

Unpaid Lunch Debt in Durham, NC

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Introduction

When families can't afford to pay for student lunches, school districts foot the bill. But with major cuts to educational funding in North Carolina—where some schools don't even have enough funds to pay for students' textbooks—this means school districts can wrack up tens of thousands of dollars in debt. In Durham, students with five or more unpaid lunches only receive a juice and a sandwich instead of a hot lunch. This lends its way to “lunch shaming”, where students who can't afford pay skip the meal altogether to avoid the embarrassment of eating a cold lunch. This is a major issue, since student performance in school is directly tied to access to quality food.

Data Sources

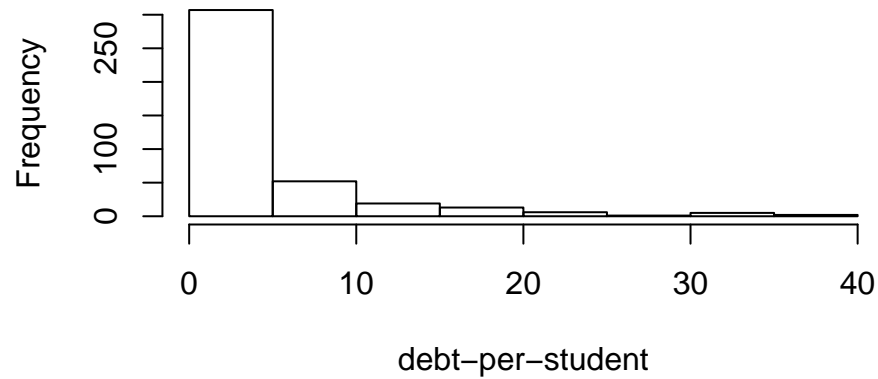
- End-of-Year unpaid meal data from James Keaten, director of child nutrition services at DPS.
- All free/reduced price lunch data was obtained from ncpublicschools.org
- 2010-11 through 2015-16 demographic data was obtained from the [NCES ELSI table generator](#), code 91803
- 2017-18 ADM data from ncpublicschools.org's [Average Daily Membership and Membership Last Day by School](#)
- 2016-17, 2017-18 demographic data from [Durham Public Schools](#) *Oct. 2018 CEP eligibility data from <https://childnutrition.ncpublicschools.gov/information-resources/eligibility/community-eligibility-provision-cep/community-eligibility-provision?searchterm=CEP>

