SOUTH ORANGE-MAPLEWOOD

School (In)Equity Report

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Prologue

The Constitution of the State of New Jersey clearly prohibits racial discrimination in public schools and specifically states that, "no person shall be . . . segregated . . . in the public schools, because of religious principles, race, color, ancestry or national origin." N.J. Constitution Art. I ¶ 5.

Moreover, the Supreme Court of New Jersey has repeatedly held that public schools must prohibit such de facto segregation and impose on those liable the responsibility to prevent such segregation.

More than fifty years after the landmark United States Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, there is clear and undisputable evidence of racial segregation in South Orange-Maplewood District schools. It has been acknowledged by Board members and two Superintendents. Statistical analysis clearly demonstrates that elementary schools are racially segregated for no compelling legitimate reason.

While federal law bars formal, *de jure*, segregation, New Jersey has taken a step further and proclaimed its "abhorrence of discrimination and segregation in the public schools," and dedicated the State to eradicating this issue regardless of whether it was a result of private segregation, official action or socioeconomic or sociological patterns. In Re Grant of Charter Sch. Application of Englewood on Palisades Charter Sch.; 164 N.J. 316, 324 (2000).

This segregation is not benign. It set the framework for discriminatory tracking and leveling at the middle and high school levels. Beginning at some point in the mid-1990s, the SOMSD began to use a leveling system to differentiate students based upon their 'ability,' and during the decade other allegations concerning racism in the district were also leveled publicly. Over the last two decades the leveling system in the SOMSD has resulted in gross racial disparities in classrooms, particularly in Columbia High School where classes are effectively segregated by race. Racially separative polices, racially disparate academic leveling and racially disproportionate disciplinary practices, as used by the SOMSD, violate Federal and State law.

This was confirmed by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (OCR) when the agency identified possible violations of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 after determining that African American students were being denied access to advanced-level and Advanced Placement (AP) courses, while also facing disproportionate punishment through the disciplinary process. The SOMSD entered into a voluntary Resolution Agreement with OCR in October 2014, committing to address practices hindering African American students and to put in place remedies to ameliorate the identified racial disparities.

The statistical analysis set forth in this report confirms the existence of unlawful segregation in the District and analyzes the systemic effects of that segregation on African American students.

Robert L. Tarver, Jr., Esq.

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Demographic Overview

In the 2018-2019 school year, the South Orange-Maplewood School District served 7,103 children in pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade. Table 1 provides an overview of the demographic composition of the district's schools.

School Name	Total	White	Black	Latinx	Asian	Other	FRPL*
Columbia High	1962	52.0%	34.7%	6.5%	4.0%	2.8%	19.4%
Maplewood Middle	809	51.8%	31.0%	9.3%	3.2%	4.7%	23.0%
South Orange Middle	777	52.6%	27.0%	7.3%	4.4%	8.6%	12.2%
Clinton Elementary	612	61.8%	17.3%	10.6%	6.7%	3.6%	14.2%
Jefferson Elementary	555	63.8%	19.5%	5.2%	4.3%	7.2%	9.0%
Marshall Elementary	524	62.0%	16.8%	8.6%	2.3%	10.3%	7.1%
Seth Boyden Elementary	496	23.8%	58.1%	10.1%	1.4%	6.7%	44.2%
South Mountain Elementary	605	64.0%	13.4%	8.3%	4.6%	9.8%	3.5%
Tuscan Elementary	626	66.6%	15.3%	8.1%	2.7%	7.2%	9.3%
Montrose Early Childhood Center	137	46.0%	27.0%	8.8%	4.4%	13.9%	11.7%
District Total	7103	54.8%	27.4%	7.9%	3.9%	6.1%	16.2%

*Students receiving free or reduced-price lunch

Table 1: South Orange-Maplewood Demographic Overview, 2018-2019 [i]

Overall, 3.9% of students are Asian, 27.4% are Black, 7.9% are Latinx, and 54.8% are white. Additionally, 16.2% of students come from families that qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. While these data closely match the demographic composition of the district's single high school, they do not match the district's middle schools or elementary schools.

South Orange Middle School and Maplewood Middle School serve populations of students with markedly different economic means. While only 12.2% of students in South Orange Middle School qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, close to 1 in 4 students at Maplewood Middle School qualify for free or reduced-price lunch as a result of their families' economic status.

The difference between the overall district demographics and the demographics of individual schools is even more striking across the six elementary schools. Five of the district's elementary schools (Clinton, Jefferson, Marshall, South

Mountain, and Tuscan) serve a student body where the proportion of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch ranges from a low of 3.5% to a high of 14.2%. Seth Boyden Elementary Demonstration School is in a category of its own, with 44.2% of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch. Across the five elementary schools listed above, 4.1% of students are Asian, 16.4% are Black, 8.2% are Latinx, and 63.4% are White. This stands in sharp contrast to Seth Boyden Elementary Demonstration School, where 1.4% of students are Asian, 58.1% are Black, 10.1% are Latinx, and 23.8% are White.

One common segregation measure is the dissimilarity index. This measure tells us the proportion of a subgroup that would need to move to a different school in order to ensure that the two subgroups are equally distributed across all schools in a district. In the South Orange-Maplewood School District, 24.5% of Black or white students would need to move to a different elementary school to ensure proportional representation of Black and white students across all elementary schools. While this is a strikingly high number, achieving racial balance within the district is not out of reach.

Historical Trends

As Figure 1 shows, the district's demographics have been shifting quite dramatically over the past two decades. Most notable are the trends for the district's population of Black students and white students. Up until the 2006-2007 school year, the district served a higher proportion of Black students than white students. Since that time, the Black student population has declined steadily while the white student population has risen steadily. These trends continue to this day and show no sign of changing. In fact, during the 2018-209 school year only 19.5% of first graders in the South Orange-Maplewood School District were Black. These data for first graders in the district provide strong evidence that the decreasing population of Black students continues to grow more serious.
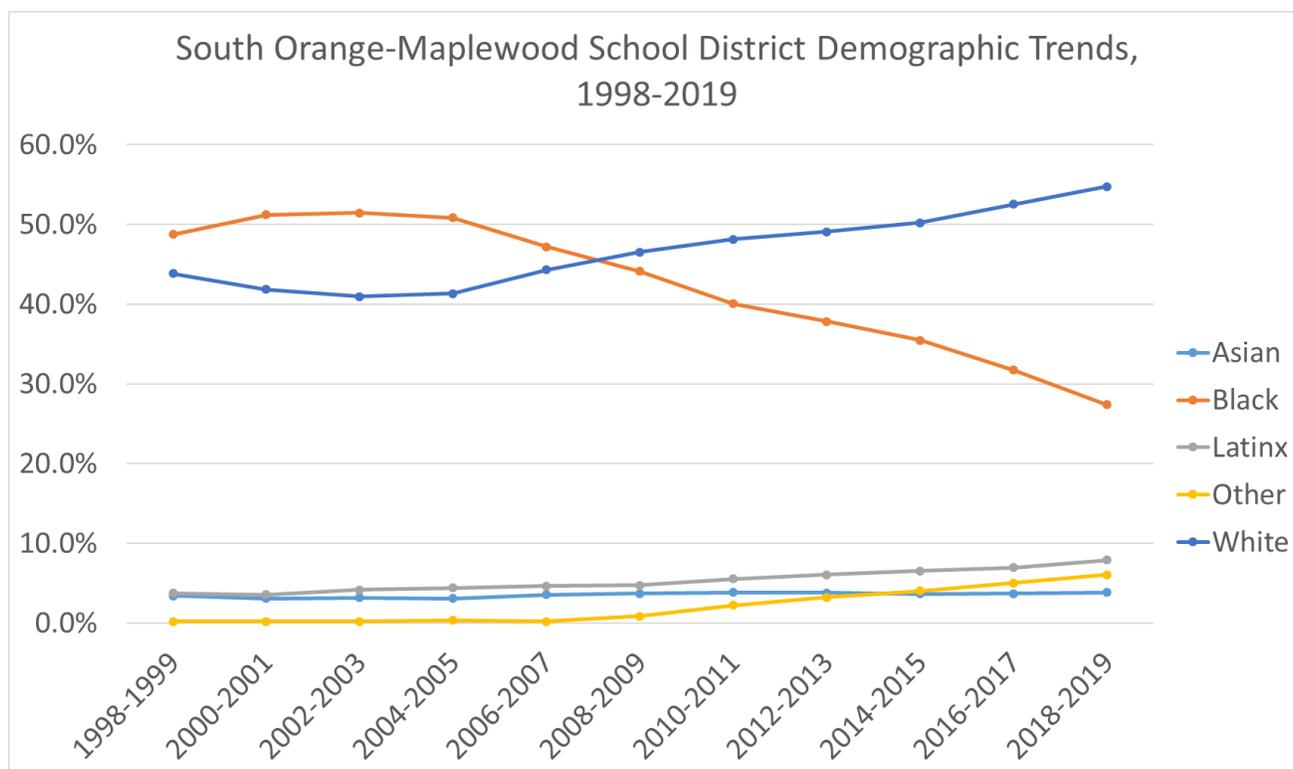
Figure 1: South Orange-Maplewood School District Demographic Trends, 1998-2019[ii]

If the South Orange-Maplewood School District does not take the initiative to understand these troubling demographic changes and take action to reverse them, it runs the risk of losing even more of its racial diversity.

