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The Cost of Segregation || Part 2: Paying for Preferences



John T. Greilick / The Detroit News

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Students at Eureka Dale Elementary head for home. Taylor School Board President Daniel Martinez says the quality of education offered throughout the district is uniform, yet the 2000 MEAP scores of students at the predominantly black school were consistently below those of their counterparts at majority-white Wareing Elementary.

One District, Two Schools, Different Outcomes

Race divides 2 Taylor schools

Black, white kids in elementary schools have different success rates

By Delores Patterson and Jodi Upton / The Detroit News

TAYLOR--With 15 elementary schools and 10,700 students, the Taylor School District ranks as one of the largest in the state. It also is home to two of the most racially opposite elementary schools in any single Metro Detroit district.

Eureka Dale elementary on the city's south side has 431 students, and seven out of every 10 are black. Four miles to the north, Wareing elementary has 427 students, and nine out of every 10 are



Donna Terek / The Detroit News

Michael Pattison, 10, walks home from Wareing Elementary, where 2000-01 figures put African-American enrollment at 1.8 percent. Some Taylor residents say they'd support further integration of district schools, but others, like Michelle Simms, president

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white.

Parents like Michelle Simms, whose son attends Wareing, say it isn't a problem.

"I don't think the lack of diversity is costing my son anything," said Simms, Wareing's parents' group president.

But whatever their opinions, few in the Downriver suburb of 66,000 can deny that the schools have profoundly different racial makeups, and, by some measures, produce profoundly different results.

Social questions

Parent Rhonda Pattison said she's disappointed there are so few minorities at Wareing.

"I think it's hurting children," she said. "I have a niece and nephew who attend Eureka Dale and, if you want to know the truth, they are happier kids. They are more confident. If I were to take my kids over there to play they would probably be afraid just because they aren't around children of other races.

"I try to teach my kids that everyone is different, but I think the kids at Eureka Dale are lucky," she said. "They are more well-rounded and I can see it in my niece and nephew."

Beverly Boike, who had three children attend Eureka Dale, said all have benefited as white children attending a predominantly black school.

"It has helped them become more accepting, rather than going to an all-white school and being very limited in their outlook on life," she said.

Maralena Howard, a grandmother of Eureka Dale students, agrees only to a point.

"I think (it) hurts children when they are the only person of their race in a classroom," she said. "My granddaughter was the only white child in her class last year. While she got along with everyone, some kids might be intimidated by that fact, which could distract them from learning."

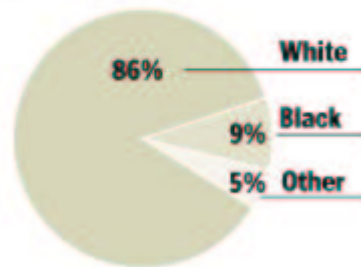
Regardless of the skin tones represented in the Wareing class of Marie Harrington's fifth-grader, she believes everyone is receiving the same education.

"And that's all that really matters," she said.

of a parents group at Wareing, say the lack of diversity isn't hurting students.

Taylor at a glance

Although the school district has one largely African-American school, Taylor — population 65,868 — remains a mostly white community.



Sources: Southeast Michigan Council of Governments and 2000 census data

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Equal resources?

The racial poles represented by Eureka Dale and Wareing are sensitive topics in the Taylor School District.

District officials would not discuss the similarities or differences in the two schools, nor would they allow access to the schools or interviews with teachers or administrators.

School Board President Daniel Martinez argues there is no difference in the quality of teaching, attention or education children receive in the district.

"If you put a motivated teacher in the classroom, the knowledge obtained from books, the blackboard and hands-on assignments is equal because it all comes down to teaching," he said. "If a teacher is teaching and there is parental involvement, kids are going to learn. It has nothing to do with race. Education has nothing to do with race."

Besides, Martinez pointed out, while the students might see largely homogenous peer groups in elementary school, those populations mix increasingly as students advance through middle school and attend one of the district's two high schools.

At 86 percent white, 9 percent black and 5 percent other races, the city of Taylor is more diverse than many of Metro Detroit's suburbs.

But Taylor isn't the only district to struggle with racially imbalanced schools. In Clinton Township, for example, McGlennen Elementary is only 9 percent black; a few miles away in the same district, Parker Elementary is 66 percent black.

In Birmingham, Greenfield Elementary is 41 percent black, while Pierce Elementary is less than one percent black.

Because students are assigned to neighborhood schools, enrollments reflect segregated housing patterns. Fixing the problem would require costly and extensive busing, which many parents oppose, administrators say.