Exploratory Data Analysis

```
## # A tibble: 8 x 4
##   year      total_debt mean_debt_per_student fullprice_lunches
##   <chr>      <dbl>          <dbl>          <dbl>
## 1 2010-11    204692.           7.34          70584.
## 2 2011-12    111567.           4.53          38472.
## 3 2012-13    117526.           4.54          40526.
## 4 2013-14    108231.           3.76          37321.
## 5 2014-15     85093.           2.51          29342.
## 6 2015-16     78428.           2.25          27044.
## 7 2016-17    127940.           3.38          44117.
## 8 2017-18    209022.           5.10          72076.

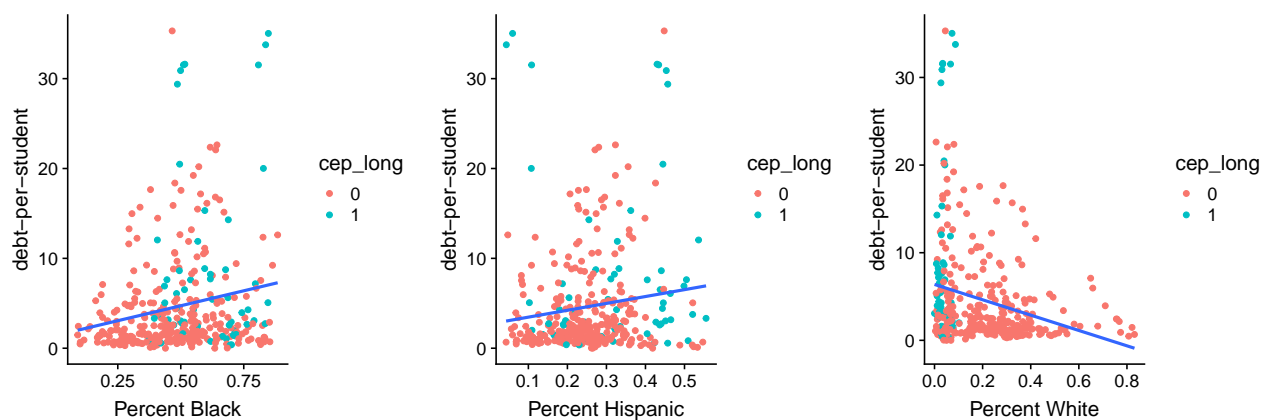
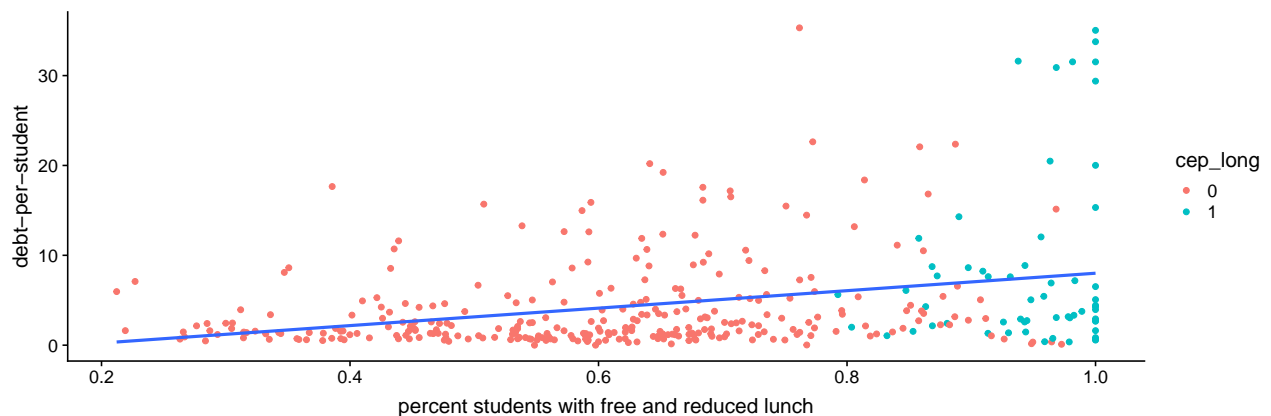
## [1] 2.036936
```

