considered in public schools assignments (Greenhouse 2007). The U.S. Supreme Court was divided and a vote of 5 to 4 reversed the decisions of 2 cases involving school programs that were creating diversity by limiting transfers on the basis of race to particular schools. Both cases were upheld by lower federal courts. The Louisville case was *Meredith v. Jefferson County Board of Education*, whereby a mother of a student was denied a transfer to attend the chosen kindergarten class because the school needed to keep the Caucasian students within the program's racial guidelines. The Seattle case, *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1*, was filed by a group of parents that formed a nonprofit corporation to fight the city's high school assignment plan (Greenhouse 2007). In January 2006, parents who objected to the Louisville and Seattle programs filed appeals with the Supreme Court from the lower court decisions which upheld the programs. The cases were resolved in a single U.S. Supreme Court opinion therefore the decision only carries the name of the *Parents Involved in*

Community Schools v. Seattle School District.

Chief Justice John G. Roberts stated that such programs were “directed only to racial, balance, pure and simple;” a goal he believed was forbidden by the U.S. Constitution’s guarantee of equal protection (Greenhouse 2007, 1). Chief Justice Robert felt the way of ending discrimination based on race was to stop doing such a thing; using race to assign children to schools was unconstitutional. Justice Anthony M. Kennedy was the fifth member of the majority in the ruling that the two programs were unconstitutional, however, he was very critical of the chief justice’s opinion and thought that race may be taken into account in certain instances. Justice Kennedy’s opinion describe how school districts could constitutionally address racial diversity by creating programs that were sufficiently “narrowly tailored” and avoided racial isolation (Greenhouse 2007). The requirement of narrowly tailored is to ensure that the means chosen fit the compelling goal so closely that there is little or no possibility that the motive for the classification was unlawful racial prejudice or stereotype (DeLeo 2008). The avoidance of labeling and sorting of individual children by race would comply with narrowly tailored, thereby attaining the equal protection demands of the 14th Amendment. Therefore, Justice Kennedy suggested the following programs that are in accordance with being narrowly tailored: drawing school attendance zones, strategic site selection of new schools and directing resources to special programs.

Justice Stephen G. Breyer was one of the four justices that ruled against Chief Roberts’ opinion. Justice Breyer thought the ruling was a radical step away from settled law and would strip local communities of the tools needed to prevent resegregation in their public schools as well as trigger race-related lawsuits (Greenhouse 2007). Furthermore, Justice John Paul Stevens sided with Justice Breyer and also wrote a dissenting opinion. Justice Stevens thought the Chief

Roberts' opinion was cruel irony to *Brown v. Board of Education* case because it is rewriting the history of one of the most important decisions made by the U.S. Supreme Court, by ignoring the context in which it was issued and the subsequent understanding of it to permit voluntary programs which are now being invalidated (Greenhouse 2007).

The Louisville and Seattle appeal cases created dissension in the U.S. Supreme Court and in the end five of the justices felt the U.S. Constitution should always be colorblind regardless of context or circumstances which led to the final ruling that public schools systems cannot seek to achieve or maintain integration through measures that take explicit account of a student's race (Greenhouse 2007). While the remaining four justices believe the ruling will be regretted not only by the court but also by the nation.

Race to the Top

The U.S. Department of Education selected the State of Georgia as one of the winners for the second round of "Race to the Top" grants. As a result, Georgia will receive \$400 million over the next 4 years. Collectively, 10 states won \$3.4 billion in Race to the Top grant funds. This grant was established through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 to help improve schools. The Race to the Top grant rewards states that have successfully created plans for educational innovation and reform. States are required to implement reform in four areas:

- Adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the Workplace and to compete in the global economy;

- Building data systems that measure student growth and success, and inform teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction;
- Recruiting, preparing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most; and
- Turning around the lowest-achieving schools (Georgia Department of Education 2010b, 1).

The State of Georgia will divide the \$400 million between the Georgia Department of Education and 26 local schools districts. More specifically, the Georgia Department of Education will utilize the money for professional training, a statewide tracking system for student achievement and development of teacher evaluation systems, while the local schools district will develop their own improvement programs for standards and test scores (Badertscher and McWhirter 2010). A total of 26 school districts have signed on to partner with Georgia's Race to the Top Plan. In total, these school districts make up 41 percent of public schools in Georgia as well as 46 percent of Georgia's students in poverty, 53 percent of the state's African American students, 48 percent of Georgia's Hispanic and 68 percent of the state's lowest achieving schools (Georgia Department of Education 2010b, 1). In addition to the Race to the Top grant, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation provided grant money for the technical assistance of the Race to the Top plan development. Georgia was among 15 states selected to receive assistance and based on their progress in education policy and reform.

Fulton County School District is not one of the school district participants in the Race to the Top program. In fact, Fulton County School District and two additional metro Atlanta large school districts, Cobb and Forsyth, objected to participate in the program out of the fear for

giving up local control. The school districts stated a big issue was that participating school systems have to remove their current teacher evaluation systems and replace them with a new statewide evaluation system (Badertscher 2010). Instead of participating in the Race to the Top program Fulton County School District is looking into becoming a charter system, which gives more local flexibility in spending, staffing and programs. Fulton County School District has also been awarded grant money from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to work with Harvard University for two years on raising student achievement and improving teacher quality (Badertscher 2010).

