Schools and the Legacy of Redlining

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40th ISDC
Frankfurt, Germany
July 2022
Systemic Racism

- A situation under which members of minority races experience deleterious outcomes, such as higher arrest rates or greater wealth inequalities, stemming from explicit or implicit bias.

- Even though explicit bias is mostly illegal, systemic racism may still exist because of structures of policy or behavior that generate unnecessarily lopsided outcomes.
One such systemic structure involves how school districts assign students to schools, using “school attendance zones” that may be vestiges of the now-outlawed practice of “redlining” urban neighborhoods.
Redlining

- Overtly racist and discriminatory policy facilitated by a federal agency of the United States government, the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC), founded in 1933 as part of the New Deal.
- It commissioned “residential security maps” for scores of cities across the country.
Redlining

- The term “redlining” came from how the maps used four colors to depict neighborhoods as belonging to four categories of loan risk:
  - Best (green)
  - Desirable (blue)
  - Declining (yellow)
  - Hazardous (red)
Redlining Example: Columbus, Ohio

- The area outlined in yellow contains two elementary schools with markedly different performance outcomes, which are located in different “school attendance zones.”

- These zones were in different neighborhoods on the 1936 HOLC map: one green (“best”) and the other yellow and red (“declining” and “hazardous”).
Administering Schools In the US

- *School districts*, which are political subdivisions, are typically defined in state law and governed by elected officials.

- Within districts, unelected administrators usually create *school attendance zones*, which are administrative service areas.
Feedback Loops Between Housing Quality and School Quality

- Affluent parents look for good schools for their children and bid up the price of housing in school attendance zones that have those good schools.
- Parents who cannot afford expensive housing make do with the schools within their school attendance zones.
- What results is a patchwork of school attendance zones with different property values and schools of commensurate quality.
School Attendance Zones and Redlining

- Today’s affluent school attendance zones with good schools often are in areas designated green (“best”) or blue (“desirable”) in the HOLC maps of eighty-five years ago.

- Today’s failing schools are often in school attendance zones whose areas were designated yellow (“declining”) or red (“hazardous”) in those old maps.

- Here, “HOLC A” means formerly green areas and “HOLC D” means formerly red areas.
Columbus, OH: Clinton vs Como Elementary Schools

87% Reading Proficiency Scores

44%
Columbus, OH: Clinton vs Como Elementary Schools

This is just one of several examples from *A Fine Line* (DeRoche, 2020)
Causes of School Performance Gap: Funding?

- Revenues in HOLC D school administrative zones were indeed lower than those in HOLC A zones.
- However, because of federal funding provided to HOLC D schools, their expenditures were not statistically significantly different from HOLC A schools.
Causes of School Performance Gap: Evidence from Charter Schools

- Research shows that it is possible to design and implement schools that, despite their location in formerly redlined areas, are high performing.

- The key? “No excuses” schools:
  - High expectations for both academics and behavior,
  - Longer school days and years, and
  - Frequent observations by teachers to give feedback, tutoring, and data-driven instruction that uses assessment to frequently update teachers. (Cohodes, 2018: 6)
Conventional Dynamic Hypothesis

Diagram:

- Quality of school in school zone
- Student performance in school zone
- School zone drives quality of school
- Quality of housing in school zone
- Desirability of school zone's HOLC map designation

Not clear that this is a valid link.
Elaborated Dynamic Hypothesis

1. Faculty skill
   - Quality of school in school zone

2. "No Excuses" level of school
   - Academic and behavioral rigor

3. Management attention to school attendance zone
   - Management attention to school in school zone
   - Quality of housing in school zone

4. School quality drives housing quality
   - Student performance in school zone

Desirability of school zone's HOLC map designation

R1: Management attention to school attendance zone drives quality of school
R2: School quality drives housing quality
Stock and Flow Model

Based on modified version of Vensim “Quality” molecule:
Policy Experiments: Baseline

Housing Quality

Time (Year)

Dmld


HOLC A

HOLC D
Policy Experiments: Baseline

Quality of school in attendance zone

![Graph showing quality of school over time with two lines: HOLC A and HOLC D.]

- **HOLC A**
- **HOLC D**

Time (Year): 1970 to 2020

Dval
Policy Experiments: Baseline

Student performance in school attendance zone

Time (Year)

HOLC A

HOLC D
Policy Experiments: Greater Faculty Skill and Effort

Quality of School

Time (Year)


Dnull

0.6 0.8 1.0

HOLC D
HOLC D Greater Faculty Effort 1970
HOLC D Greater Faculty Effort 2000
Policy Experiments:
Greater Faculty Skill and Effort

Student Performance

- HOLC D
- HOLC D Greater Faculty Effort 1970
- HOLC D Greater Faculty Effort 2000
Policy Experiments: “No Excuses” Approach

Quality of school in attendance zone

Time (Year)


Dnnl

HOLC D  HOLC D No Excuses 2000
HOLC D No Excuses 1970  HOLC A
Policy Experiments: “No Excuses” Approach

Student performance in school attendance zone

- HOLC D
- HOLC D No Excuses 1970
- HOLC D No Excuses 2000
- HOLC A
Policy Experiments: School Choice

Quality of school in attendance zone

Time (Year)


Dnud

HOLC D
HOLC D choice 1970
HOLC D choice 2000
Policy Experiments: School Choice

Quality of school in attendance zone

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>HOLC A</th>
<th>HOLC D choice 1970</th>
<th>HOLC D choice 2000</th>
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</table>
Policy Experiments: School Choice

Student performance in school attendance zone

- **HOLC D**
- **HOLC D choice 1970**
- **HOLC D choice 2000**
Policy Experiments: School Choice

Student performance in school attendance zone

Time (Year)

HOLC A
HOLC D choice 2000
HOLC D choice 1970
Policy Experiments: School Choice’s Effect on Housing Quality
Conclusions

- Much evidence has shown that the long-standing practice of redlining, despite being outlawed in 1968, nevertheless has had lingering effects on current conditions.

- Those include housing quality and value itself, but also the quality of schools in those school attendance zones that overlap formerly redlined areas.
Conclusions

- We examined the systemic structure of this situation, positing that it is not the quality of housing, per se, that has led to failing schools.

- They come from the lack of administrative effort to enforce good academic and behavioral standards and to support high effort from faculty.
Conclusions

- The policy experiments in the stylized model used in this paper simulated
  - improved faculty effort alone,
  - improved academic and behavioral conditions (the “no excuses” approach) alone, and
  - a combination of the two.
Conclusions

- The results showed that significant improvements in school quality and in student performance are
  - modest with improved teaching,
  - significant with the “no excuses” approach alone, and
  - high with the combined approach.
Conclusions

- Indeed, the combined approach closed the gap between HOLC A and HOLC D zones in school quality.
- For student performance, the gap remained after implementation of the combined approach, but the trend was in the direction of closing it.
- For some charter schools, in New York City and elsewhere, this combined approach has already closed the quality and performance gaps.