

# The Return of School Segregation in Eight Charts

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Photo: Ninth grade students are seen in a segregated classroom in Summerton, S.C., in 1954. (AP Photo/Rudolph Faircloth)

It was 1954 when the Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* that separate but equal schools were unconstitutional. The landmark decision put an end to legal segregation, but 60 years later,

racial divides are back on the rise inside America's public school classrooms.

So what happened? Changing demographics is one factor at play, while another has been a string of controversial court rulings that have made it easier for states to win release from federal integration orders. For many school districts, this has meant a return to levels of integration last seen during the Johnson administration. Here is a brief overview of the landscape:

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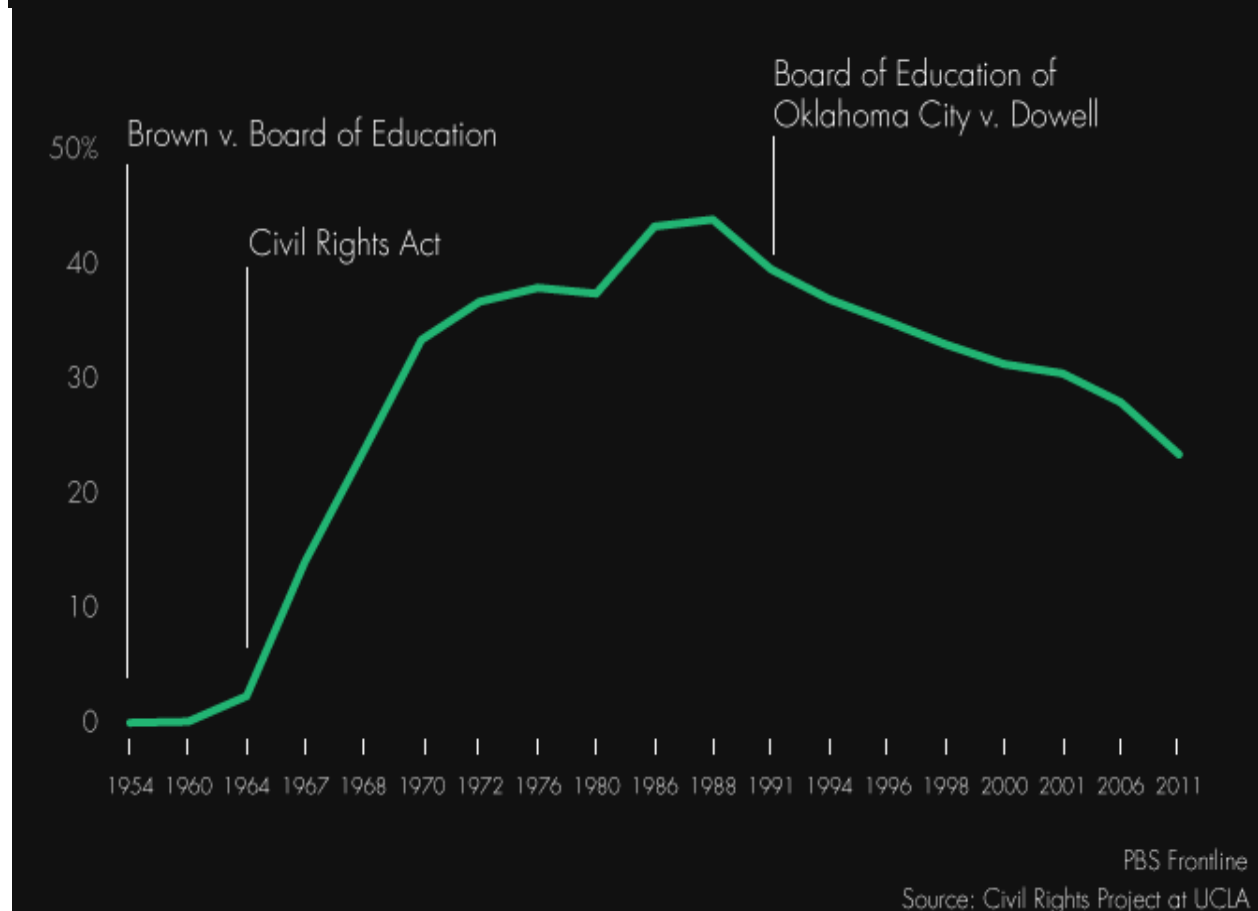
## 1. Gains achieved by black students in the south are gone