Teacher Quality and Institutional Economic Resources

Teachers are an important contribution in students' success. It has been found that high poverty schools often have less stable and less qualified teaching staff (Orfield and Lee 2005). Researcher, Linda Darling-Hammond, found that California schools with more than a 90 percent minority student body are nearly 7 more times likely to have unqualified teachers than in a school with a low minority student body (Darling-Hammond 2001, 41). Furthermore, other studies have shown that schools with a large population of minority and impoverished students experience a higher rate of turnover among teachers (Freeman, Scafidi, and Sjoquist 2002). Freeman, Scafidi and Sjoquist conducted a study on racial segregation in Georgia public schools and the impact on teacher quality; they found a relationship between the percentage of African American students and teacher turnover. Caucasian teachers, composed of over 80 percent of the Georgia teaching force during the time of the study, were more likely to leave schools that serve higher proportions of African American students; and the turnover rates increased dramatically throughout the late 1990s (Freeman, Scafidi, and Sjoquist 2002, 25).

In addition to the quality of teachers, inequality exists in school curriculum. A 1993 study by Monk and Haller on the correlation between the average socioeconomic status of the student body and academic credits that were offered concluded that schools with higher concentrations of low-income students had a less challenging curriculum (Monk and Haller 1993). The funding designated for impoverished schools versus affluent schools is often disproportionately unequal. Even when funding levels are comparable between high poverty schools and low poverty schools, the high poverty schools frequently lack important resources such as the following learning materials, new textbooks, computers and tools required to effectively teach classes.

Methodology

A case study method is used in this analysis to examine the effects of socioeconomic and racial segregation on the students in Fulton County School District. The research used multiple sources of evidence from literature and data collection to explore the 5th grade student population in Fulton County School District. Since socioeconomic and racial segregation factors appear to have an effect on student achievement, it was appropriate to examine the relationship between these two variables in a diverse school district such as Fulton County.

For the purpose of this research, I studied only schools in Fulton County School District. Private schools located in Fulton County, Georgia, were not included because the research is designed to measure the effects of socioeconomics and racial segregation on public schools' academic achievements. After controlling for the parameters previously listed, the study dataset contained information on the 57 public elementary schools in Fulton County School District. Moreover, the study was performed on all 5th grade classes in the schools located in Fulton

County School District. This grade level is being studied because a state law requires that students meet a certain criteria in order to legally move on to the next grade level. A 5th grade student will not be promoted to the 6th grade if achievement in accordance with the law or policy has not been met on the Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) mathematics and reading assessments as well as promotional standards and criteria established by Georgia Board of Education and Fulton County School District.

The Georgia CRCT has been designed to measure students' aptitude. The test measures specific skills in Georgia core curriculum that are required for continued academic progress. The student performance standards for Georgia are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1.

Test Measurements for Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests

Scores below 800	"Does not Meet Expectations"
Scores from 800 to 849	"Meets Expectations"
Scores at or above 850	"Exceeds Expectations"

The variables from the data included school demographics and student academic outcomes. The school demographics variables from the Georgia Department of Education include two independent variables. The first variable was the race of the students. The races identified in the study are as follows: African American, Asian American, Caucasian, Hispanic, Multiracial, and Native American. The second variable was the economic level of the students that comprised of economically disadvantaged and not economically disadvantaged students.

The student academic outcome variable came from the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement’s annual report cards. The annual report cards provide accountability for the Georgia’s education from the pre-kindergarten through postsecondary levels. The report card data came from the most recent data available which is the 2008-2009 academic school year. An analysis was performed on the variables of socioeconomic and race for the 5th grade students and their scores on the CRCT reading and mathematics assessments. The variables of race and socioeconomic were tested independently. Furthermore, Figure 2 displays the formula used to calculate the variation between the different racial and socioeconomic groups in Fulton County School District.

Figure 2.

<p>Race Variation Formula</p> <p>Base value = Caucasian Students Comparison value = Minority Students Variation formula = (comparison value) – (base value) / (base value) * 100%</p> <p>Socioeconomic Variation Formula</p> <p>Base value = Not Economically Disadvantaged Students Comparison value = Economically Disadvantaged Students Variation formula = (comparison value) – (base value) / (base value) * 100%</p>

Due to the data sources and variables included in this study there were several important limitations. The unit of analysis was schools located in the Fulton County School District. Furthermore, there are limitations associated with a single level of analysis as opposed to a multilevel analysis; therefore, this study was able to build upon a number of other studies that

demonstrate the significance of the relationship between the socioeconomic and race demographics and school educational achievements. In addition, any interpretation of the results will not focus on the assessment of individual students, but rather the results will be focused on educational achievement for schools in Fulton County School District based on socioeconomics and race.

Limitations also exist among the data sample. The number of schools included in this study is limited because the data were comprised of students that attend public elementary schools. Excluded from the analysis are students that reside in Fulton County and attend private schools. Another limitation of this study is its examination of only schools located in Fulton County School District. Although the study is limited to the Fulton County School District, it is believed that problems from socioeconomic and racial segregation not only occur in this school district rather these trends happen nationwide.

