

Students leaving Little Rock metro area traditional public schools between 2008 and 2014 had **racially and economically integrative** impacts on the school that they exited:

- **84%** of moves made by black or white students were **racially integrative or neutral**.
- **79%** of moves made students were **economically integrative or neutral**.
- **83%** of transfers of black and white students out of traditional public schools and into area charters had an **racially integrative or neutral**.
- **78%** of transfers out of traditional public schools and into area charters had an **economically integrative or neutral**.

Integration in the Little Rock Area: Part 5 Are Student Moves Integrative or Segregative?

School integration has been a contentious policy issue in Little Rock since the 1950s. Recent charter expansions have raised questions about the current level of integration in public schools (charter and traditional) in the Little Rock metro area. As part of our series on integration in Little Rock, this brief examines the impact of student moves on the overall level of integration in the Little Rock area public school system.

Introduction

Defining and measuring integration is not an easy task. What is the appropriate threshold for integration? Is a school integrated if its student body matches the United States population, matches the state’s population, or matches the demographics of the city where it’s located? Or should we hold schools to a different standard—equal shares of white students and students of color? It is intuitive to suggest that an integrated school is one in which students interact with peers of different backgrounds and are exposed to new perspectives, but that definition is not easily measured, and we need an objective way to determine whether schools are moving towards the goal of integration.

We define integration for this analysis based on the demographics resemble those of all students enrolled in public schools in the Little Rock metro area. We believe this standard provides the most practical and relevant context in which to examine integration in the Little Rock area public school system.

In this brief, we examine the Little Rock metro area public school system as a whole, rather than looking exclusively at the Little Rock School District (LRSD). Readers interested specifically in LRSD can find the analysis in the full [Arkansas Education Report](#).

This Brief

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Our analysis of integration in the Little Rock metro area school system includes traditional public schools (TPSs) in the area impacted by federal desegregation cases and the public charter system. The traditional public schools include LRSD, North LRSD, and Pulaski County Special School District. Charter schools in the LR metro area include: Academics Plus, College Prep Academy, Covenant Keepers, eStem, Exalt Academy, Flightline Upper Academy, Jacksonville Lighthouse, Lisa Academy, Lisa Academy North, Little Rock Prep, Premier High, Quest High, and SIAtch High.

Why Compare to Metro Area Public School Students?

By comparing schools’ demographic composition to the Little Rock metro area rather than the city of Little Rock itself, we ensure that our results are not biased by patterns of residential segregation and historical racial divides between cities and suburbs

By comparing schools’ demographic composition to the demographics of public school students in the Little Rock metro area we ensure that we are holding schools to a realistic standard. Since all eligible students do not enroll in public schools, the demographics of public school students may not mirror those of the entire population of the Metro Area. Given the students who choose a public education, we expect that students in each school are exposed to the full diversity of their peers.

Methods

In this analysis we focus on the integrative impact of two groups of students: students exiting traditional public schools and students entering public charter schools. We include all students who exited traditional public schools in the analysis, as well as all students who entered charter schools during the years examined.

It's important to remember that the majority of students who are exiting traditional public schools in the Little Rock metro area do not enroll in charters, but rather leave the public school system entirely. In 2014-15, 1% of student movers from LR metro area TPSs went to charters, while 3% moved to surrounding districts (Conway, Cabot, or Bryant), 3% went to other public schools in the state, and 7% left the state public school system completely.

Similarly, students entering charter schools come from a variety of educational settings. In 2014-15, 72% of students entering LR metro area charters came from LR metro area TPSs, 21% came from outside the Arkansas public school system, and 7% came from public schools in other parts of the state. For a more detailed analysis of where students move, see the second and third briefs in the series.

Classifying School Demographics

We begin by classifying schools as above average, integrated, or below average with respect to the percent of white, black, and FRL students enrolled in the school each year. We use a +/- 10 percentage point window around the Little Rock Metro Area public school enrollment average to classify schools in this way.

For example, in the 2008-09 school year, 58% of students enrolled in a public school (charter or TPS) in the LR Metro Area were black. Schools at which 48%-68% of students identified as black were designated as integrated, while schools at which less than 48% of the students were black were labeled below average, and schools at which more than 68% of students were black were above average. Similarly, in 2008-09 62% of LR Metro Area students received free or reduced price lunch (FRL), meaning schools with 52%-72% of their students receiving FRL were labeled integrated, schools with less than 52% of students receiving FRL were below average, and schools with more than 72% of their students receiving FRL were above average.