Academic Outcomes

Most academic outcome measures are fraught with inconsistencies and caveats. Success can, and should be, defined in myriad ways. Despite these realities, quantitative data do shed light on inequities.

Table 2 provides an overview of key academic outcomes from the 2018-2019 school year. It is important to note that in almost all areas highlighted in this table, the South Orange-Maplewood School District outperforms the statewide average. The one notable exception is that students receiving free or reduced-price lunch in South Orange-Maplewood have lower English Language Arts proficiency rates, lower Math proficiency rates, lower graduation rates, and lower postsecondary enrollment rates than the statewide averages for students

receiving free or reduced-price lunch. Such data indicate that the South Orange-Maplewood school district does a particularly poor job of serving students who have an economic disadvantage.

	Districtwide	Asian	Black	Latinx	White	FRPL*	non-FRPL**
ELA Proficiency	68.4%	NA	41.7%	NA	81.3%	34.3%	75.2%
Math Proficiency	56.3%	NA	28.3%	NA	70.6%	25.5%	62.8%
Graduation Rate	90.8%	95.5%	85.0%	93.3%	94.6%	84.4%	NA
Postsecondary Enrollment	77.7%	86.4%	67.9%	78.6%	84.1%	66.3%	NA

*Students receiving free or reduced-price lunch
** Student not receiving free or reduced-price lunch

Table 2: South-Orange Maplewood District-wide Academic Outcomes, 2018-2019[iii]

Despite the fact that most subgroups in South Orange-Maplewood outperform statewide averages, there are a number of alarming achievement gaps within the district. Most notably is the achievement gap between Black and white students in the district. The stark difference in English Language Arts and Math proficiency rates for Black and white students necessitate immediate and dramatic action. Furthermore, the fact that 94.6% of white students graduate from high school on time while only 85% of Black students do must be addressed. Additionally, the South Orange-Maplewood School District needs to take action and ensure that it supports postsecondary enrollment for all students. Currently, only 67.9% of Black students are enrolling in college in the Fall after their high school graduation.

Achievement gaps at the elementary school level are particularly stark. Table 3 shows that on the third grade English Language Arts exam, the mean scale score for the district was 761. While the mean scale score on the third grade English Language Arts exam at Seth Boyden Elementary Demonstration School, where 23.8% of students are White students, 58.1% are Black, and 44.2% are economically disadvantaged, is 743, the mean scale score on the third grade English Language Arts exam at Tuscan Elementary School, where

66.6% of students are White, 15.3% are Black, and 9.3% are economically disadvantaged, is 765. The data demonstrate that while 62.9% of third grade students in the South Orange-Maplewood School District met or exceeded expectations on the Spring 2019 English Language Arts New Jersey Student Learning Assessments, the proportion of students who met or exceeded expectations on this exam ranged from a low of 41.8% at Seth Boyden Elementary Demonstration School to a high of 68.9% at Tuscan Elementary School. Additionally, the English Language Arts racial achievement gap across all elementary schools is significant. While 75.7% of Asian students and 73.3% of white students demonstrate proficiency on the English Language Arts Exam, only 56.3% of Latinx students and 34.1% of Black students demonstrate proficiency.

	Mean Scale Score	Total	Asian	Black	Latinx	White	FRPL*	non-FRPL**
Clinton	770	67.3%	NA	36.8%	NA	75.4%	30.0%	71.6%
Jefferson	764	68.0%	75.0%	32.3%	NA	76.5%	13.3%	73.1%
Seth Boyden	743	41.8%	NA	32.7%	46.2%	64.3%	34.6%	51.3%
South Mountain	759	62.4%	NA	35.7%	72.7%	63.6%	NA	63.9%
Tuscan	765	68.9%	NA	38.5%	54.5%	76.7%	23.1%	75.3%
Districtwide	761	62.9%	75.7%	34.1%	56.3%	73.3%	28.8%	69.6%

*Students receiving free or reduced-price lunch
** Student not receiving free or reduced-price lunch

Table 3: South Orange-Maplewood Grade 3 English Language Arts New Jersey State Learning Assessment, 2019 [iv]

Table 4 shows that on the third grade Mathematics exam, the mean scale score for the district was 762. While the mean scale score on the third grade Mathematics exam at Seth Boyden Elementary Demonstration School, where 23.8% of students are White, 58.1% are Black, and 44.2% are economically disadvantaged, is 749, the mean scale score on the third grade Mathematics exam at Tuscan Elementary School, where 66.6% of students are White, 15.3%

are Black, and 9.3% are economically disadvantaged, is 768. The data demonstrate that while 68.1% of third grade students in the South Orange-Maplewood School District met or exceeded expectations on the Spring 2019 Mathematics New Jersey Student Learning Assessments, the proportion of students who met or exceeded expectations on this exam ranged from a low of 56.7% at Seth Boyden Elementary Demonstration School to a high of 71.7% at Tuscan Elementary School. Additionally, the Math racial achievement gap across all elementary schools is significant. While 75.8% of Asian students and 77.7% of white students demonstrate proficiency on the Math Exam, only 63.3% of Latinx students and 41.8% of Black students demonstrate proficiency.

	Mean Scale Score	Total	Asian	Black	Latinx	White	FRPL*	non-FRPL**
Clinton	765	70.5%	NA	38.9%	NA	78.5%	30.0%	75.0%
Jefferson	763	68.6%	66.6%	32.2%	NA	77.4%	13.3%	73.6%
Seth Boyden	749	56.7%	NA	46.5%	76.9%	76.9%	51.9%	63.2%
South Mountain	764	71.3%	NA	57.1%	63.6%	72.7%	NA	72.1%
Tuscan	768	71.7%	NA	30.8%	54.6%	82.2%	23.1%	78.5%
Districtwide	762	68.1%	75.8%	41.8%	63.3%	77.7%	39.4%	73.7%

*Students receiving free or reduced-price lunch
** Student not receiving free or reduced-price lunch
Table 4: South Orange-Maplewood Grade 3 Math New Jersey State Learning Assessment, 2019 [v]

Student Tracking and Leveling

The most recent publicly available data on student tracking and leveling in the South Orange-Maplewood School District dates from 2015. At that time, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights collected school-level and district-level data on educational access and equity. These data illustrate a

deeply inequitable system of tracking and leveling in the South Orange-Maplewood School District.

Figure 2 highlights some aspects of the inequity related to tracking and leveling in the South Orange-Maplewood School District. These inequities take shape at a young age, where certain students are classified as "gifted" and provided specialized services to advance their education. In the South Orange-Maplewood School District, the "gifted" label is closely tied to race. In 2015, 83% of students who were classified as "gifted" were white even though only 52% of students in the district were white. Simultaneously, only 8% of students who were classified as "gifted" were Black even though 33% of students in the district were Black. This pattern continues into eighth grade, where 74% of the students given early access to an Algebra I course were White. Only 14% of students in these Algebra I courses were Black. While the racial gap in access to advanced courses decreases in high school calculus and Advanced Placement courses, the gap persists.
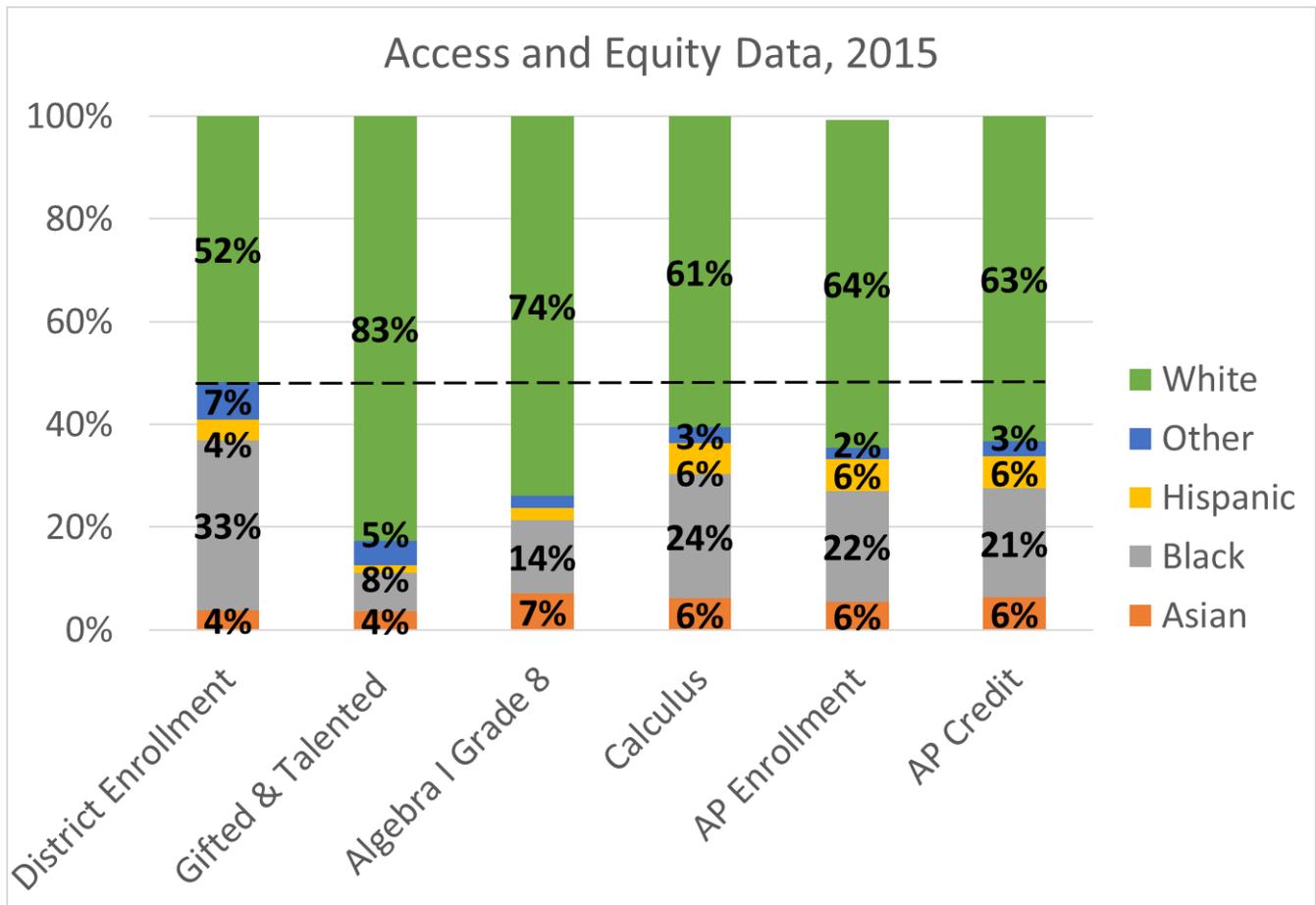