In the wake of the Brown decision, the percentage of black students in majority white southern schools went from zero to a peak of 43.5 percent in 1988. But those changes have reversed in recent years, with [data from UCLA's Civil Rights Project](#) showing that by 2011 that figure was back to 23.2 percent, just below where it stood in 1968.

The UCLA researchers attribute the decline to legal attacks on desegregation orders under Presidents Reagan and George H.W. Bush, as well as the 1991 decision in [Board of Education of Oklahoma City v. Dowell](#). By a 5-3 vote, the Supreme Court ruled that a school district can be freed from an injunction to desegregate if it can demonstrate compliance with the order and also show that it will not "return to its former ways."

The south today is still the most integrated region in the nation for black students, but the trend has increasingly been away from integration. As the Civil Right Project has warned, "the direction of change ... suggests that things will continue to worsen."

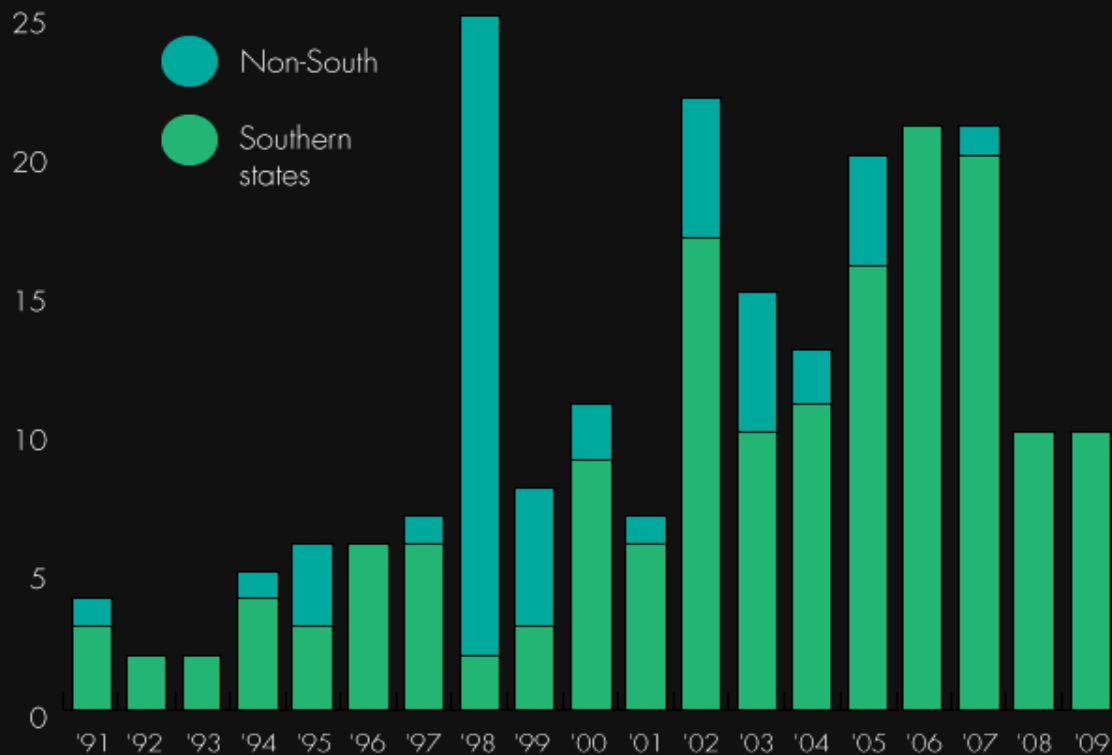
# BLACK STUDENTS IN WHITE SCHOOLS IN THE SOUTH



## 2. Court oversight increasingly faded during the 2000s

Between 1990 and 2009, courts released 45 percent of school districts under court oversight, according to research from Stanford University's Center for Education Policy Analysis. [The nationwide study](#), which focused on districts with at least 2,000 students, found that the pace of releases went from about seven per year in the 1990s, to roughly 15 per year during the 2000s. The year with the most releases was 1998, when 21 schools in Indiana alone were removed from oversight.