Above Average (black/white/FRL) School: The relevant demographics of the students enrolled are greater than 10 percentage points above those of the public school students in the Little Rock metro area.

Integrated (black/white/FRL) School: The relevant demographics of the students enrolled are within 10 percentage points of those of the public school students in the Little Rock metro area.

Below Average (black/white/FRL) School: The relevant demographics of the students enrolled are greater than 10 percentage points below than those of the public school students in the Little Rock metro area.

Labeling Exits from Traditional Public Schools

For each transfer out of a Little Rock metro area traditional public school, we determine if the exit had an integrative, neutral, or segregative impact on the school. The determination of the impact of a student exiting a school depends on both the demographics of the school and of the student who is leaving.

Figure 1 illustrates the three possible impacts of a black student exiting from a school:

A) The black student was enrolled in a school where an above average share of the student body is black. When the student leaves the school the percentage of black students decreases slightly. Because the student's exit moves the school's racial composition closer to the area average, we identify this move as **integrative**.

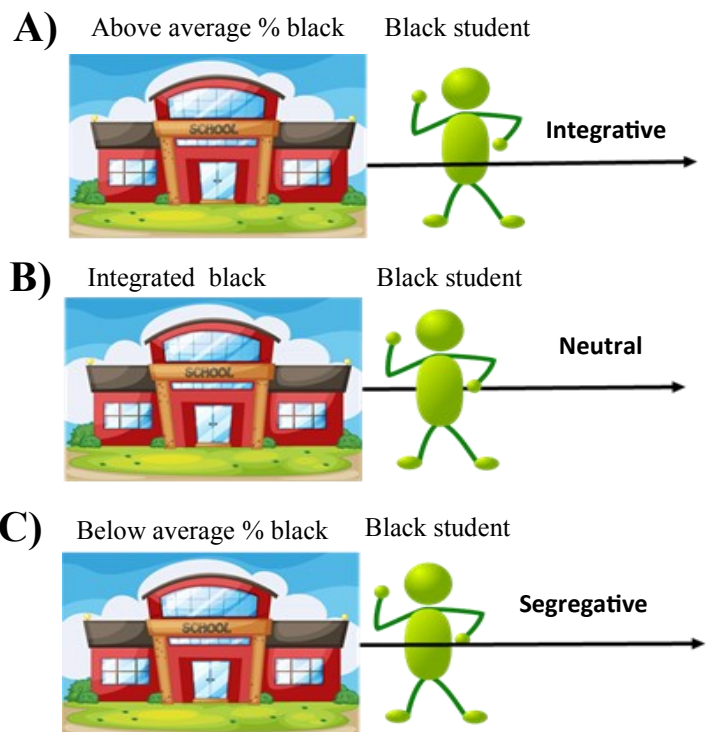
B) The black student had been attending a school where black student enrollment was within 10 percentage points of the area's average share of black students. Since the school is integrated in regard to black enrollment, the impact of the student exit is determined to be **neutral**.

C) The black student had been attending a school with a below average share of black students enrolled. When the student exits the school, the percentage of black students decreases slightly. Because the student's exit moves the school's racial composition farther from the area average, we identify this move as **segregative**.

Although it is possible that an individual student move tips the school from neutral to below average black, we make the simplifying assumption that each individual move only moves the school within the category that it began in—that the integrated school remains in the integrated category, that the below average school moves towards the average mark but remains below average, and that the above average school moves towards the average but remains above average.

We label all student exits from traditional public schools in this manner for black, white, FRL and Non-FRL students across the seven years of our analysis.

Figure 1: Potential School Impacts of a Student Exit



Labeling Entrances to Charters

For each transfer into a Little Rock metro area public charter school, we determine if the exit had an integrative, neutral, or segregative impact on the school. The determination of the impact of a student entering a school depends on both the demographics of the school and of the student who is entering.

Figure 2 illustrates the three possible impacts of a economically disadvantaged student enrolling in a charter school in the Little Rock metro area. The student is eligible for the Free or Reduced Lunch (FRL) program, which is used as a proxy for economic disadvantage. The school that the student is entering may enroll a below average, about average, or above average share of FRL-eligible students compared to the Little Rock metro area public school enrollment as a whole.