Figure 2: South Orange-Maplewood Access and Equity Data by Race and Ethnicity, 2015 vi

The district's middle schools and high school maintain a system of leveling. In 2017, the South Orange-Maplewood School District shared data related to its system of tracking and leveling in a presentation titled "Update on Office of Civil Rights Consent Agreement." Figures 3 through 9 provide a summary of these data. From sixth grade through high school, there is correlation between race and course level. In the district's middle schools, a disproportionate number of white students take advanced math courses and a disproportionate number of Black students take lower level math courses. In the district's high school, a disproportionate number of white students take AP courses and other advanced courses, while a disproportionate number of Black students take college prep courses and other lower level courses.
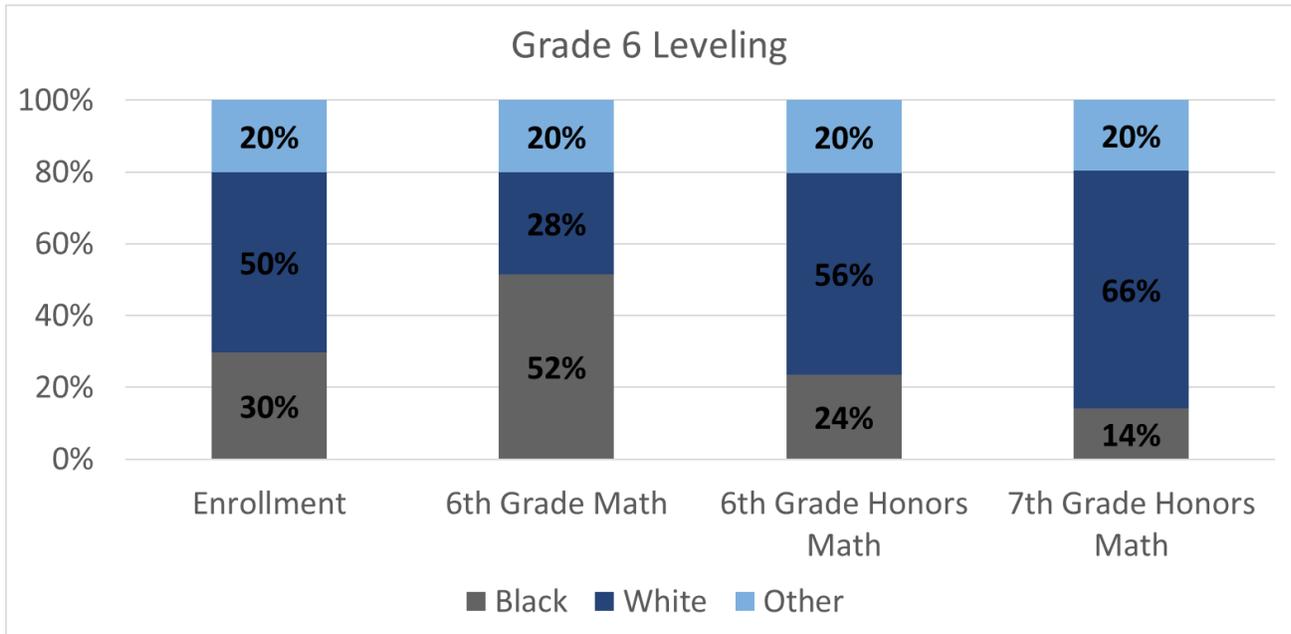
Figure 3: South Orange-Maplewood Grade 6 Course Enrollment by Race and Ethnicity, 2017-2018 [vii]

7th Grade Leveling

Figure 4: South Orange-Maplewood Grade 7 Course Enrollment by Race and Ethnicity, 2017-2018 viii

8th Grade Leveling

Figure 5: South Orange-Maplewood Grade 8 Course Enrollment by Race and Ethnicity, 2017-2018 ix

