

Critically Assessing Diversity in Schools and the Role of Housing and Education Policy

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Beloved Community

ABSTRACT

Median home price is strongly associated with the academic quality of public schools in the United States. As public-school access is determined by attendance school boundaries, education opportunity is determined by housing. Studies suggest strong associations between 1930s-era ‘Redlining’ maps (discriminatory zoning practices used to inform mortgage lender’s decision to approve or deny a loan often because of the racial characteristics of the applicant’s neighborhood) and school attendance zone boundaries within school district borders, resulting in families living in historically ‘hazardous’ (low-grade) zoned areas to underperforming schools. While strong evidence suggests the association of discriminatory housing policies with academic performance, the association between restrictive zoning and key non-academic outcomes such as Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) has not been studied. The purpose of this paper is to explore how Redlining affects key non-academic outcomes today. Using Beloved Community’s Equity Audit tool, we assessed 88 schools’ equity capacity in governance, operations, finance, pedagogy, adult culture, and youth culture and ArcGIS to map and assign these schools with their respective ‘Redlining’ grades. Fisher's Exact Test was used to test the association between DEI scores and ‘Redlining’ grades. All schools in the ‘Desirable’ HOLC grade zone scored in the lowest DEI score band, while all schools in the ‘Hazardous’ HOLC grade zone scored in the highest DEI score band (p -value <0.05). Results suggest that even though Redlining was outlawed in 1977, its original objective to keep ‘desirable’ neighborhoods homogenous in income and racial demographics is still being achieved. As housing is a gateway to educational opportunity, education reform must include changes in housing policy.

Keywords: Redlining; Equity; Zoning; Student Outcomes; Education; Open Enrollment