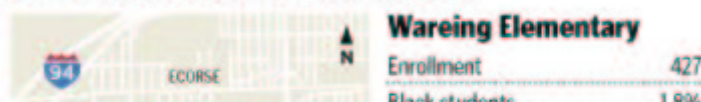
In Taylor, the black population nearly doubled during the 1990s.

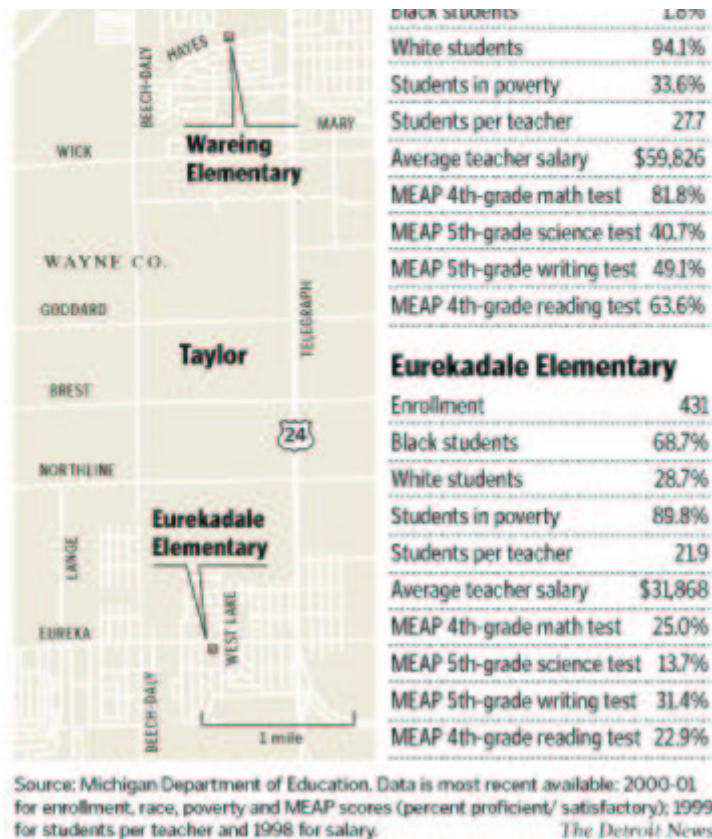
"We can't pick where people live. We take the kids that are given to us. That's the bottom line," he added. "There are so many things that challenge a school district. No one sits down and says we want certain people over here and others over there. Education is at the heart of what we're doing. That's all."

Some, like Mike Brown, don't see those living patterns changing. A parent of a Wareing student, Brown also does not think busing students would be beneficial. The possibility of long bus rides and children arriving to school restless are not chances he wants to take with his child's education, he said.

Different schools, different worlds

Two Taylor elementary schools less than four miles apart have vastly different populations — and different resources and success rates on state-administered tests.





Testing differences

While many parents say academic learning isn't contingent on class demographics, some believe teachers should reflect the varied backgrounds of the students.

"I really don't understand why there are no black teachers here when the school has mostly black students," said Eureka parent Jeanni Johnson, who thinks positive role models would help her child's education. "Children need teachers they can relate to. Some children are just more comfortable with their own people."

Calls to the Taylor Federation of Teachers Local 1085 to get a racial breakdown of teachers in the district were not returned.

The average teacher's salary at Eureka was \$31,868 during the 1997-98 school year while it was \$59,826 at Wareing, indicating more experienced teachers at Wareing, according to the most recent state figures.

Whether or not the color of teachers affects learning, some say the quality of instruction is reflected in students' grades on state standardized tests.

While almost 82 percent of Wareing students passed the 2000 Michigan Educational Assessment Program, or MEAP, test in math, only 25 percent passed at Eureka.

Similar disparities followed in the most recent scores in reading, science, and writing, with Wareing students faring better in each test. Eureka students came closest in writing, where 31.4 percent of students passed, compared to 49.1 percent at Wareing.

Martinez said the lower scores at Eureka Dale might have been a reflection of the school's first-year principal.

"Although she's very qualified, it takes awhile for an administrator to be in that position and work with staff in order to develop a plan that will get scores up to par. That's normal in any school district," Martinez said. "I don't think MEAP is the be-all and end-all of what a school district is doing."

Unresolved questions

If Taylor makes an effort to integrate its elementary schools, some parents say they would support the initiative.

Eureka Dale parent Deirdre Lyons said she would rather children get to know about each other's backgrounds now rather than later.

"When I got to high school I saw different races for what seemed like the first time and it was a shock culturally. That's how fights and stuff break out because kids don't know how to relate to each other and accept ...differences," Lyons said.

For Simms, president of Wareing's parent group, there are other priorities.

"I believe children need to be around children regardless of their age, race, sex, height, whatever," she said. "What is important is that they have good role models for teachers and principals."

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