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9th Grade Leveling

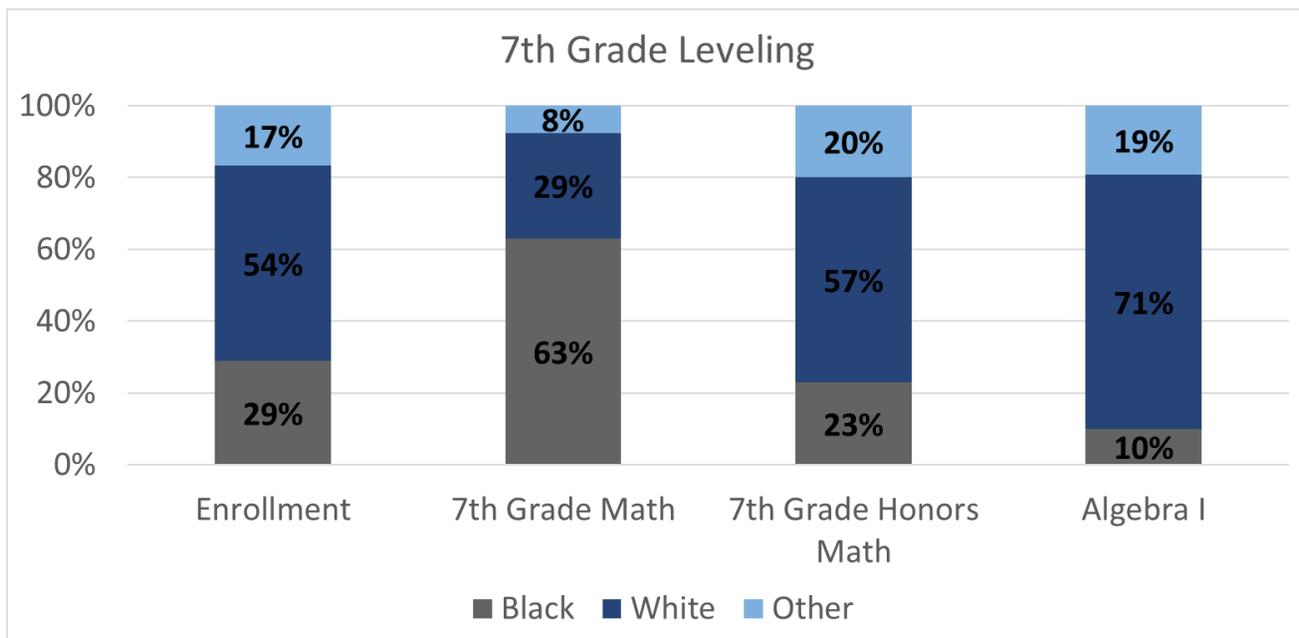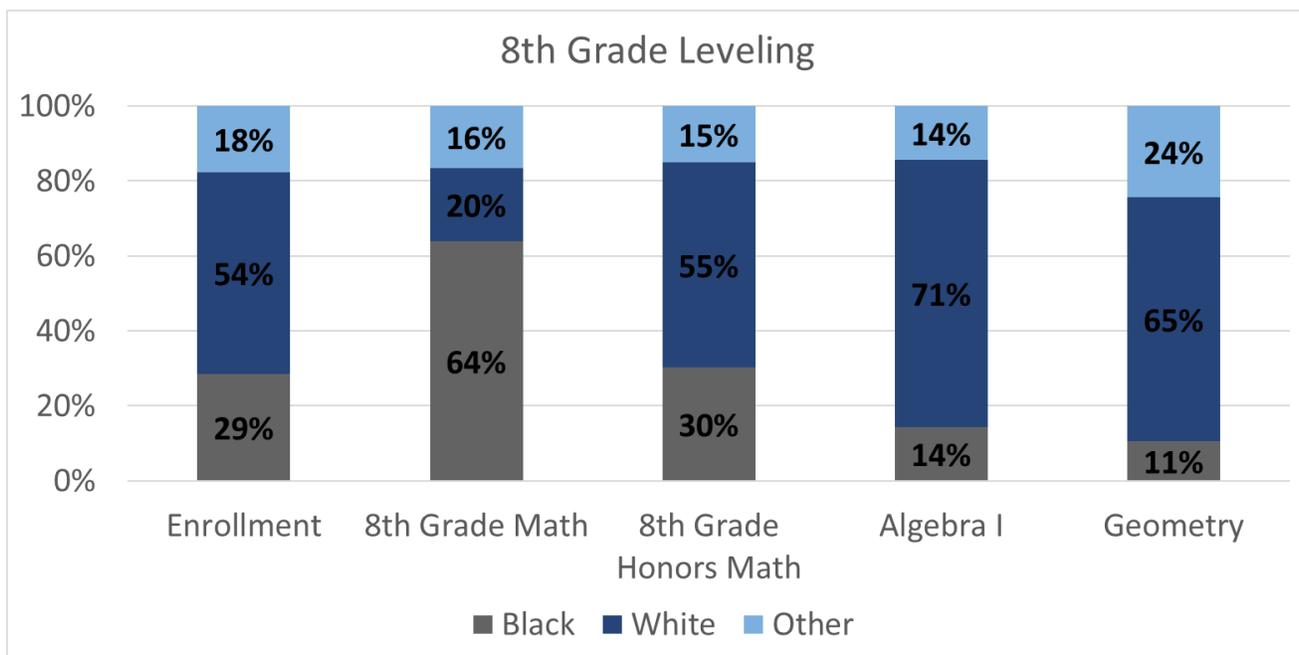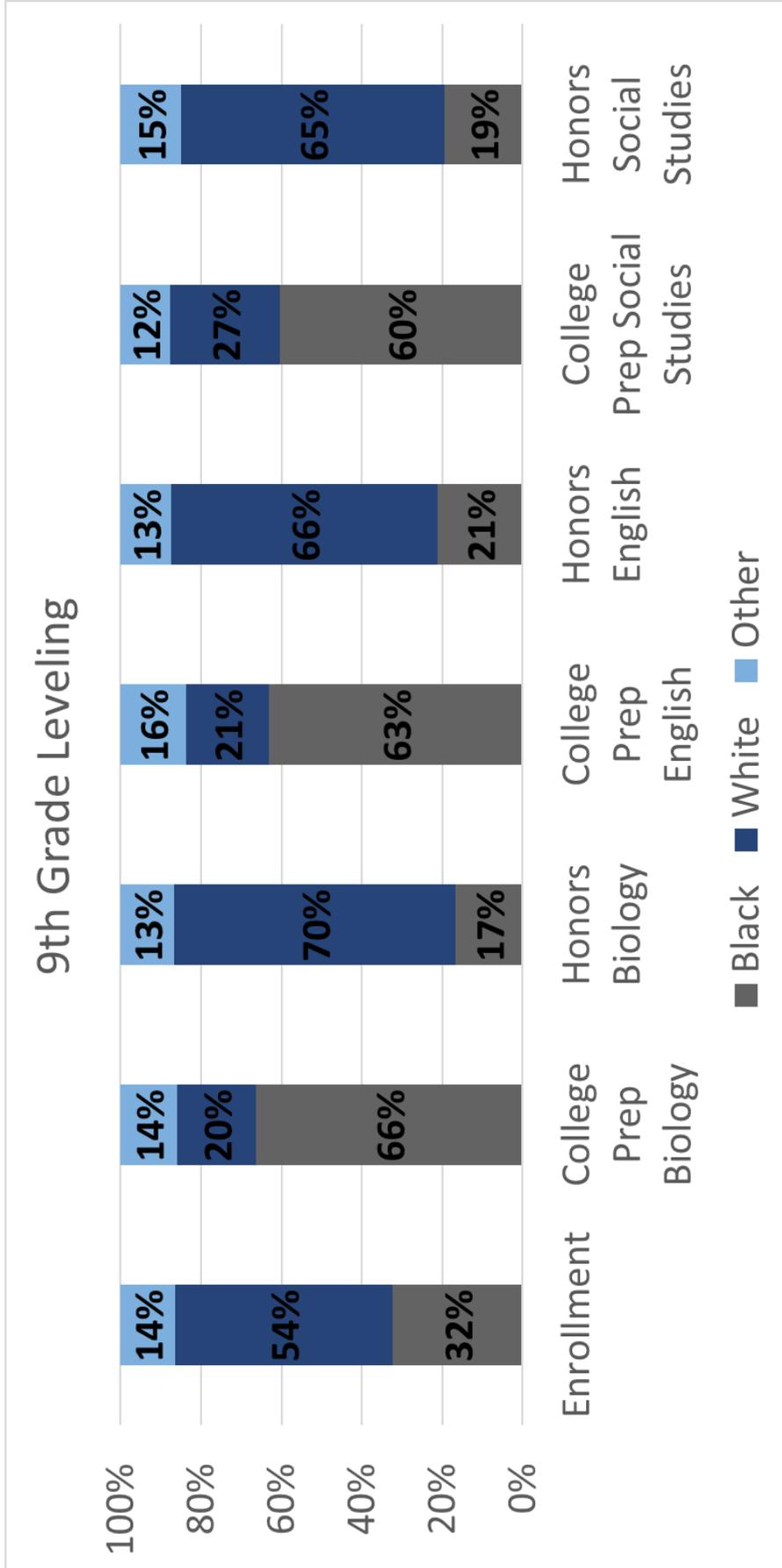|	Enrollment	College Prep Biology	Honors Biology	College Prep English	Honors English	College Prep Social Studies	Honors Social Studies
Other	14%	14%	13%	16%	13%	12%	15%
White	54%	20%	70%	21%	66%	27%	65%
Black	32%	66%	17%	63%	21%	60%	19%

■ Black ■ White ■ Other

Figure 6: South Orange-Maplewood Grade 9 Course Enrollment by Race and Ethnicity, 2017-2018

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10th Grade Leveling

Figure 7: South Orange-Maplewood Grade 10 Course Enrollment by Race and Ethnicity, 2017-2018

Legend: Black ■ White ■ Other

Course	Other	White	Black
AP Social Studies	10%	75%	15%
Honors Social Studies	9%	48%	43%
College Prep Social Studies	9%	9%	83%
AP English	10%	80%	10%
Honors English	10%	61%	28%
College Prep English	6%	13%	82%
Advanced Physics	11%	81%	8%
Honors Physics	10%	57%	33%
College Prep Physics	4%	21%	74%
Level 2 Physics	11%	3%	86%
Enrollment	9%	50%	41%