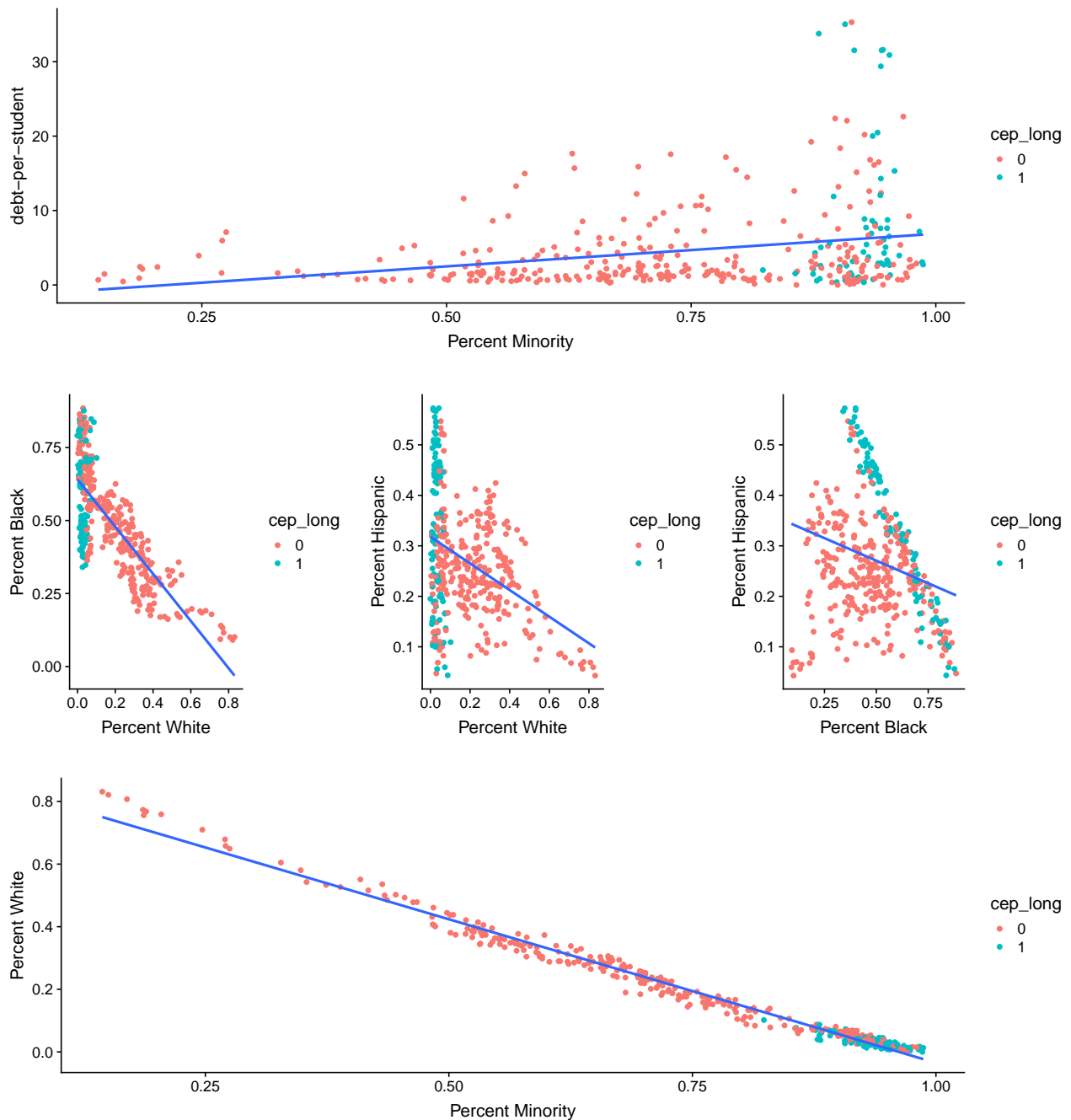
At the end of the 2017-18 academic year, DPS had over \$211,000 in school lunch debt. That's over 72,000 unpaid lunches, with an average of \$5.10 of debt per student. It's also the most debt the school district has seen in the past eight years.



Most schools have less than \$5 of lunch debt per student. In Durham, a full-priced lunch costs \$2.90, and a reduced-price lunch cost \$0.40, according to the Durham Public Schools [website](#). That's about two unpaid full-priced lunches per student, or just over 12 unpaid reduced-price lunches per student. For the rest of my EDA, I'll delve into which schools have more debt and whether we can find systematic issues. I'll also be looking at schools that are part of the Community Eligibility Provision, which means all students receive free lunch.