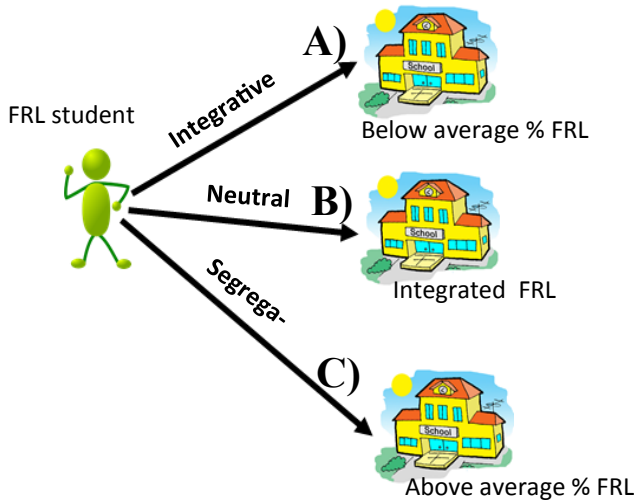
A) The FRL student enrolls in a school where a below average share of the student body is FRL. When the student enters the school the percentage of FRL students increases slightly. Because the student’s entrance moves the school’s FRL composition closer to the area average, we identify this move as **integrative**.

B) The FRL student beings attending a school where FRL student enrollment is within 10 percentage points of the area’s average share of FRL students. Since the school is integrated in regard to low economic enrollment, the impact of the student exit is determined to be **neutral**.

C) The FRL student enrolls in a school with a below average share of FRL students enrolled. When the student attends the school, the percentage of FRL students increases slightly. Because the student’s entrance moves the school’s low economic composition farther from the area average, we identify this move as **segregative**.

We label all student entrances to public charter schools in this manner for black, white, FRL and Non-FRL students across the seven years of our analysis.

Figure 2: Potential School Impacts of a Student Entrance



Impact on Exited Traditional Public Schools

Table 1 shows the impact of the moves made by black and white students on the LR metro area TPSs they left between the 2008-09 and 2014-15 school years. Across all seven years examined, 52% of moves made by students were racially integrative, while 17% were segregative, and 30% were neutral. The majority of black student are leaving schools that are above average black enrollment, and the majority of white students are leaving schools that are above average white enrollment.

Table 1: **Exit Impact of All Student Transfers Out of Little Rock Metro Area TPSs by Race.**

Student Demographic	School Demographic	De- mographic Impact	2014-15		2008-09 to 2014-15	
			# of Students	% of Exits	# of Students	% of Exits
Black students leaving	Above avg % black	Integrative	1,425	25.2%	9,166	26.1%
	Integrated black	Neutral	1,054	18.6%	6,601	18.8%
	Below avg % black	Segregative	722	12.8%	3,860	11.0%
White students leaving	Above avg % white	Integrative	1,529	27.1%	9,059	25.8%
	Integrated white	Neutral	665	11.8%	4,668	13.3%
	Below avg % white	Segregative	257	4.5%	1,767	5.0%
Total			5,652	100%	35,121	100%

Table 2 shows the impact of the moves made by FRL and Non-FRL students on the LR metro area TPSs they left between the 2008-09 and 2014-15 school years. In total, 56% of the moves made by students in the seven years examined had an economically integrative impact on the TPSs they left, while 21% had a segregative impact and 23% had a neutral impact. Moves made by FRL students during this time generally had an economically integrative impact on the TPSs they exited. Similar to the patterns identified by race, the majority of students are leaving schools that enroll an above average percentage of students similar the them economically.

Table 2: **Exit Impact of All Student Transfers Out of Little Rock Metro Area TPSs by FRL Status.**

Student Demographic	School Demographic	Impact	2014-15		2008-09 to 2014-15	
			# of Students	% of Exits	# of Students	% of Exits
FRL students leaving	Above avg % FRL	Integrative	2,095	31.4%	13,238	32.9%
	Integrated FRL	Neutral	874	13.1%	5,564	13.8%
	Below avg % FRL	Segregative	957	14.4%	5,778	14.4%
Non-FRL students leaving	Above avg % Non-FRL	Integrative	1,599	24.0%	9,370	23.3%
	Integrated Non-FRL	Neutral	642	9.6%	3,558	8.8%
	Below avg % Non-FRL	Segregative	479	7.5%	2,699	6.7%
Total			6,664	100%	40,207	100%

Impact on Exited TPSs of Students Entering Charters

While we believe that integration should be examined for the Little Rock metro area system holistically, including ALL student exits from TPSs, we wanted to specifically examine if students leaving traditional public schools for charters is resulting increased racial or economic segregation in the traditional public schools that they are exiting.