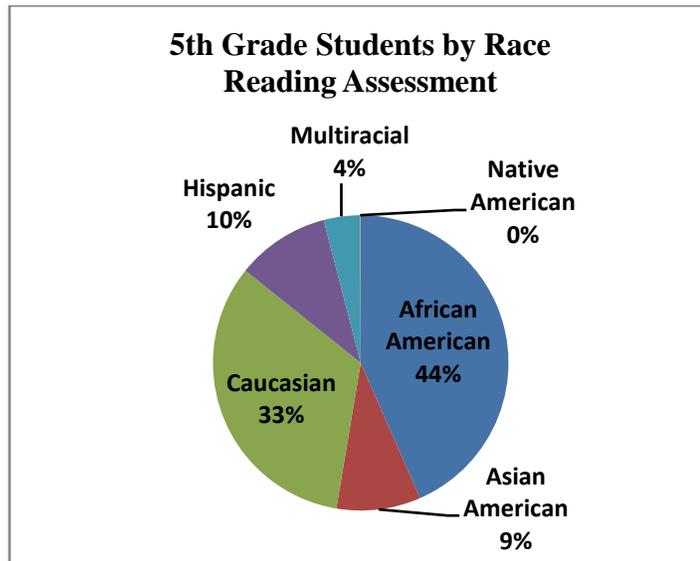
Findings

Reading assessment of racial groups in Fulton County School District

The variance among the percentage of students at each performance level for the reading and math assessments at the 5th grade level was calculated and analyzed. The first analysis examined the effects of race on the reading assessment performance. The reading scores of 6,603 students were analyzed. The demographics of the students are illustrated in Figure 3. Forty-four percent of the students were African American, 33 percent Caucasian, 10 percent Hispanic, 9 percent Asian American, 4 percent Multiracial, and 0 percent Native American. Fulton County School District has 4 students in the 5th grade that are Native American which

produced the 0 percent displayed in the figure. Due to the limited number of Native American students, the study did not include this race in the analysis.

Figure 3.



The results of the reading assessment performance derived from the total percentage of test performances at the three levels, does not meet, meet and exceeds. As shown in Figure 4, the majority of the races either met or exceeded the reading assessment part of the CRCT. However, there were large variations between the races at each level. African American and Hispanic students had the highest percentage of students that “does not meet” or failed the reading assessment. There were a total of 2,867 African American students that took the reading assessment and of these students 287 did not pass the assessment. Hispanic students had 61 students that did not pass the reading assessment. Conversely, Asian American and Caucasian students only had 1 percent that “does not meet” the required test performance level, which

totaled 6 Asian American and 22 Caucasian students. The Multiracial students had 5 percent that failed to meet the required performance level, which totaled 13 students.

Hispanic and African American students had the highest percentage of students at the “meet” level, with 79 percent and 78 percent, respectively. In total, 532 Hispanic and 2,236 African American students achieved the reading assessment at the “meet” level. While, 62 percent of the Multiracial (163 students), 48 percent of Caucasian (1,049 students), and 40 percent of Asian American students (244 students) obtained a score within the “meet” level.

Asian American and Caucasian students had the largest percentage of students to obtain the “exceed” level. Fifty-eight percent of Asian American students exceeded the reading assessment, which totaled 353 students. Caucasian students had 51 percent (1,115 students) that exceeded the test. In addition, 33 percent of Multiracial students had an “exceed” performance level, which totaled 263 students. African American and Hispanic students had 13 percent that obtained a “exceed” performance level, these two races had the lowest percent of students exceed the reading assessment.

Figure 4.

CRCT reading assessment performance based on race			
	Does not Meet	Meet	Exceed
African American	10%	78%	13%
Asian American	1%	40%	58%
Caucasian	1%	48%	51%
Hispanic	9%	79%	13%
Multiracial	5%	62%	33%

Reading assessment variation among racial groups in Fulton County School District

Significant discrepancies in student performance based on race were evident when comparing the variations based on test performance. Figure 5 displays the variation between the minority students that were present in Fulton County School District and their Caucasian counterpart. Variance was calculated for each of the 3 performance levels. The first performance level, “does not meet,” revealed a 900 percent variance between African American and Caucasian students and an 800 percent variance between Hispanic and Caucasian students. The substantial variance between these students occurred because a larger percentage of African American and Hispanic students were receiving low scores on their reading assessment. Multiracial students also had a higher percentage of students receiving low scores on the reading assessment than Caucasian students which led to a variance of 400 percent. Asian American and Caucasian students attained the same percentage of students at the “does not meet” level, therefore the variance was zero percent.

A comparison of the different races at the “meet” level did not show as much of a variance as the first level. There are a higher percentage of African American, Hispanic, and Multiracial students that achieved the “meet” level than Caucasian students. The variance between African American and Caucasian students was 63 percent, Hispanic students had a variance of 65 percent with their Caucasian counterparts and Multiracial student’s variance with Caucasian students was 29 percent. Although Asian American students had a lower number of students reach the “meet” level than Caucasian students, the performance percentages were fairly close which created a variance of 17 percent.

The third performance level, “exceed,” provided the strongest relationship in the effects of race on a student’s achievement. African American and Hispanic students had the same

variance with Caucasian students; there was a 75 percent variance between the students at this test performance level. There was also a 35 percent variance between Multiracial students and Caucasian students. The “exceed” level had the largest percentage of Asian American and Caucasian students than any other level, the majority of the students from these two races excelled in the reading assessment of the CRCT. The variance between the Asian American and Caucasian students was -14 percent, Asian American students had a slightly larger percentage of students that obtained the “exceed” performance level.

Figure 5.