Grade 11 Leveling

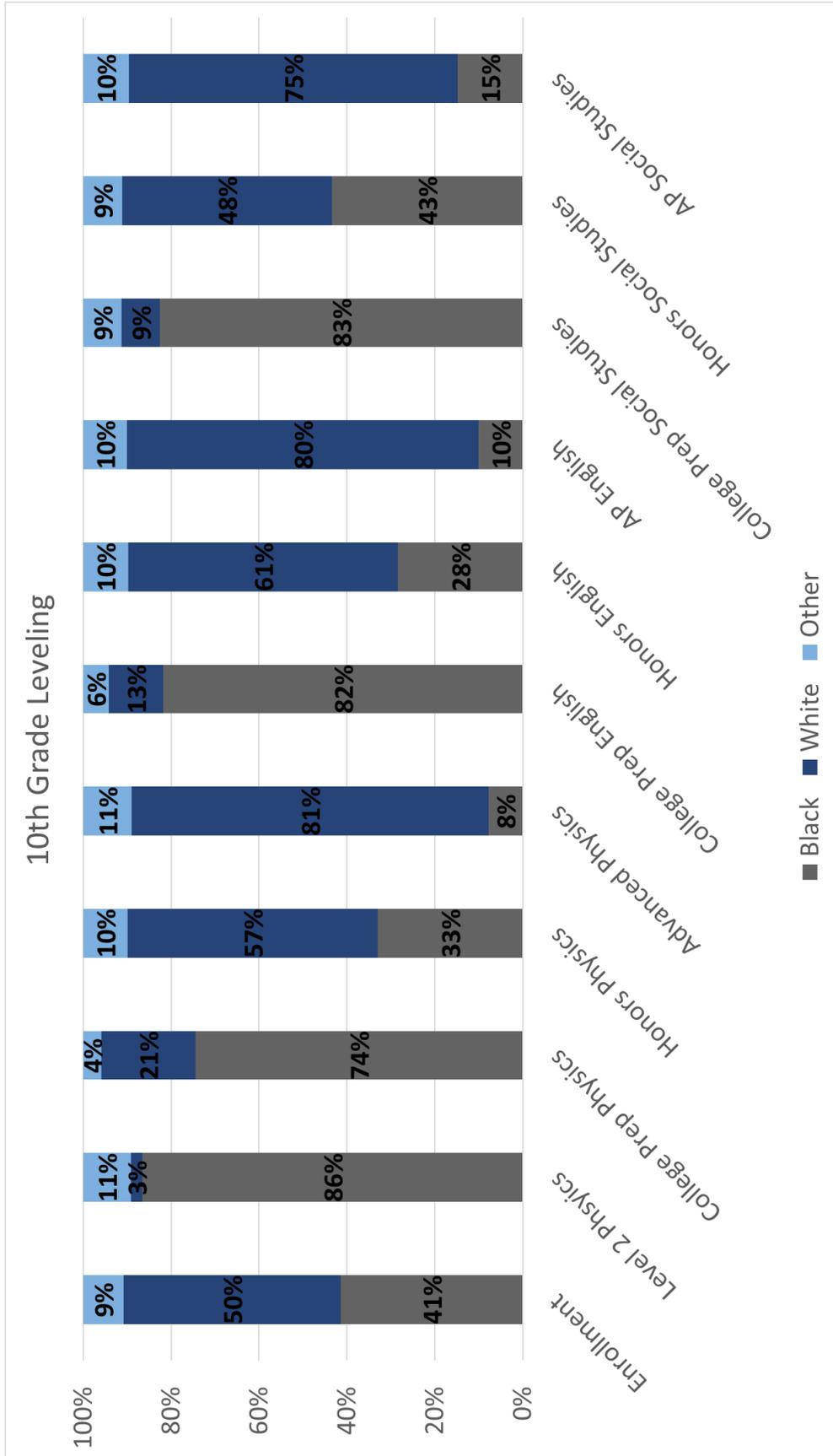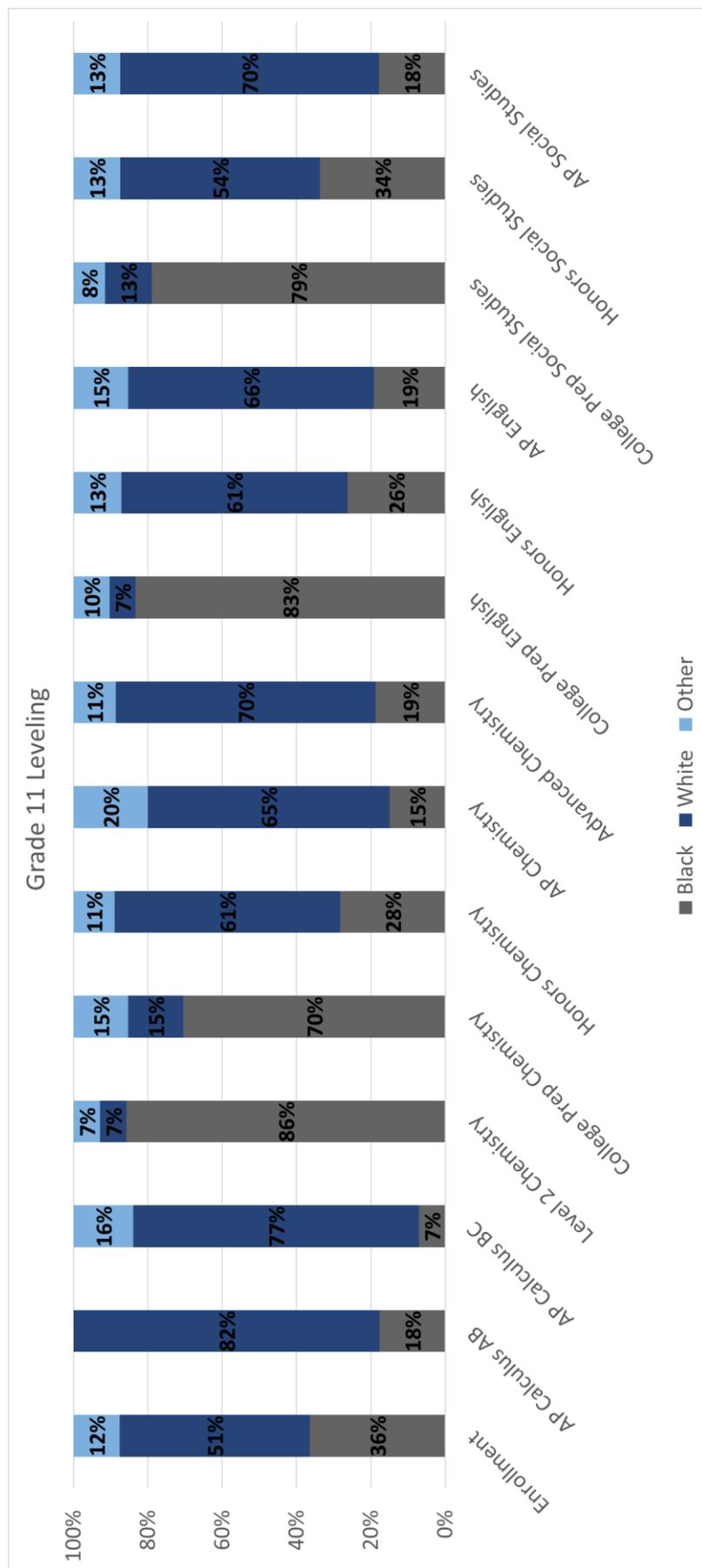|	Other	White	Black
AP Social Studies	13%	70%	18%
Honors Social Studies	13%	54%	34%
College Prep Social Studies	8% / 13%		79%
AP English	15%	66%	19%
Honors English	13%	61%	26%
College Prep English	10% / 7%		83%
Advanced Chemistry	11%	70%	19%
AP Chemistry	20%	65%	15%
Honors Chemistry	11%	61%	28%
College Prep Chemistry	15% / 15%		70%
Level 2 Chemistry	7% / 7%		86%
AP Calculus BC	16%	77%	7%
AP Calculus AB		82%	18%
Enrollment	12%	51%	36%

■ Black ■ White ■ Other

Figure 8: South Orange-Maplewood Grade 11 Course Enrollment by Race and Ethnicity, 2017-2018
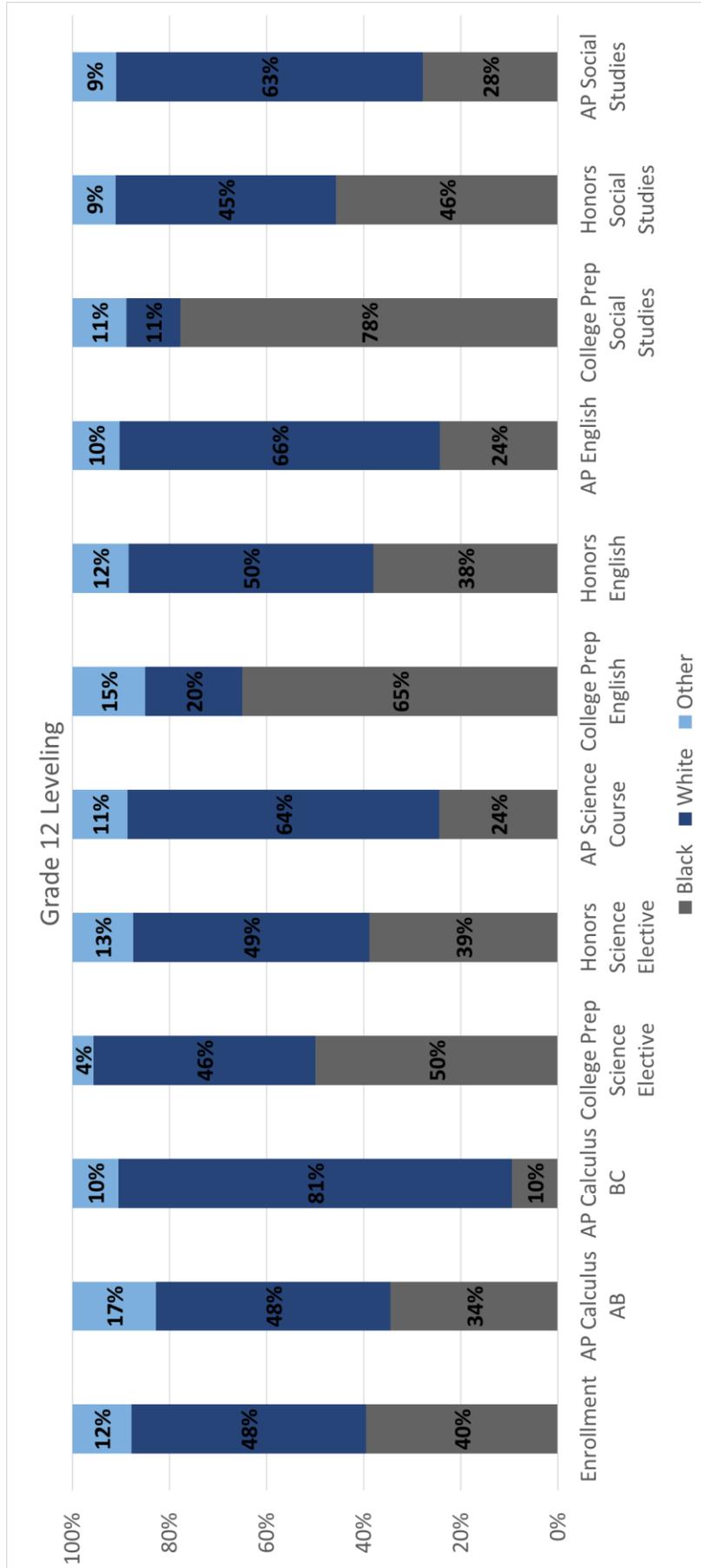
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Figure 9: South Orange-Maplewood Grade 12 Course Enrollment by Race and Ethnicity, 2017-2018

For example, Figure 4 shows that while 29% of seventh-grade students are Black, 63% of students taking the lowest level math course are Black and only 10% of seventh-grade students enrolled in Algebra I are Black. The same figure shows that while 54% of seventh-grade students are white, 71% of students in Algebra I are white and only 29% of students in the lowest level math class are white.