## SCHOOLS RELEASED FROM DESEGREGATION ORDERS



PBS Frontline  
Source: Center for Education Policy Analysis, Stanford University

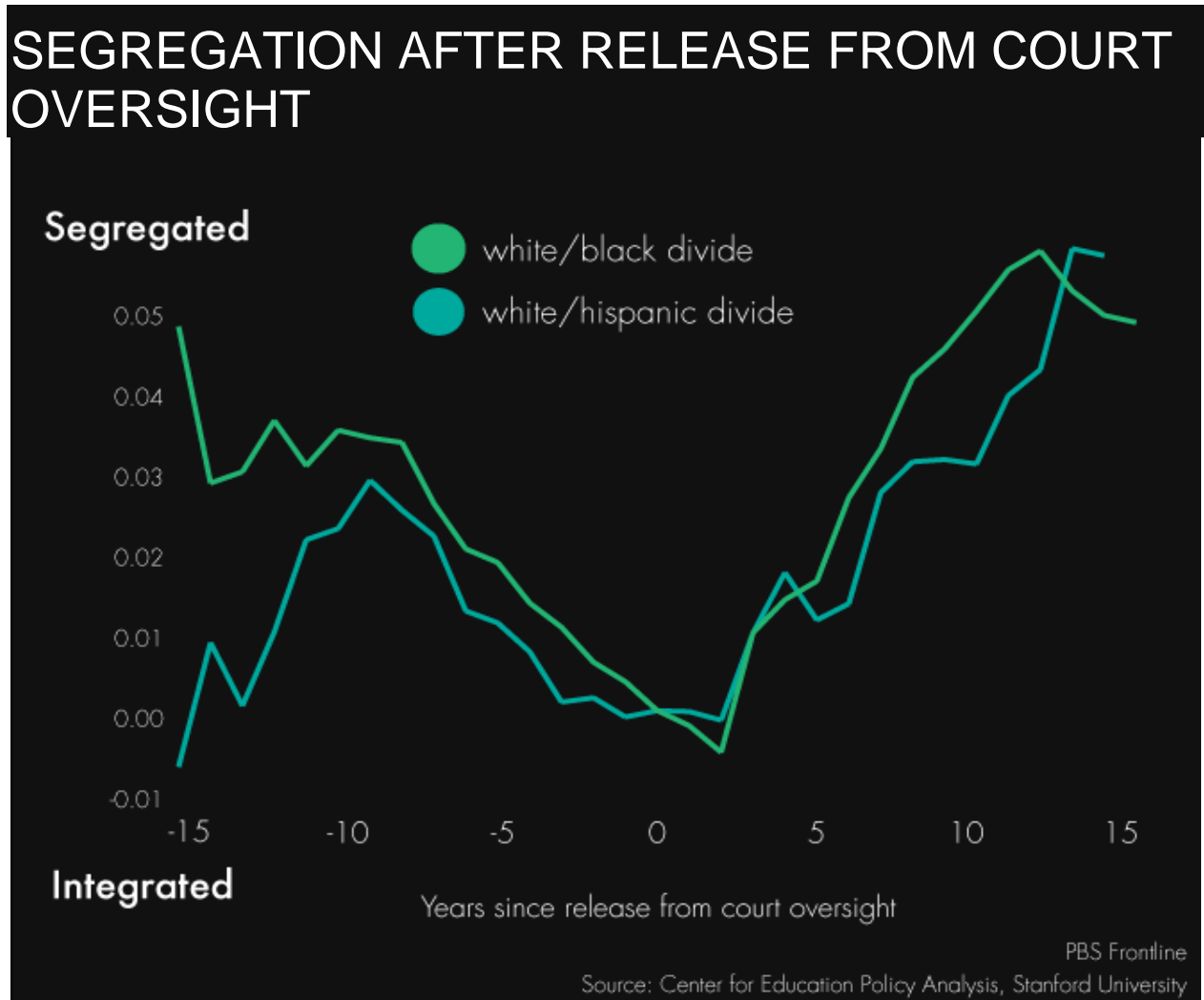
### 3. Segregation tends to rise without court oversight