Variance based on performance percentage of students by race

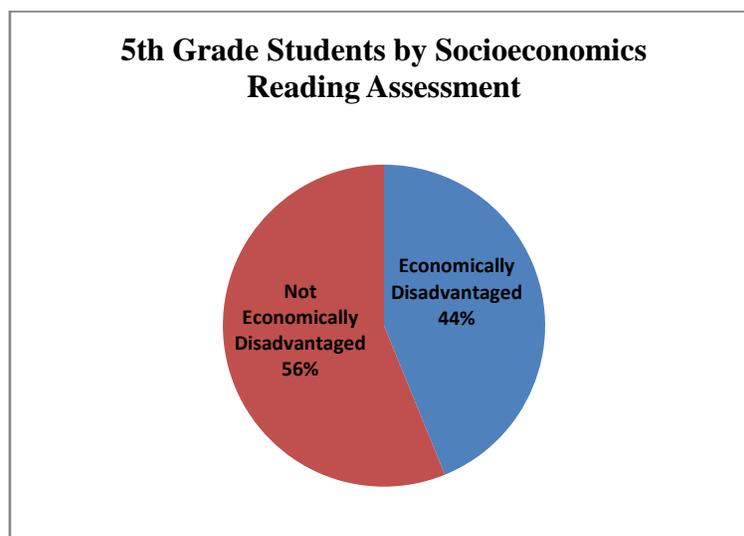
	<i>Does not Meet</i>	<i>Meet</i>	<i>Exceed</i>
	Caucasian		
African American	-900%	-63%	75%
Asian American	0.0%	-16.7%	13.7%
Hispanic	-800%	-65%	75%
Multiracial	-400%	-29%	35%

Reading assessment of socioeconomic levels in Fulton County School District

The second analysis evaluated the effects of socioeconomics on student achievement. The socioeconomic demographic in this research consisted of students that are economically disadvantaged and those that are not economically disadvantaged. Figure 6 displays the socioeconomic composition of the Fulton County School District 5th grade students, 44 percent were economically disadvantaged while not economically disadvantaged students represented the remaining 56 percent. The results of the reading assessment performance were also obtained from the total percentage of test performance at the three levels that were utilized in the race

analysis. Based on the results illustrated in Figure 6, the majority of students in both socioeconomic levels met the reading assessment. There were a total of 2,894 economically disadvantaged students tested and 318 students (11 percent) failed to meet the required reading assessment level. On the contrary, only 74 not economically disadvantaged students (2 percent) did not meet the required assessment level. The total number of not economically disadvantaged students that took the reading assessment was 3,709 students.

Figure 6.



The “meet” performance level of the reading assessment had the largest percentage of students in both socioeconomic categories. There were 2,286 economically disadvantaged students (79 percent) and 1,929 not economically disadvantaged students (52 percent) that attained the “meet” performance level on the reading assessment. The not economically disadvantaged students had a significantly higher percentage of students that obtained the “exceed” level than economically disadvantaged students. Forty-six percent of the not economically disadvantaged students exceeded the reading assessment as compared to 10

percent of the economically disadvantaged students. The total number of not economically disadvantaged students that excelled was 2,894 students and only 289 economically disadvantaged students achieved the same level of success.

Figure 7.

CRCT reading assessment performance based on socioeconomics			
	Does not Meet	Meet	Exceed
Economically Disadvantaged	11%	79%	10%
Not Economically Disadvantaged	2%	52%	46%

Reading Assessment Variation among the various socioeconomic levels in Fulton County School District

Inconsistencies in student performance based on socioeconomics are apparent when comparing the variances based on test performance between economically disadvantaged students and those that are not disadvantaged. Illustrated in Figure 8 are the variances between the two economic groups identified in Fulton County School District. Variance was calculated based on the results from the three performance levels. The variance for the first performance level, “does not meet,” was 450 percent. This large variation was a result of a higher percentage of economically disadvantaged students failing to meet the reading assessment requirement than students that were not economically disadvantaged. Furthermore, the variation at the “meet” level is considerably smaller than the prior level, this occurred because the majority of students from both economic levels accomplished this level of achievement. The variance between the students was 52 percent; the percentage of economically disadvantaged students was higher at this level than any other level. There was a large variation at the “exceed” performance level,

not economically disadvantaged students outperformed the students that were economically disadvantaged with a 78 percent variation. Based on the results from the variances, a relationship has been found that students who are not economically disadvantaged will attain the “exceed” performance level of the reading assessment at a higher percentage than students that are economically disadvantaged.

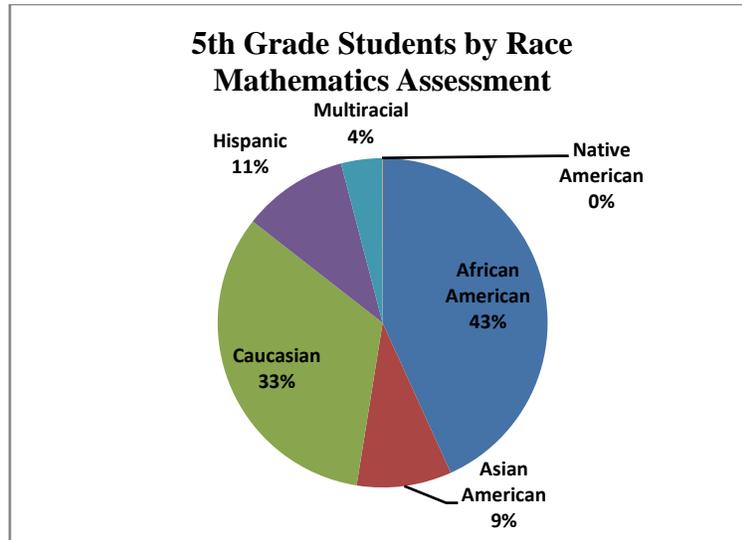
Figure 8.