Figure 7 shows that while 50% of tenth-grade students are white, only 3% of students in the lowest level physics class are white and 81% of students in the most advanced physics course are white. The same figure shows that while 41% of eleventh-grade students are Black, 86% of students in the lowest level Physics class are Black and only 8% of students in the most advanced physics class are Black. Figure x shows that a similar pattern persists in English courses and Social Studies courses.

Student Discipline

It is important to note that the South Orange-Maplewood School District maintains an appalling racial disciplinary gap. Figure 10 highlights the fact that Black students face a disproportionate number of in-school and out-of-school suspensions. While white students make up 52% of the district, they only receive 20% of suspensions. Simultaneously, Black students receive 70% of suspensions despite only making up 33% of the district's population. In 2015, Black students missed 510 days of schooling as a result of out-of-school suspensions. White students missed 92 days of schooling as a result of out-of-school suspensions.
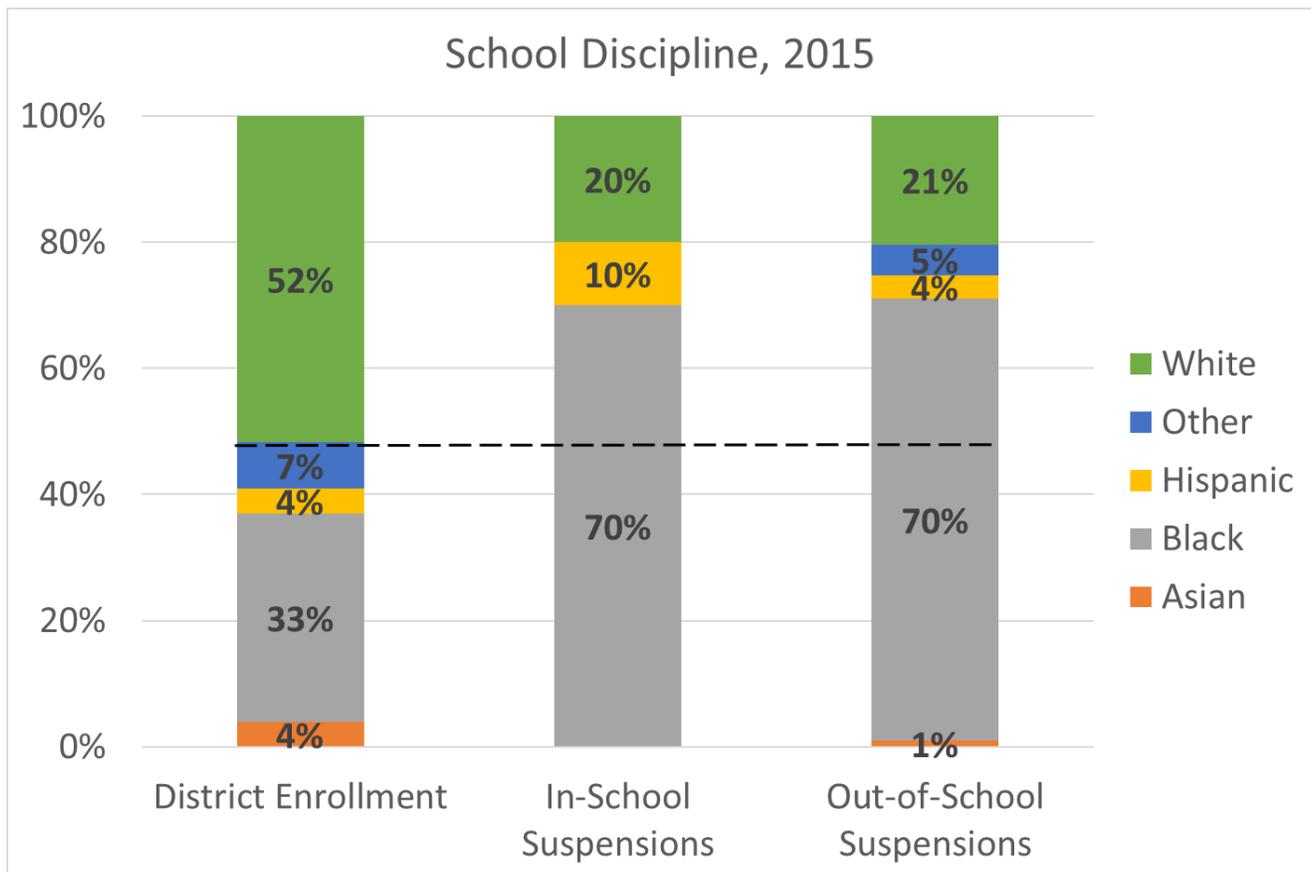
School Discipline, 2015

Figure 10: South Orange-Maplewood School Discipline by Race and Ethnicity, 2015 [x]

Neighborhood Characteristics

The South Orange-Maplewood School District is not large. It is only 6.7 square miles in area, and its perimeter is 11.4 miles. Driving from any one point in the district to any other point in the district can easily happen in a short amount of time.

As of 2018, 41,030 people lived in the school district. 25% of this population is below the age of 18. Map 2 shows the locations of public schools in the South Orange-Maplewood school district as well as childhood poverty rates by census tract. Across the entire school district, only 5.5% of children live in poverty; however, a large concentration of children living in poverty exists in the

southern-most census tract where Seth Boyden Elementary Demonstration School sits.

While most children living in the South Orange-Maplewood School District attend public school, 10.1% opt out of the public system and attend private schools. Many of these children are concentrated in the northern and western portions of the district, as shown in Map 1.
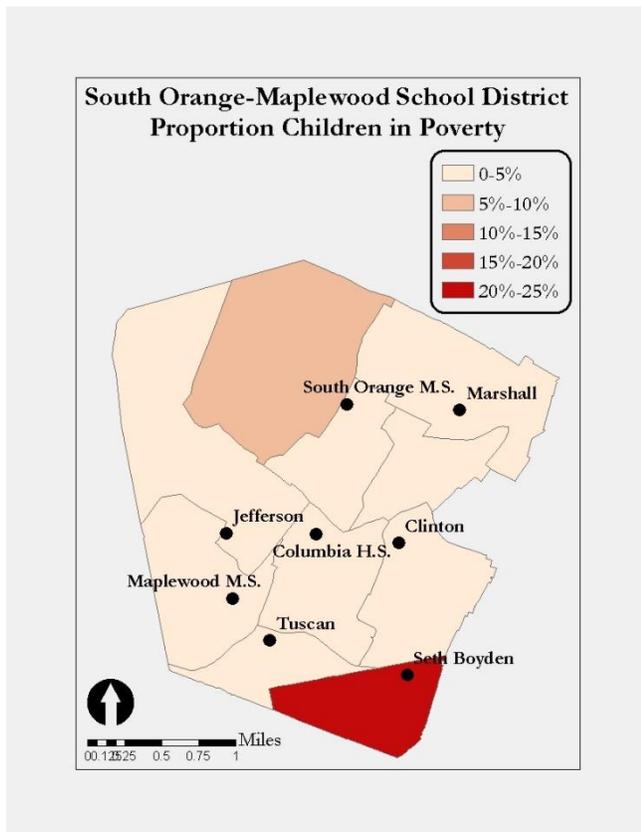

