



News Release

Maryland Equity Project Releases Report on Public School Enrollment in Maryland

Research finds more poor students, more racial diversity, but also more school segregation

College Park, MD (November 13, 2014) – A new report from the Maryland Equity Project finds that public school enrollment is becoming more racially diverse and poorer. Tracking demographic changes between 1990 and 2010, the public schools have shown a steady decline in the share of enrollment that is White and continued growth in minority students. Minority enrollment accounted for 56% of students in 2010.

The state is also seeing a substantial increase in the number of low-income students. The percentage of Maryland students who qualify for free and reduced-priced meals—a measure used by schools as a proxy for family incomes—has climbed steadily since 1990. In 1990, 22.4% of students were low-income compared to 40.1% in 2010. All counties are experiencing an increase in the number of poor students.

The report uses multiple methods to describe demographic trends in Maryland. Appendices provide detailed data and figures for each school district to show these trends.

“These changes present tremendous challenges and opportunities for school districts,” says Gail Sunderman, co-author and director of the Maryland Equity Project. “Students, particularly poor students, are coming to school with more needs at a time when funding for education is tight.”

The changes are not evenly distributed across districts. “Most of the growth in enrollment is taking place in the central portion of the state,” according to co-author Justin Dayhoff. “Those districts showing the greatest change in the racial composition of students are also those with growing enrollments.”

The report also finds that schools are becoming more segregated by race and that the concentration of low-income students in schools is increasing. “Maryland is going to have to take a serious look at how it supports education so that these changing demographics don’t create a two-tiered educational system,” says

Sunderman. “Concentrating low-income students in a few schools creates additional challenges for schools systems.” One advantage in Maryland is that school districts are countywide, which provides more flexibility to address segregation than when districts are smaller and more numerous.

Poverty is increasing across the country—in about 18 states, a majority of public school students are low-income. “Maryland isn’t there yet, but for a state as wealthy as Maryland, 40% low-income is disturbing,” says Sunderman. “School districts on their own can’t address these issues, particularly growing poverty. It is going to take a broader effort that cuts across policy domains and involves innovative thinking on a range of social-economic issues facing families.”

About Us: The Maryland Equity Project seeks to improve education through research that supports an informed public policy debate on the quality and distribution of educational opportunities in Maryland. The Maryland Equity Project is a program in the Department of Teaching and Learning, Policy and Leadership, College of Education at the University of Maryland, College Park, MD. Visit us at mdequity.org or follow us on Twitter @mdequity.