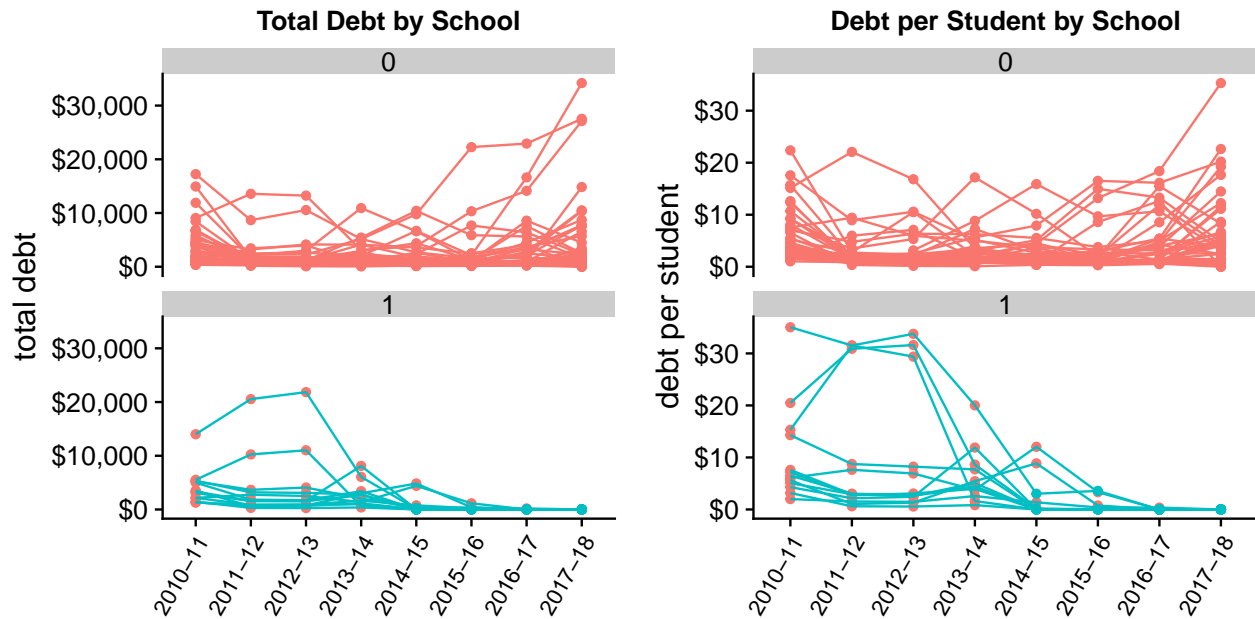
Debt and Demographics





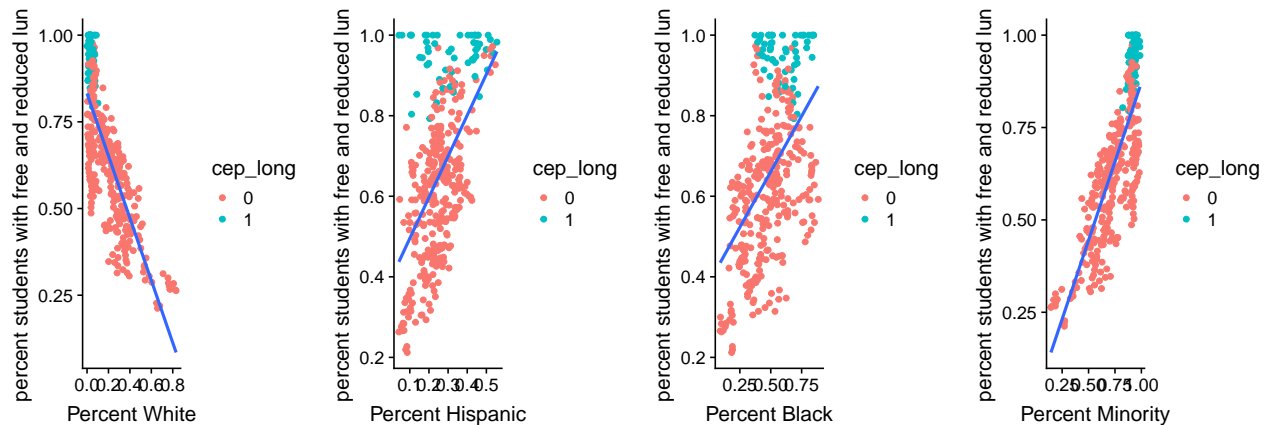
There is a weak positive correlation between the percentage of students who have free and reduced price lunch and the debt-per-student at each school. It looks like schools with CEP status generally have a higher percentage of students on free/reduced lunch. As for demographics, there is also a weak positive correlation between the percentage of black students and debt-per-student. Conversely, there is a weak negative correlation between the percent of white students and debt-per-student. There doesn't appear to be a much of a relationship between the percentage of hispanic students and debt-per-student. That being said, if we look at the total percentage of minority students — the percentage of black *and* hispanic students — there is a positive correlation with debt-per-student. Schools that CEP status are also starkly segregated, with very few white students and primarily black and hispanic students.