One way researchers have measured integration is by turning to what's called the "dissimilarity index." The scale runs from 0 to 1, with 0 showing a school with balanced integration and 1 representing complete segregation.

When the Stanford researchers looked at what happens when districts leave court oversight, they found schools typically climb back toward 1, or more segregation. Schools released from integration plans saw the

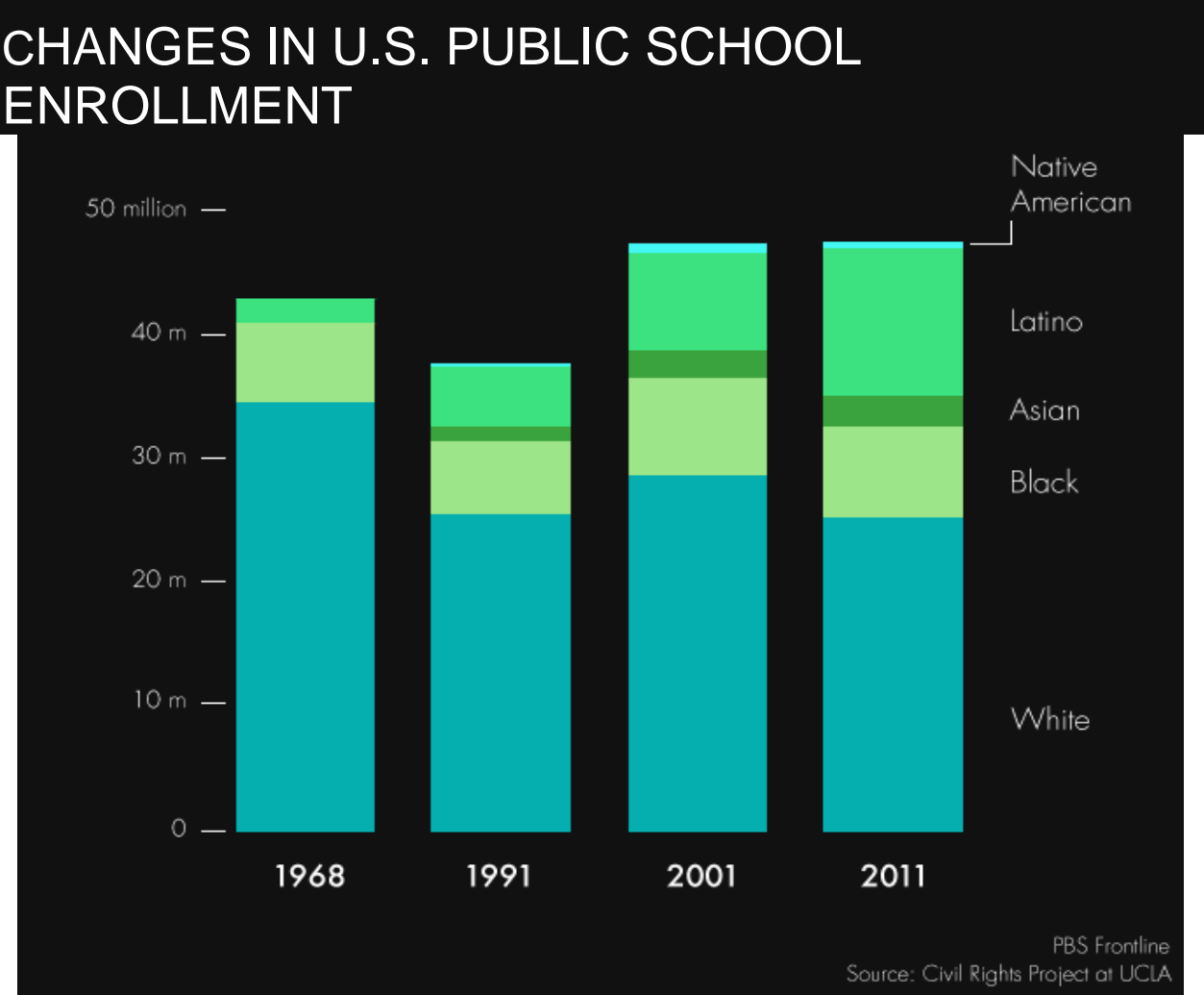
gulf between whites and blacks grow by 24 percent after 10 years as compared to schools still under court order. The split between white students and Latinos grew by 10 percent after a decade.