Variance based on performance percentage of students by socioeconomics			
	<i>Does not Meet</i>	<i>Meet</i>	<i>Exceed</i>
	Not Economically Disadvantaged		
Economically Disadvantaged	-450%	-52%	78%

Mathematics assessment of racial groups in Fulton County School District

The second analysis examined the effects of race on the mathematics assessment performance. Mathematics scores of 6,635 students were examined; the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement reported a larger number of 5th grade students that participated in the mathematics assessment of the CRCT test. The demographics of the students are displayed in Figure 8, 43 percent of the students were African American, 33 percent Caucasian, 11 percent Hispanic, 9 percent Asian American, 4 percent Multiracial and 0 percent Native American. As previously stated, Fulton County School District has 4 students in the 5th grade that are Native American which produced the 0 percent in the Figure 9.

Figure 9.



The results of the mathematics assessment performance were from the total percentage of test performances at the three levels, does not meet, meet, and exceeds. Figure 10 illustrates that the majority of the races either met or exceeded the mathematics assessment part of the CRCT. However, there were substantial variations between the races at each level. African American students had the highest percentage of “does not meet” the mathematics assessment requirement at 19 percent. A total of 545 African American students failed the mathematics assessment. Hispanic and Multiracial students also experienced higher percentage rates of students that did not meet the mathematics assessment, 11 and 9 percent, respectively. There was a total of 75 Hispanic and 24 Multiracial students that failed to meet the required mathematics assessment. Caucasian students had a percentage rate of 4 percent that “does not meet” the mathematics assessment, which was 88 students. Asian American students had the lowest percentage of students that did not meet the required assessment. A total of 6 Asian American students (1 percent) failed to meet the mathematics requirement.

Hispanic and African American students had the highest percentage of students at the “meet” level, with 62 percent and 57 percent, respectively. In total, 427 Hispanic and 1,635 African American students achieved the mathematics assessment at the “meet” level. More than half of the Hispanic and African American students met the required mathematics assessment. Multiracial students had 45 percent that obtained the “meet” level, which were 120 students. While, 29 percent of Caucasian (636 students), and 14 percent of Asian American students (87 students) attained a score within the “meet” level.

Asian American had the largest percentage of students to obtain the “exceed” level. Eighty-five percent of Asian American students exceeded the mathematics assessment, which totaled 525 students. Caucasian students had 67 percent (1,469 students) that exceeded the test. In addition, 47 percent of Multiracial students had an “exceed” performance level, which totaled 125 students. Twenty-seven percent of Hispanic students exceeded the mathematics assessment, while 24 percent of African American students excelled. In total, there were 186 Hispanic students and 689 African American students.

Figure 10.

CRCT mathematics assessment performance based on race			
	Does not Meet	Meet	Exceed
African American	19%	57%	24%
Asian American	1%	14%	85%
Caucasian	4%	29%	67%
Hispanic	11%	62%	27%
Multiracial	9%	45%	47%

Mathematic Assessment Variance among the various racial groups in Fulton County School District

Significant variations in student performance based on race were found when comparing the variances based on test performance. Figure 11 displays the variance between the minority students that are present in the Fulton County School District and their Caucasian counterparts. Variance was calculated for each of the 3 performance levels, does not meet, meet and exceeds. The first performance level, “does not meet,” revealed a 375 percent variance between African American and Caucasian students. The large variance between these students occurred because a larger percentage of African American students received low scores on their reading assessment. Hispanic and Multiracial students also had a higher percentage of students receiving low scores on the mathematics assessment than Caucasian students which led to variances of 175 percent for Hispanic students and 125 percent for Multiracial students. Asian American students had the lower percent of students at the “does not meet” level than Caucasian students, therefore the variance was 75 percent.

A comparison of the different races at the “meet” level showed much larger variances than the prior performance level. There were a higher percentage of African American, Hispanic, and Multiracial students that achieved the “meet” level than Caucasian students. The variance between African American and Caucasian students was 700 percent, Hispanic students had a variance of 825 percent with their Caucasian counterpart, and Multiracial student’s variance with Caucasian students was 400 percent. The large variations for the African American and Hispanic students occurred because there were a higher percentage of these students that attained the “meet” level than Caucasian students. Asian American students had a

lower number of students reach the “meet” level than Caucasian students, the performance percentages was lower which created a variance of 375 percent.

The performance levels for the mathematics assessment provided strong correlation of the effects of race on a student achievement. The third level of assessment “exceed” had substantial connections regarding race and academic achievement, the majority of the Asian American and Caucasian students excelled on their mathematics assessment. African American and Hispanic students had the largest variances with Caucasian students; the variance for African American students was 1,075 percent and 1,000 percent for Hispanic students. There was also a 500 percent variance between Multiracial students and Caucasian students. As previously referenced, the Asian American and Caucasian students had the largest percentage of students to exceed the mathematics assessment. The variance between the Asian American and Caucasian students was 450 percent, Asian American students had a larger percentage of students that obtained the “exceed” performance level.

Figure 11.

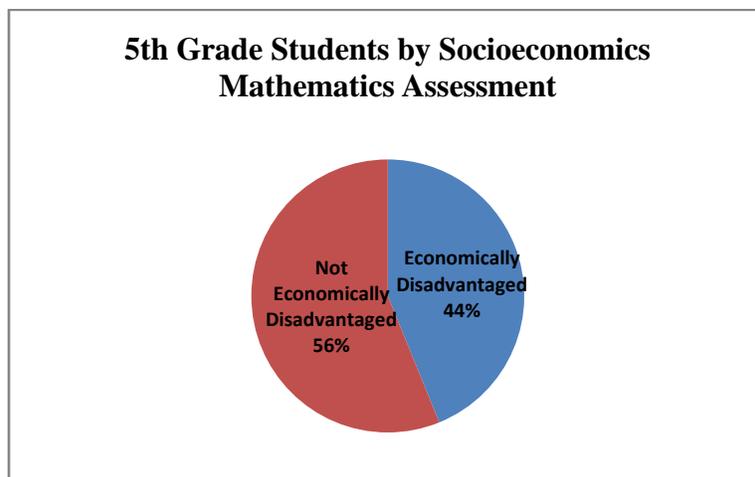
Variance based on performance percentage of students by race