Debt over time



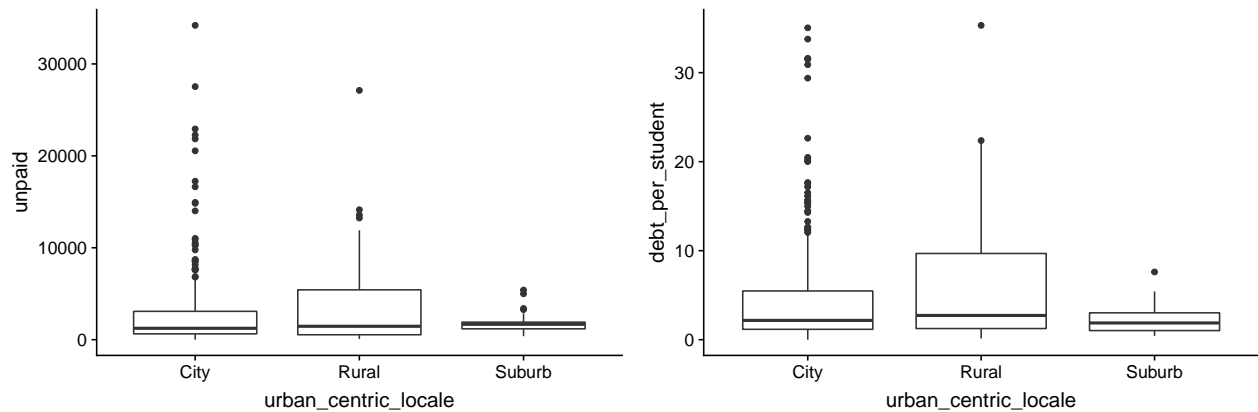
Schools with CEP status generally had a large amount of debt until the 2014-15 school year, when they gained CEP status. That being said, other schools with similar amounts of debt did not gain CEP status.

Demographics and need

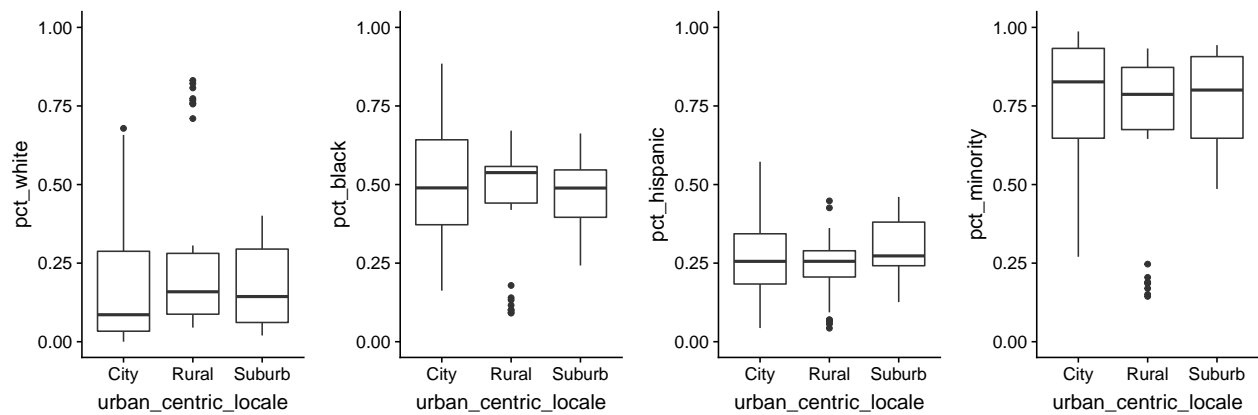


We can also see that race is a proxy for need. The percentage of black and hispanic schools have a strong, positive correlation with the percentage of students on free and reduced price lunch. For white students, this relationship is strong and negative.