This is not to say that segregation reverts to where it was before *Brown v. Board of Education* — when the index was at 1 — “but segregation does increase substantially relative to levels attained under the court orders,” note the researchers.



#### 4. Integration is struggling to keep up with enrollment trends

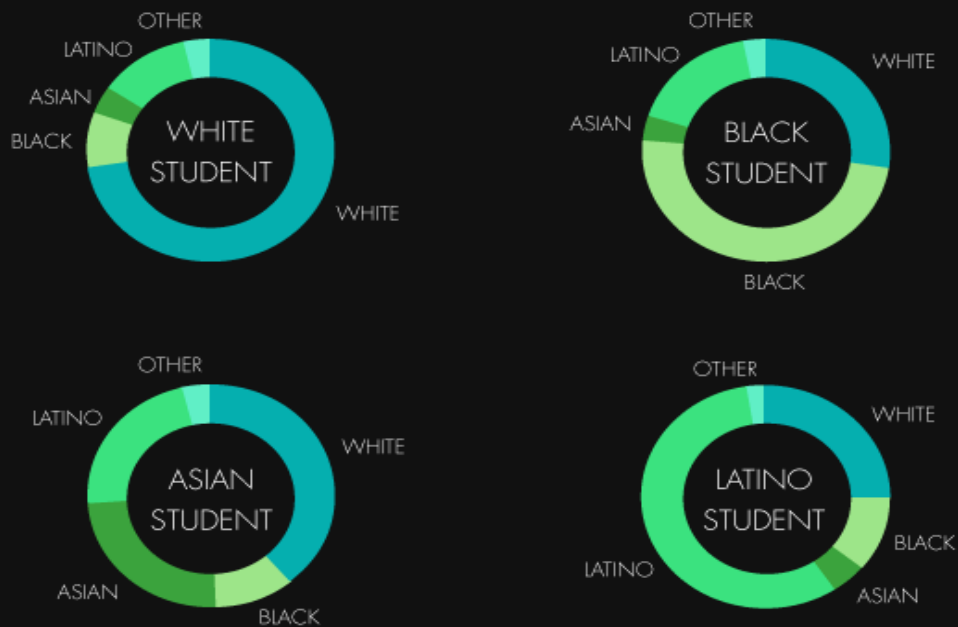
The widening divide in America’s school system has taken place despite a dramatic shift in enrollment trends. Consider that from 1968 to 2011, enrollment among white students fell 28 percent, but grew by 19 percent among black students and a whopping 495 percent among Latinos. By 2011, Latinos had become the most segregated minority group in U.S. schools, even though they accounted for roughly 25 percent of the nation’s 48.7 million public school students. The typical Latino student now attends a school that’s nearly 57 percent Latino, more segregated than blacks and Asians.