Tables 3 and 4 present the racial and economic integration impacts of students who exited a LR metro area TPSs and entered a LR metro area public charter schools over the seven years examined. Although only 2% of the students who exited LR metro area traditional public schools enrolled in area charter schools, the impact of the student moves are consistent with what we found when examining all student exits from the area TPSs. Across all years examined, 48% of TPS to charter moves were racially integrative to the TPS, 35% were neutral and 17% were segregative. Additionally, 56% of TPS to charter moves were economically integrative to the TPS, 22% were neutral and 22% were segregative. Students leaving the traditional public schools to enroll in area charters decrease the segregation of the school that they exit.

Table 3: **Exit Impact of Student Transfers Out of Little Rock Metro Area TPSs and Into Little Rock Metro Area Charters by race**

Student Demographic	TPS School Demographic	Impact	2008-09 to 2014-15	
			# of Students	% of Exits
Black students leaving TPS for charters	Above avg % black	Integrative	1,283	28.1%
	Integrated black	Neutral	1,109	24.3%
	Below avg % black	Segregative	619	13.6%
White students leaving TPS for charters	Above avg % white	Integrative	916	20.1%
	Integrated white	Neutral	483	10.6%
	Below avg % white	Segregative	149	3.3%
Total			4,559	100%

Table 4: **Exit Impact of Student Transfers Out of Little Rock Metro Area TPSs and Into Little Rock Metro Area Charters by FRL**

Student Demographic	TPS School Demographic	Impact	2008-09 to 2014-15	
			# of Students	% of Exits
FRL students leaving TPS for charters	Above avg % FRL	Integrative	1,753	32.7%
	Integrated FRL	Neutral	629	11.7%
	Below avg % FRL	Segregative	574	10.7%
Non-FRL students leaving TPS for charters	Above avg % Non-FRL	Integrative	1,267	23.6%
	Integrated Non-FRL	Neutral	541	10.1%
	Below avg % Non-FRL	Segregative	601	11.2%
Total			5,365	100%

Impact on Entering Charters of Students Exiting TPSs

The impact on the charter schools that students are entering after they leave TPSs is also important to examine.

Tables 5 and 6 present the racial and economic entrance integration impacts of students who exited a LR metro area TPS and entered a LR metro area public charter schools. Across all years examined, 26% of moves into charters from TPSs were racially integrative to the charter school, 27% were neutral and 46% were segregative. It is important to note the differences in TPS to charter moves by race. After the switch to charter, there was a large increase in the number of black students attending a school serving a below average enrollment of black students. Conversely, after the switch to charter, there was a marked decreased in the number of white students attending a school with a below average percentage of white enrollment.

Additionally, 29% of TPS to charter moves were economically integrative to the charter, 10% were neutral and 61% were segregative. Students that switched from TPSs to charters were more likely to attend a school with a below average percentage of FRL students.

Table 5: **Entrance Impact of Student Transfers Out of Little Rock Metro Area TPSs and Into Little Rock Metro Area Charters by race**

Student Demographic	Charter School Demographic	Impact	2008-09 to 2014-15	
			# of Students	% of Exits
Black students entering charters from TPS	Below avg % black	Integrative	1,173	25.7%
	Integrated black	Neutral	699	15.3%
	Above avg % black	Segregative	1,139	25.0%
White students entering charters from TPS	Below avg % white	Integrative	29	0.6%
	Integrated white	Neutral	540	11.8%
	Above avg % white	Segregative	979	21.5%
Total			4,559	100%

Table 6: **Entrance Impact of Student Transfers Out of Little Rock Metro Area TPSs and Into Little Rock Metro Area Charters by FRL**

Student Demographic	Charter School Demographic	Impact	2008-09 to 2014-15	
			# of Students	% of Exits
FRL students entering charters from TPS	Below avg % FRL	Integrative	1,370	25.6%
	Integrated FRL	Neutral	352	6.6%
	Above avg % FRL	Segregative	1,234	23.0%
Non-FRL students entering charters from TPS	Below avg % Non-FRL	Integrative	205	3.8%
	Integrated Non-FRL	Neutral	163	3.0%
	Above avg % Non-FRL	Segregative	2,041	38.0%
Total			5,365	100%