Map 2
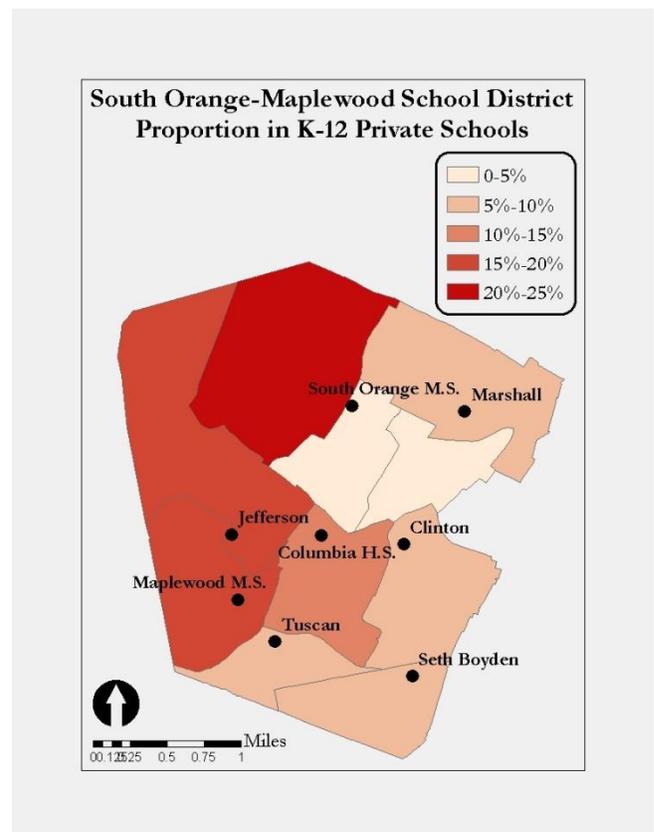
Map 1

Map 4 provides an overview of median household income levels across the South Orange-Maplewood school district, and Map 3 shows educational attainment levels across the South Orange-Maplewood School District. The census tract where Seth Boyden Elementary Demonstration School is located has both the lowest annual median income ($73,583) and the lowest proportion of adults with a Bachelor's degree (36%). The wealthiest census tract, where 82% of adults have a Bachelor's degree has a median income of $218,646.
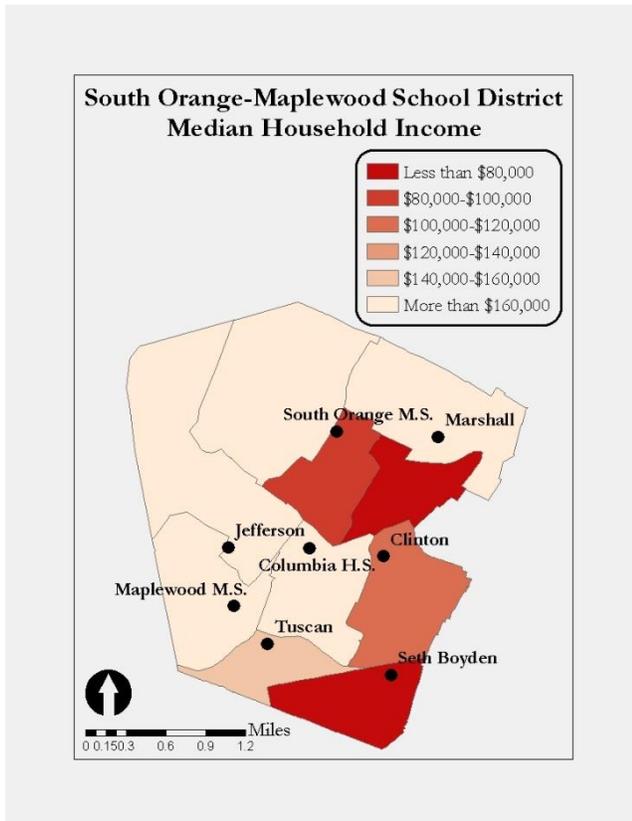
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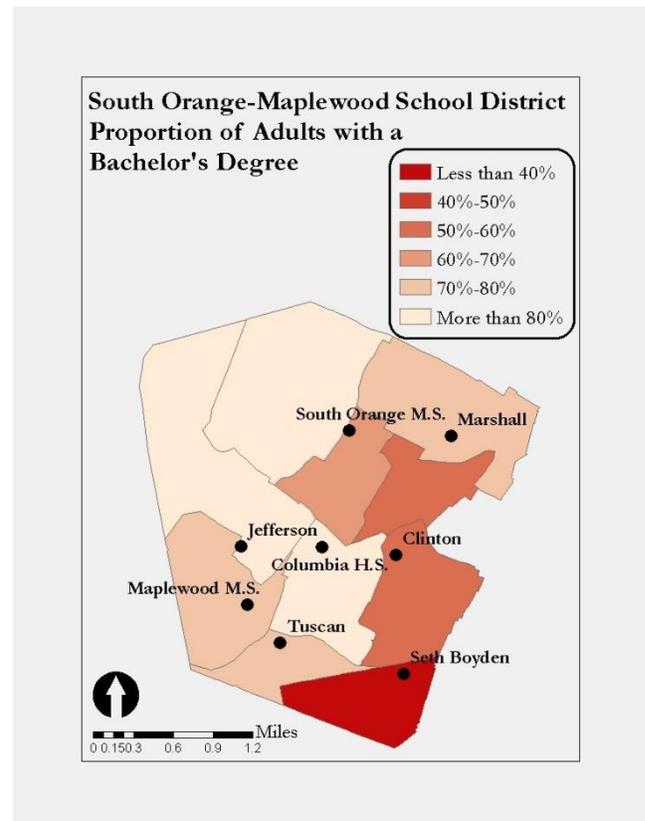
Map 3

Map 5 and Map 6 highlight the distribution of the Black and white populations across census tracts in the South Orange-Maplewood School District. In five of the census tracts, the Black population is below 25%. And in one of the census tracts, the Black population is above 75%. In four of the census tracts, the white population is above 75%. And in one of the census tracts, the white population is below 25%.
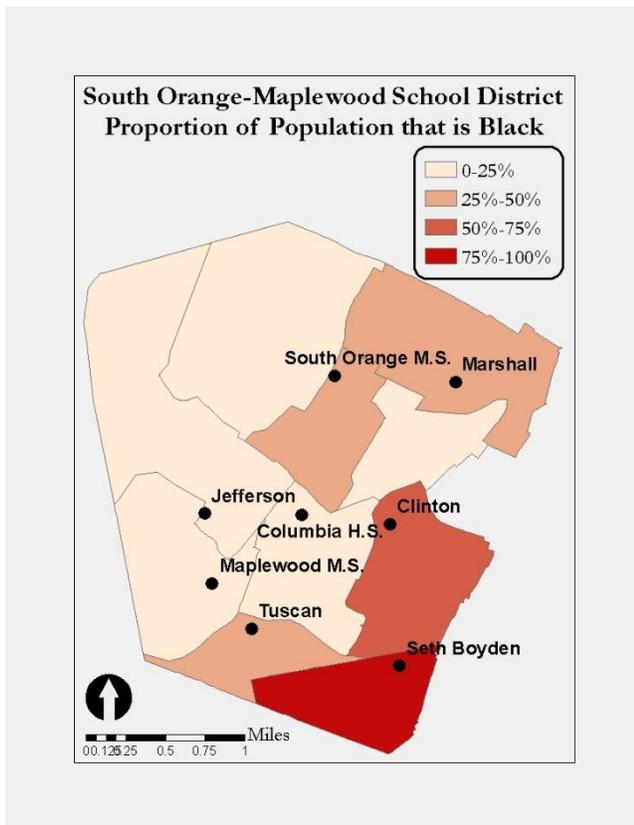
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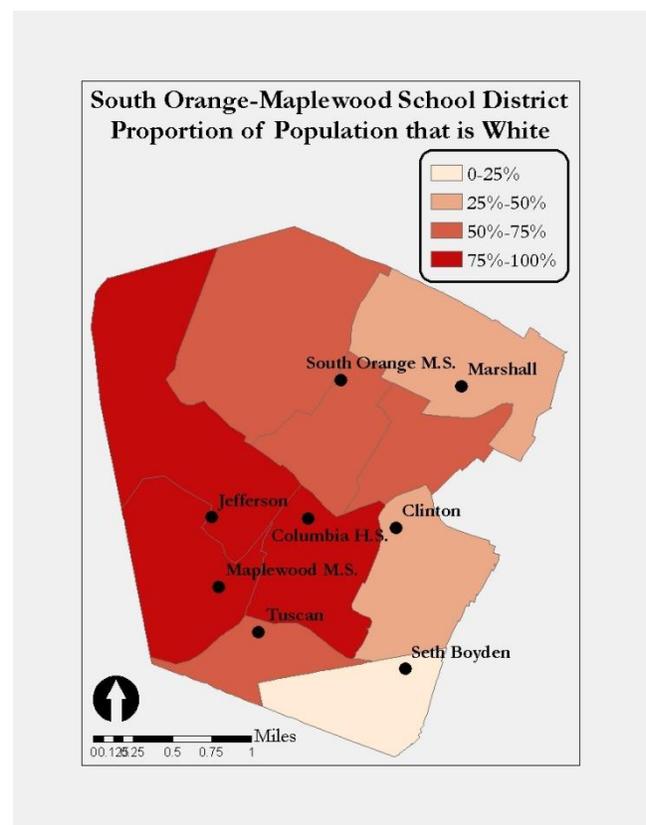
Map 6