## 5. Whites have the least exposure to students of other races

While Latinos are the most segregated minority group, white children have the least exposure to students of other races, according to the UCLA researchers. Today's typical white student attends a school that is nearly 75 percent white, but only one-eighth Latino and one-twelfth black. Put another way, in a classroom of 30 students, the average white student has 21 white classmates, two black classmates, four Latinos, one Asian and one "other." Conversely, the typical black or Latino student would have eight white classmates and at least 20 minority classmates.

### EXPOSURE TO OTHER RACES AT SCHOOL, 2011-2012



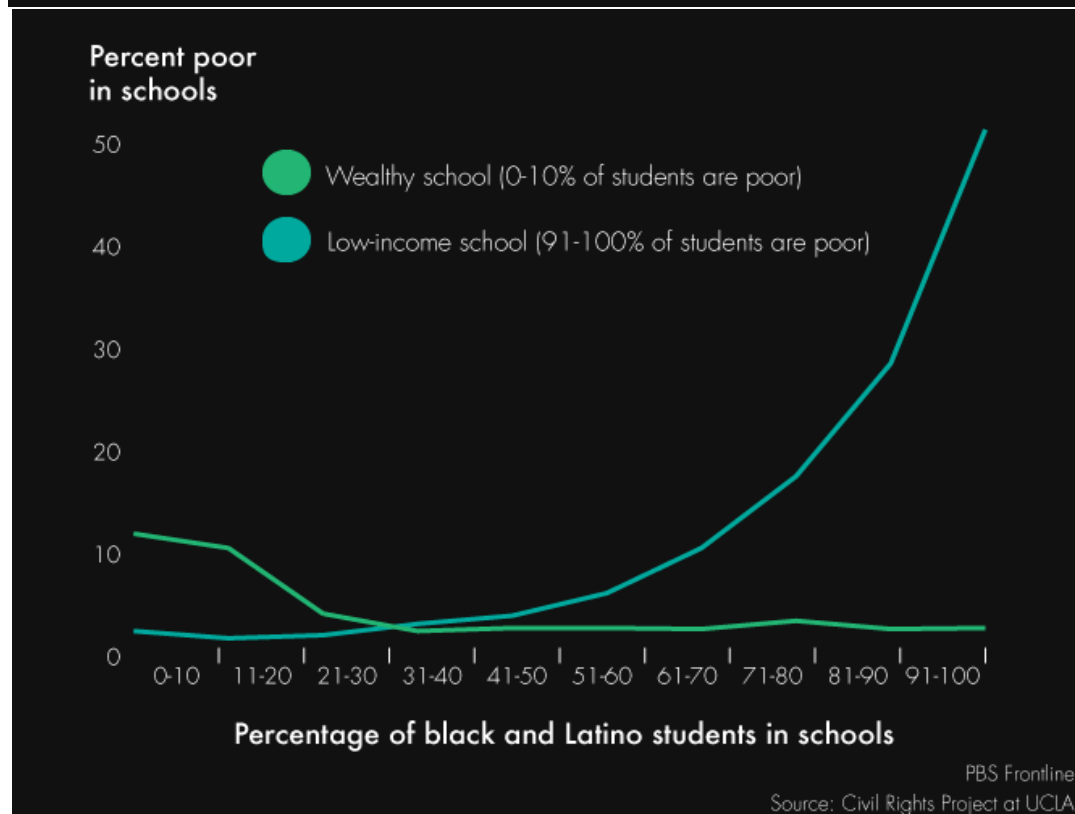
PBS Frontline  
Source: Civil Rights Project at UCLA

## 6. Segregation is as much about poverty as it is about race

The UCLA research also found strong connections between poverty and segregation, with blacks and Latinos representing more than half of children in schools with the most poverty, and just 11 percent of students in the least impoverished schools. For many black and Latino children, this can often mean less qualified teachers, as well as shoddier facilities and materials.

“In many respects, the schools serving white and Asian students and those serving black and Latino students represent two different worlds,” say the researchers.