	<i>Does not Meet</i>	<i>Meet</i>	<i>Exceed</i>
	Caucasian		
African American	-375%	-700%	1075%
Asian American	75%	375%	-450%
Hispanic	-175%	-825%	1000%
Multiracial	-125%	400%	500%

Mathematics assessment of socioeconomic levels in Fulton County School District

The final analysis evaluated in this study was the effects of socioeconomics on the mathematics assessment for 5th grade students. The socioeconomic demographic in this research consisted of students that are economically disadvantaged and those that are not economically disadvantaged. Figure 12 displayed the socioeconomic composition of Fulton County School District 5th grade students that took the mathematics assessment, 44 percent were economically disadvantaged and 56 percent represented not economically disadvantaged students. The results of the mathematics assessment performance were also obtained from the total percentage of test performance at the three levels that were utilized in the previous analyses. Based on the results illustrated in Figure 13, the majority of students in both socioeconomic levels met the mathematics assessment. There were a total of 2,911 economically disadvantaged students tested and 553 students (19 percent) failed to meet the required mathematics assessment level. Conversely, 149 not economically disadvantaged students (4 percent) did not meet the required assessment level. The total number of not economically disadvantaged students that took the mathematics assessment was 3,728 students.

Figure 12.



The “meet” performance level of the mathematics assessment had the largest percentage of students for economically disadvantaged students. There were 1,717 economically disadvantaged students (59 percent) that attained the “meet” performance level on the mathematics assessment. The research reported 32 percent of the not economically disadvantaged students obtained the “meet” performance level, which were a total of 1,193 students. The not economically disadvantaged students had a significantly higher percentage of students that obtained the “exceed” level than economically disadvantaged students. Sixty-four percent of the not economically students exceeded the mathematics assessment as compared to 22 percent of the economically disadvantaged students. The total number of not economically disadvantaged students that excelled was 2,386 students, compared to 640 economically disadvantaged students achieving at this same level of success.

Figure 13.

CRCT mathematics assessment performance based on socioeconomic level

	Does not Meet	Meet	Exceed
Economically Disadvantaged	19%	59%	22%
Not Economically Disadvantaged	4%	32%	64%

Mathematic assessment variance among the various socioeconomic groups in Fulton County School District

Variation in student performance based on socioeconomics was displayed when comparing test performance between economically disadvantaged students and those that are not

disadvantaged. Figure 14 illustrates the variances between the two economic groups. The variance for the first performance level, “does not meet,” was the highest variance between economically disadvantaged and not economically disadvantaged students at 375 percent. This variation was a result of a higher percentage of economically disadvantaged students failing to meet the mathematics assessment requirement than students that were not economically disadvantaged. Furthermore, the variation at the “meet” level was smaller than the prior level, this occurred because the majority of students from economically disadvantaged students attained this level of achievement. The variance between the two groups was 84 percent. There was a significant variance at the “exceed” performance level, not economically disadvantaged students outperformed the students that were economically disadvantaged with a 66 percent variation. Due to the results from the variances, a relationship has been found that students who are not economically disadvantaged will attain the “exceed” performance level of the mathematics assessment at a higher percentage than students that are economically disadvantaged. Furthermore, economically disadvantaged students have a higher percentage not to meet the mathematic assessment requirement than not economically disadvantaged students.

Figure 14.

Variance based on performance percentage of students by socioeconomics			
	<i>Does not Meet</i>	<i>Meet</i>	<i>Exceed</i>
	Not Economically Disadvantaged		
Economically Disadvantaged	-375%	-84%	66%

Although statistical significance would provide a superior degree of validity for this research, the literature and data collected provided adequate evidence that disparities in Fulton

County School District are apparent based on the test performance percentage by race and socioeconomics. Upon further research regarding these issues of inequality, statistical significant would be utilized to reveal whether or not a “true” relationship exists between race, socioeconomics, and student achievement.

Conclusion

Just a few years ago, the United States Supreme Court made it harder to create racially integrated public schools in the ruling of the *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1* case. The court ruled that while it is acceptable for school districts to create a school assignment plan that promotes diversity, it was illegal to define this diversity solely in terms of race. Moreover, this decision has created a challenge for establishing racially integrated schools and promoting educational equality for all children (Burkholder 2010). This study shows variations in student achievement among the different socioeconomic and racial levels in Fulton County School District.

Additional school-related factors that are associated with impoverished and minority students have been found to also affect student achievement; these factors were not included in this study. The quality of the school has been linked to students’ success. Hoerandner and Lemke (2006) found that unequal funding limits the number of teachers schools can hire, which lead to larger classroom sizes. In addition, the quality of teachers is consistently lower in high-poverty schools, often these teachers are new, unskilled and unqualified (Peske and Haycock 2006). Students that experience socioeconomic and racial segregation not only have to deal with factors such as limited school resources and lack of quality teachers, but low expectations from teachers, poor tracking and misclassification are also factors that can contribute to student

achievement (Ogbu 1994). Student peers have also been linked to having a negative impact on academic success, there is a correlation between the absences of strong positive peer influence in high poverty schools in the south (Rumberger 2003).