Measures of exposure and isolation provide an estimate for the proportion of people from different demographic subgroups that an individual of a certain race or ethnicity is likely to encounter in their neighborhood (as delineated by census tracts in this report). Figure 11 illustrates the overall demographic distribution of the population living in the South Orange-Maplewood School District. It also highlights the demographic composition of a neighborhood for the average Asian, Black, Hispanic, and white person living in the district. While the average Hispanic resident lives in a neighborhood that is reflective of the overall population, the average Black resident lives in an area with a higher proportion of Black people and the average Asian resident and white resident lives in an area with a higher proportion of white people.
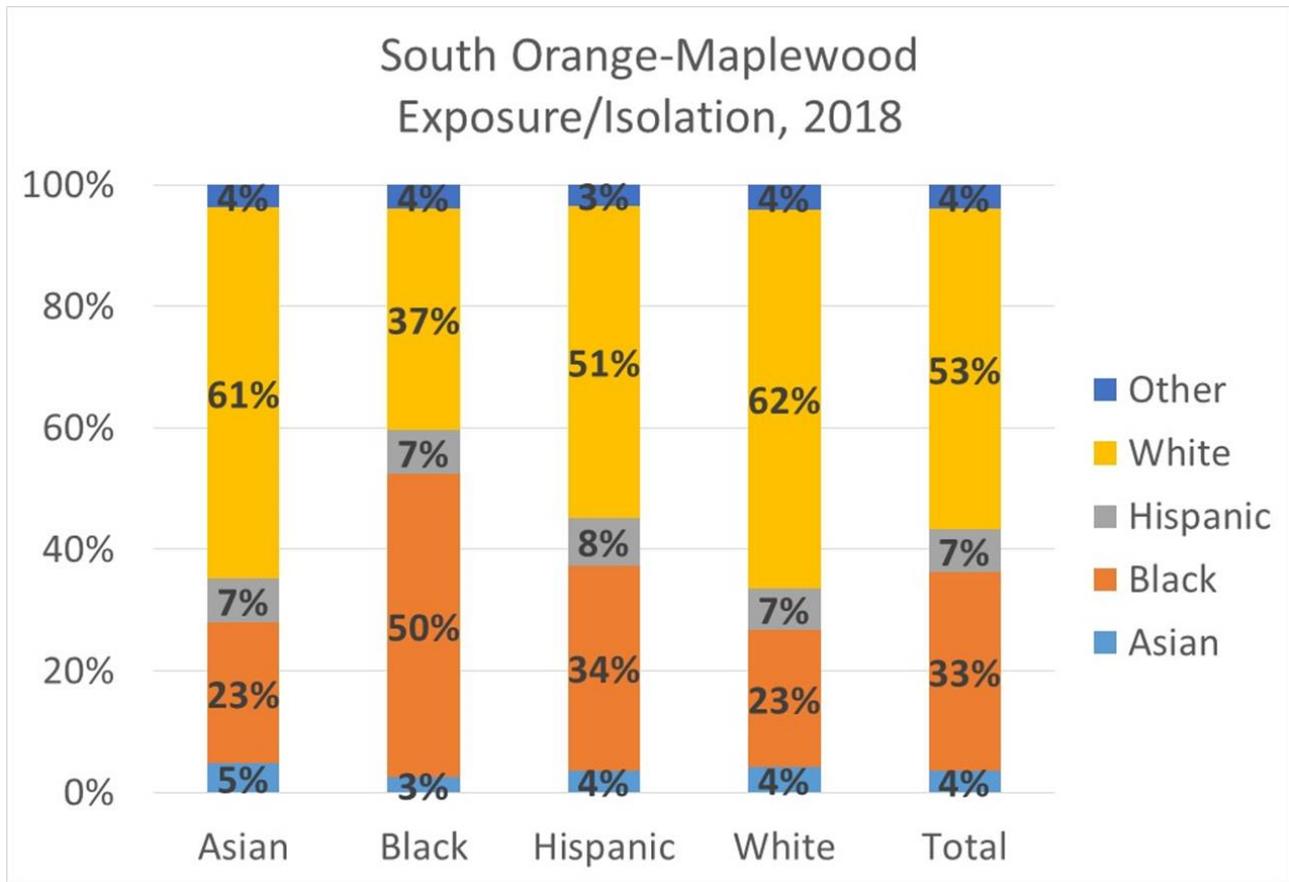
Figure 11: South Orange-Maplewood Neighborhood Exposure and Isolation, 2018 [xi]

The people of South Orange and Maplewood should prioritize dismantling the neighborhood segregation that exists in their municipalities. However, the South Orange-Maplewood School District does not need to wait for neighborhood desegregation in order to ensure that its schools are racially balanced. School districts such as the Morris School District in neighboring Morris County have developed school assignment practices that overcome neighborhood segregation. The dissimilarity index tells us that even though 42.1% of Black or white residents in the Morris School District would need to move to a new neighborhood to ensure proportional representation of Black and white residents in all neighborhoods, only 2.6% of Black of white students in the Morris School District would need to change elementary schools to ensure proportional representation in all schools.[xii] Notably, the Black-white dissimilarity index for neighborhoods in the South Orange-Maplewood School District is lower than it is in the Morris School District; 37.4% of Black or white residents in the South Orange-Maplewood School District would need to move to a new neighborhood to ensure proportional representation of Black and white residents in all neighborhoods. The lower dissimilarity index, along with the reality that the

Morris School District is 18.8 square miles (nearly three times the size of the 6.7 square mile South Orange-Maplewood School District), highlight the feasibility of ensuring racial balance in the elementary schools across the South Orange-Maplewood School District.

Conclusion

This report demonstrates that the South Orange-Maplewood School District upholds a complex system of racial segregation. Not only does the district allow segregation to persist between schools, but it also segregates students within schools.

The district's elementary schools are segregated by race and economic status, with a disproportionate number of Black students and students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch concentrated in Seth Boyden Elementary Demonstration School.

The district's middle schools and high schools use a system of tracking and leveling that segregate students into different classrooms. Data show that the district's white students are far more likely to be enrolled in advanced courses in sixth grade through high school. Concurrently, the district's Black students are far more likely to be enrolled in lower level courses in sixth grade through high school.

In order to serve all students well, the South Orange-Maplewood School District must design and implement a comprehensive integration plan. Along with ending between school segregation and the segregative system of tracking and leveling within its middle schools and high schools, the district must also ensure an equitable and inclusive education for all of its students. Integration is not simply a process of desegregation. While the South Orange-Maplewood School District must cease segregation as a prelude to equity and inclusion, it must also address a wide array of systemic problems. The following is a list of recommended actions that the South Orange-Maplewood School District should take if it seeks true integration:

- Conduct an in-depth equity and inclusion audit that
    - uncovers the range of experiences of students, teachers, staff, administration, and parents in the district's schools;
    - assesses the overt and implicit biases held by teachers, staff, administration, students, and parents
    - evaluates the content taught in classrooms and the resources used to support instruction;
    - analyzes the full extent of within school segregation across all grades, classes, and extracurricular activities;
    - investigates the disciplinary practices of teachers and administrators; and
    - accounts the amount and nature of professional development aimed at building equitable and inclusive spaces throughout the district's schools.

- Develop a school assignment plan that maximizes diversity across all schools.

- Terminate the system of leveling and tracking, and replace it with a detracking plan that supports the equitable growth of all students.

- Replace existing disciplinary practices with a restorative justice program.

- Build and implement an on-going professional development plan that
    - guides teachers, staff, and administrators in uncovering and remediating their biases;
    - prepares teachers to develop and deliver an anti-racist curriculum that uplifts all voices;
    - trains teachers, staff, and administrators in culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogies; and
    - instructs teachers, staff, and administrators in restorative justice practices.

- Establish courses at all grade levels that specifically uplift the voices of marginalized groups historically omitted from school curricula.

- Host regular forums to engage the entire community in dialogue about diversity, equity, and inclusion.

- Craft an array of programming that provides students with frequent opportunities to think critically about diversity, equity, and inclusion within classrooms, during special events, in extracurricular forums, and with their families.

- Work with the local governments of South Orange and Maplewood, real estate agents, and community members to develop and implement a series of actions aimed to end the alarming residential segregation of the two municipalities and to support the growth of a more diverse community.

These recommendations can serve as a useful starting point. A comprehensive plan that rectifies past inequities and moves the district towards true integration plan must be developed by the full community, in conjunction with experts. The work in front of the South Orange-Maplewood School District is not easy, but it can be accomplished.

About the Author

Ryan W. Coughlan is an Assistant Professor of Education at Molloy College in Rockville Centre, New York. He studies the social context of schooling. Dr. Coughlan's research uses geospatial statistical methods to analyze school zoning practices, patterns of school segregation, educational outcomes, and social bonds between neighborhoods and schools. Along with his research on the social context of schooling and his related publications in academic journals, Dr. Coughlan has written five books on school integration, the history of progressive education, the social foundations of education, and the sociology of education. His research has been featured in *The New York Times*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, and on NPR's *All Things Considered.* He has also served as a quantitative data expert in multiple school equity lawsuits.

Dr. Coughlan earned his Ph.D. in Urban Systems with a concentration in Urban Education from Rutgers University, Newark and holds a M.A. from the City College of New York and an A.B. with honors from Harvard University.

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Endnotes

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