### MINORITIES IN POOR SCHOOLS VS. WEALTHY SCHOOLS

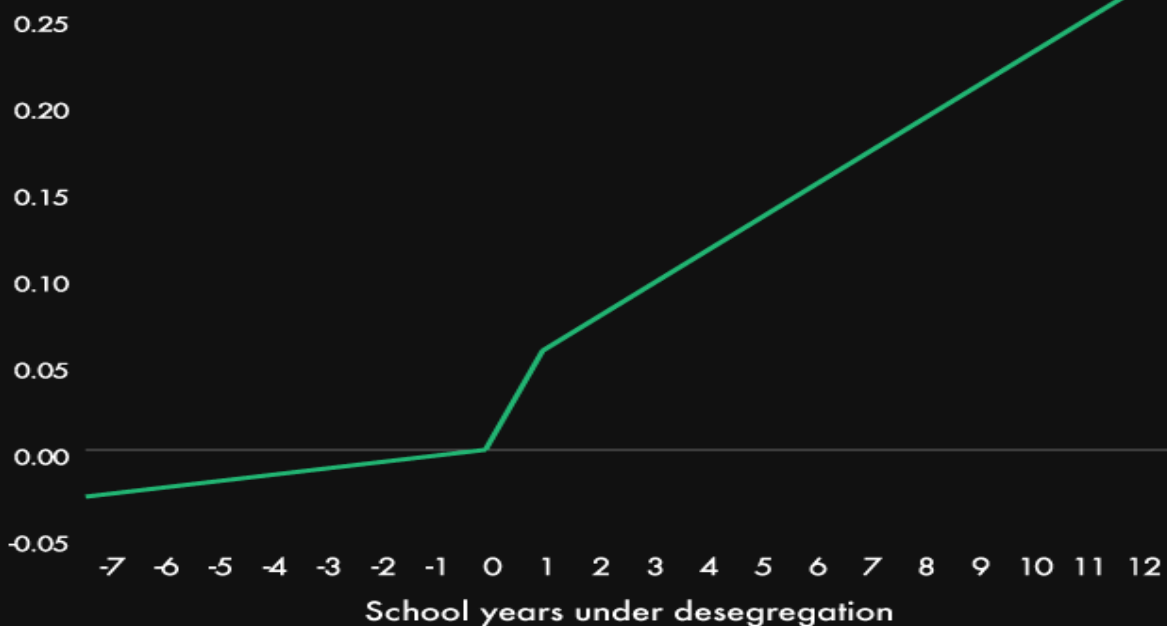




## 7. Integration boosts the odds of high school graduation

Integration doesn't just mean access to better schools, it can also mean a better chance of earning a degree. Rucker Johnson, a professor of public policy at the University of California at Berkeley, has studied the life trajectories of students born between 1945 and 1970, focusing on the effects that exposure to court-ordered desegregation had on their lives. [In one study](#), he found that for every year a black student attended an integrated school, their likelihood of graduating went up 2 percentage points. The longer that student stayed in school, the greater his odds. (In the chart below, the vertical axis represents a student's probability of graduating, based on Johnson's models). Johnson found that the difference is tied to the fact that schools under court supervision benefit from higher per-pupil spending and smaller student-teacher ratios.

### PROBABILITY OF HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION FOR BLACKS WHO ATTENDED DESEGREGATED SCHOOLS



## 8. Integrated schools can lead to a healthier financial future

Another benefit of attending a school under court oversight is higher wages later in life, and a smaller chance of experiencing poverty, according to Johnson. His research found that the average effect among blacks of a five-year exposure to court-ordered desegregation was a 15 percent increase in wages. That probability, represented below along the vertical axis, amounted to an extra \$5,900 in annual family income, and an 11-percentage point decline in yearly incidences of poverty. Johnson also found that while desegregation led to clearly positive outcomes for blacks, it caused no statistically significant harm for whites.

### WAGES FOR BLACKS FROM DESEGREGATED SCHOOLS