Family and neighborhoods are factors that also contribute to student achievement. Characteristics such as parent educational achievement, family income and parental involvement have been linked to achievement in test (Lee 2004). Moreover, researchers Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch (1995) found that the absence of social capital in impoverished communities affects educational outcomes in these students, and students with higher levels of social capital have better overall educational outcomes.

The research conducted in this study revealed that there were large variations in achievement among the various socioeconomic levels and racial groups in Fulton County School District. The variation in achievement among these groups will expand in the future if not immediately addressed. The students in Fulton County School District should receive equal education; however, it has been found that schools in the northern part of the school district are achieving higher test scores than schools located in the southern part of the school district. Furthermore, the schools located in the southern part of the school district have a disproportionately larger amount of high-poverty and minority students that are African American and Hispanic, than the schools located in the northern part of the school district. In addition, Fulton County School District has not meet the national Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) report since the 2003-2004 school year with the exception of the 2004-2005 school year, this failure was a result of 95 percent of the schools not meeting the academic and testing performance. The following groups in Fulton County School District have also not met AYP, African American, Students with Disability (SWD), English language learner (ELL) and

Economically Disadvantaged. Although residence is what mandates what schools students attend, the inequality in schools is apparent and needs to be corrected. Fulton County School District will continue to have a vast difference among student academic success if not addressed and the removal of such programs as the majority-to-minority program will only make matter worst.

The purpose of this paper has been to explore the impact of socioeconomics and race on students' academic attainment. It is important that more studies are conducted to explore these effects so that educators, public administrators, and even policymakers can help reduce the inequalities in education that are occurring in Fulton County School District. Such recommendations as magnet schools and integration are reasonable solutions for this school district. However, these problems do not just exist in Fulton County School District; inequality in education is a national problem as well.

Recommendations and Discussion

Fulton County School District is considering the possibility of transitioning the district into a charter school system. However, some issues have been raised whether charter schools can help turn around the worst performing schools in the nation (Kahlenberg 2009). The Center for Research on Education Outcomes at Stanford University examined charter schools from fifteen states and the District of Columbia, these schools represent approximately 70 percent of the nation's charter school. The study found that only 17 percent of charter schools outperform regular schools when looking at the gain in math over a period of time (Center for Research on Educational Outcomes 2009, 1). In addition, nearly half of these charter schools had results that were no different from the local public school options and roughly 37 percent had results that

were significantly worse than if the students remained in traditional public schools (Center for Research on Educational Outcomes 2009, 1). On the other hand, the results from the study found that two subgroups, impoverished and English language learner (ELL) students perform better in charters than in the traditional public school system. The overall findings from this report displayed a significant amount of charter schools performing poorly, the Center for Research on Educational Outcomes stated that in order to flourish, charter schools must increase the quantity of high quality schools, replicate the successful school models and, most importantly, promote accountability in exchange for flexibility.

The establishment of magnet schools would be a good recommendation to reduce inequality in Fulton County School District. Magnet schools are an excellent way to create desegregated, high quality educational options for students and families, whereby there is a change in faculty, students, and parents. There have been several academic benefits for students attending magnet schools and this type of school is the largest set of choice-based schools in the country (Tefera, Siegel-Hawley and Frankenberg 2010). Magnet schools could be created in the failing schools located in the Fulton County School District and reopened with fresh educational outlooks that attract new teachers and students from various socioeconomic and racial groups. The socioeconomic composition of a school has been proven to affect the achievement of the students in the school (Kahlenberg 2009). The Coleman Report in 1966 found that the most important predictor of academic achievement is the socioeconomic status of the family and the second most important predictor is the socioeconomic makeup of the school (Coleman 1966). In more recent studies, a school's socioeconomic status has been linked to student achievement with social class having more of an effect than the socioeconomic status of the family (Kahlenberg 2009). Furthermore, the students from the failing schools would now have an

opportunity to fill the vacated spots in academically successful schools by the students transferring to the magnet school (Kahlenberg 2009).

Kahlenberg (2009) included in his report, *Turnaround Schools That Work*, several examples of failed schools that evolved into successful magnets schools. Wexford Elementary in Lansing, Michigan, had a high level of impoverished students and struggled for many years to meet Adequate Yearly Progress, it was also facing reconstitution, which redesigns the curriculum and instructional practices. In the 2004-2005 school year, Wexford Elementary started transitioning into a Montessori Magnet school. That following year, the school was still labeled as a high poverty and racially isolated school, with 81.5 percent low income, 69 percent African American and 8 percent Hispanic students (Kahlenberg 2009, 7). However by the 2008-2009 schools year, the middle class student population had grown to 33.6 percent and Caucasian students to 40 percent (Kahlenberg 2009, 7). Now a truly diverse school, Wexford Elementary has 44.2 percent African American, 39.5 Caucasian and 11.6 percent Hispanic students. Furthermore, the school has successfully attained Adequate Yearly Progress, which includes all subgroups such as the low-income category. Additionally, 84.6 percent African Americans and 59 percent of economically disadvantage students are proficient or advances in the reading assessment for the grades fourth through seventh (Kahlenberg 2009, 7).

Another recommendation for Fulton County School District is the implementation of economically integrated schools through public school choice. Economic integration in schools has been found to be beneficial for low-income students and does not affect the achievement in middle class students because they are less affected by schools influences than low-income students (Kahlenberg 2009). Furthermore, the United States is a multicultural society therefore

classrooms should be more representative of diversity and consist of different racial, ethnic and socioeconomic groups.

