

# Measuring Segregation

## The Evolution of Segregation and Education

**Due Date: Tuesday, February 6 at 6pm**

5% of final grade

EC 970: Sophomore Tutorial  
Harvard University Department of  
Economics

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What does it mean for a school district to be segregated? This assignment familiarize you with how segregation is measured in the academic literature.

This should be 4-6 pages in length (double-spaced, Times New Roman 12 pt font, 1-inch margins).

**Please submit your papers** to canvas as a word or PDF document by **5pm on Thursday, February 1**. Please name your file lastname\_a1.

Your assignment should include citations. For guidance on how to incorporate citations, see [Writing Economics](#), pgs. 14-19.

### Assignment structure

[Massey and Denton \(1988\)](#) reviews the measures of segregation developed by sociologists through the late 1980s. In 2020, the Urban Institute introduced a new measure of segregation: [the Segregation Contribution Index](#). In this assignment, you will review both sources, then write a 4-6 page paper on the advantages and disadvantages of different measures of segregation.

To prepare to write this, please read:

- The entirety of [“How Much Does Your School Contribute to Segregation”](#)
- The following sections of [Massey and Denton \(1988\)](#):
  - Pgs. 281-289
  - The first paragraph of 3. CONCENTRATION
  - The first paragraph of 4. CENTRALIZATION
  - The first paragraph of 5. CLUSTERING
  - Table 1. “The Dimensions of Residential Segregation and Their Measures”
  - Pgs. 301-303
  - Pgs. 309-312 “Summary”

Your paper should have the following structure:

1. 3-4 paragraphs summarizing the 5 types of measures described by Massey and Denton (1988) and the advantages and disadvantages of each.
2. 3-5 paragraphs describing the relationship between school segregation and residential segregation.
  - This is not covered directly by Massey and Denton (1988) and will require some outside research. Make sure to cite your sources!
  - The measures covered in Massey and Denton (1988) pertain to residential segregation, but school segregation is mentioned throughout. How should we translate each of these dimensions of segregation to the context of school segregation?
3. 3-4 paragraphs discussing the segregation contribution index. How do these compare to the measures Massey and Denton discuss? Which of the five dimensions do you think it measures?
4. 3-4 paragraphs concluding by discussing your preferred method(s) of measuring segregation.
  - The dissimilarity index, the isolation index, and the interaction index (commonly referred to as “the exposure index”) are all popular choices for measuring segregation in

the economics literature. Why do you think that is?

- Do you agree with this choice? Do you have a different preferred method? Why?
- Does your choice vary with what you are trying to communicate to your reader?

## Rubric.....

You will be graded on the thoroughness of your response and the organization of your paper.

- Demonstrates understanding of concepts in readings .....50%
- Thoughtful discussion of relationship between residential segregation and school segregation with citations .....25%
- Demonstrates understanding of strengths and weaknesses and applicability to different scenarios .....20%
- Organization .....5%

## References

Massey, Douglas S. and Nancy A Denton. 1988. "The Dimensions of Residential Segregation." *Social Forces* 67(2): 281-315

Neugeboren, Robert. "Writing Economics: A Guide for Harvard Economics Concentrators." Mimeo, Harvard University, 2014.

Urban Institute. "How Much Does Your School Contribute to Segregation?" Accessed 15 January 2024. <https://apps.urban.org/features/school-segregation-index/>