For more information about this Policy Brief and other education issues in Arkansas contact us:

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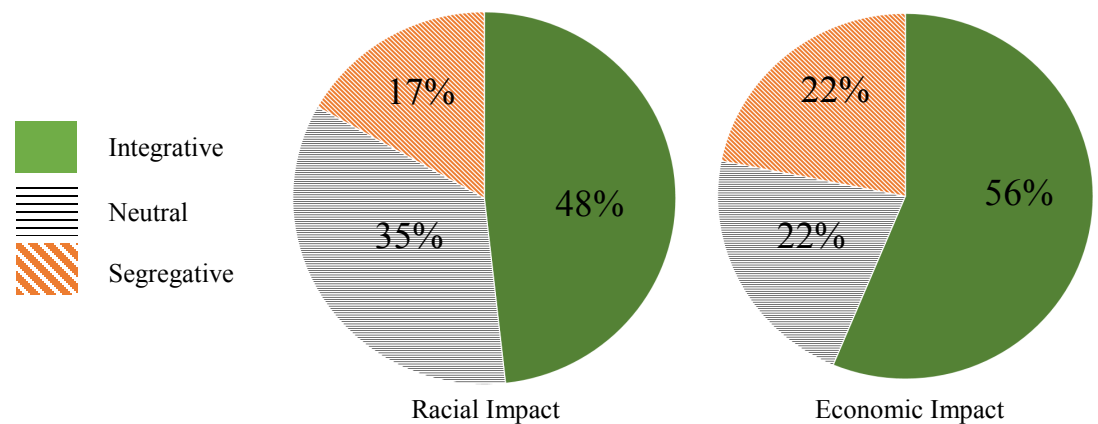
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Figure 3: Integrative Impact of Student Moves to Charters on LRMA TPSs 2008-09 to 2014-15



Overall Impact of Student Exits on LR Metro Traditional Public Schools

Across the seven years examined, 84% of the moves made by black or white students had a racially neutral or integrative impact on the Little Rock metro area traditional public school that they exited. Similarly, 79% of the student moves made from TPSs had an economically neutral or integrative impact on the Little Rock metro area traditional public school that they exited. Although the students who move to charters represent only 13% of the students who exit LR metro area traditional public schools annually, the students who move to charters mirror the impact effects seen for all exits.

Figure 3 summarizes the racial and economic integration impacts of students exiting Little Rock metro area traditional public schools and enrolling in area charters. Across the seven years examined, 83% of the moves made by black or white students had a racially neutral or integrative impact on the Little Rock metro area traditional public school that they exited. Similarly, 78% of the moves made from TPSs to charters had an economically neutral or integrative impact on the Little Rock metro area traditional public school that they exited.

Conclusion

In this analysis, we examined if the students who leave LR area traditional public schools increased or decreased racial and economic segregation in the schools. On the whole, moves made by students had an integrative impact on the traditional public schools they exited. Moves made by white students tended to further segregate the charters they entered, while moves made by black and FRL students into charters helped integrate those schools. Taken together, the moves made by students during this seven year period had a neutral to integrative impact on the Little Rock metro area public school system as a whole.

Overall, students exiting traditional public schools and/or entering area charters are advancing racial and economic integration in the Little Rock metro area traditional public schools.

In our [last brief](#), we explored the current level of integration in Little Rock metro area schools, and found that the majority of schools are not integrated with respect to either race or socioeconomic status. This analysis shows that, currently, student transfers between schools are helping to improve the state of integration in the Little Rock metro area public school system. Moves out of the traditional system are typically integrative because the schools that students are attending are often racially and economically segregated.

It is important to consider the root causes behind racial and economic segregation in traditional public schools, and what policy makers can do to ameliorate the educational segregation that many students encounter as a result of their home address.

Throughout this series, we have explored the complex and contentious issue of integration in the Little Rock area, an issue first raised when the Little Rock Nine desegregated Central High. At the conclusion of this series, we hope to have provided information to policymakers and residents in Little Rock about what demographic trends are happening in schools in the area. Ultimately, integration is only partially measured by demographics and numbers of students—it is truly realized when students build authentic relationships with peers from different backgrounds, and understand and appreciate the rich mosaic of cultures in the Little Rock area. That work will remain an ongoing endeavor in classrooms, homes, and the Little Rock community more broadly.