Berkeley Unified School District (BUSD) located in Berkeley, California, has voluntarily integrated the public schools. BUSD success in establishing integrated schools that use choice-based assignment policy is due to its improved and equal educational options. This school district's integration plan consists of an assignment strategy of using zones at two levels with educational reform in improving and equalizing all schools to be attractive and with outreach as a way to promote successful integration (Chavez and Frankenberg 2009). More specifically, BUSD integration plan has two levels of geography, zoning and planning areas; these levels comprise of 3 attendance zones and 400 plus 4 to 8 block groups that are separated based on their racial/ethnic, economic and educational demographics. The integration plan also incorporates parent's school preference and priority while trying to obtain maximum school diversity. Furthermore, each student living in a particular planning area is assigned to the same diversity code; the code is based on the area's population characteristics and not on the student's own individual characteristics. As of the 2008 school year, the composition of BUSD consists of 30.5 percent Caucasian, 25.8 percent African American, 16.6 percent Hispanic, 7.1 percent Asian American and 18.7 percent Multiracial students (Chavez and Frankenberg 2009, 1).

The success of this integration plan was revealed when the majority, about 77 percent of the Berkeley residents, enrolled their students in BUSD. The plan has also been successful in matching families with their school preference: about 76 percent of families received their first choice school, 8 percent received their second choice, 9 percent received their third choice and 7 percent were assigned to a school they did not choose (Chavez and Frankenberg 2009, vi). In addition, BUSD promotes school-site equity as one of its integration goals for the purpose of

making all school choices attractive to families by minimizing differences and discouraging competition between them (Chavez and Frankenberg 2009).

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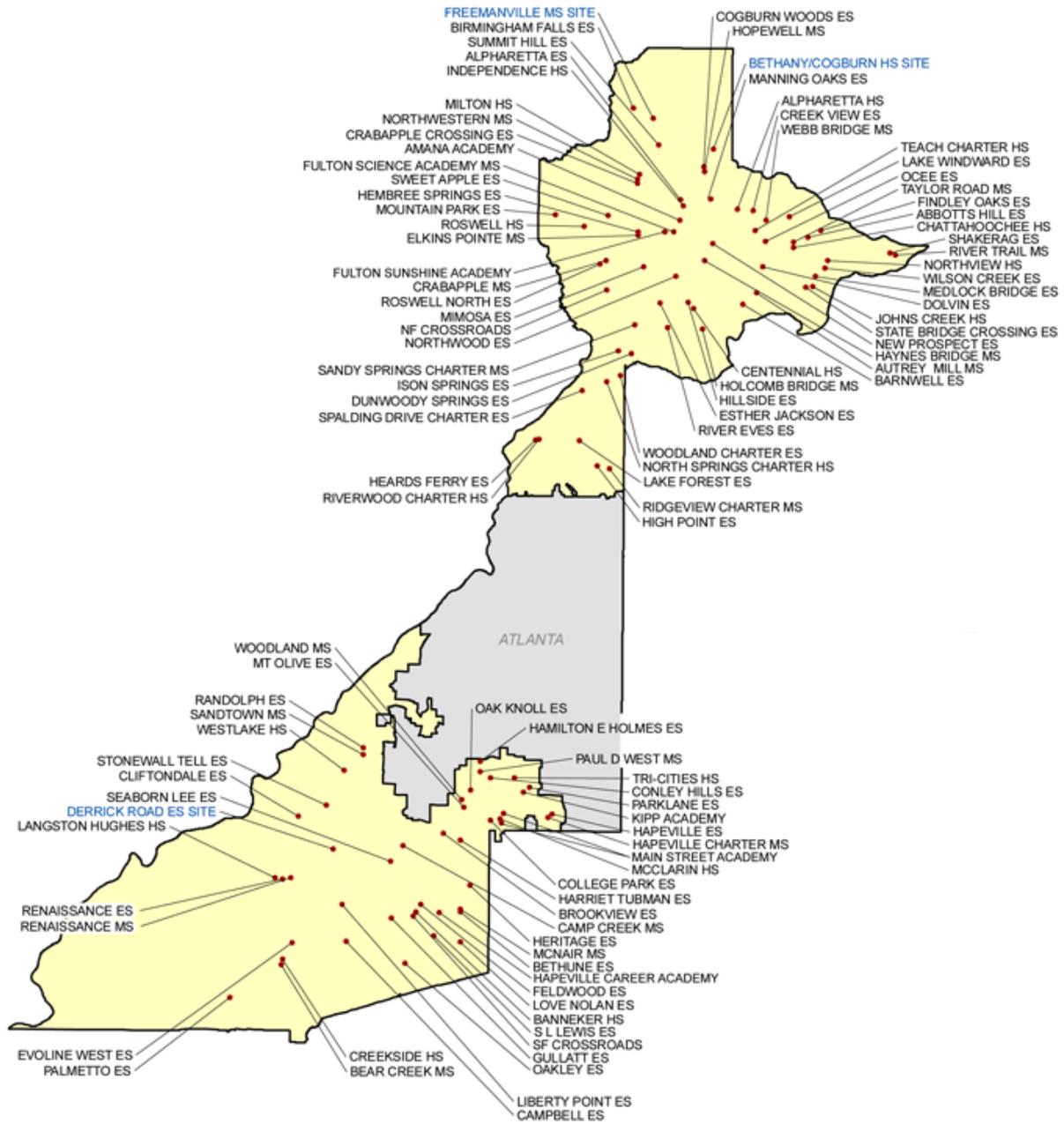
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Appendix

Figure 1. A map of Fulton County School District



Source: Fulton County School District, accessed August 24, 2010