Locale and debt, race



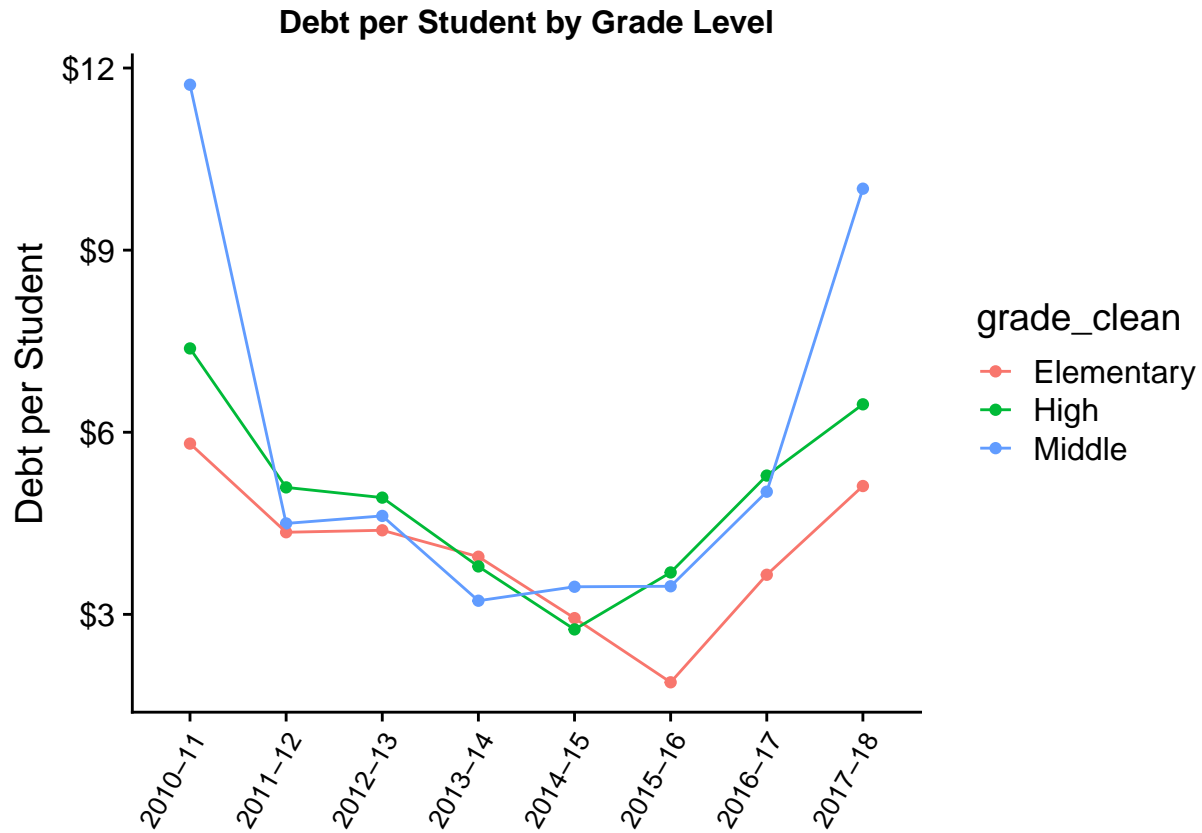
There don't seem to be major differences in debt by location.



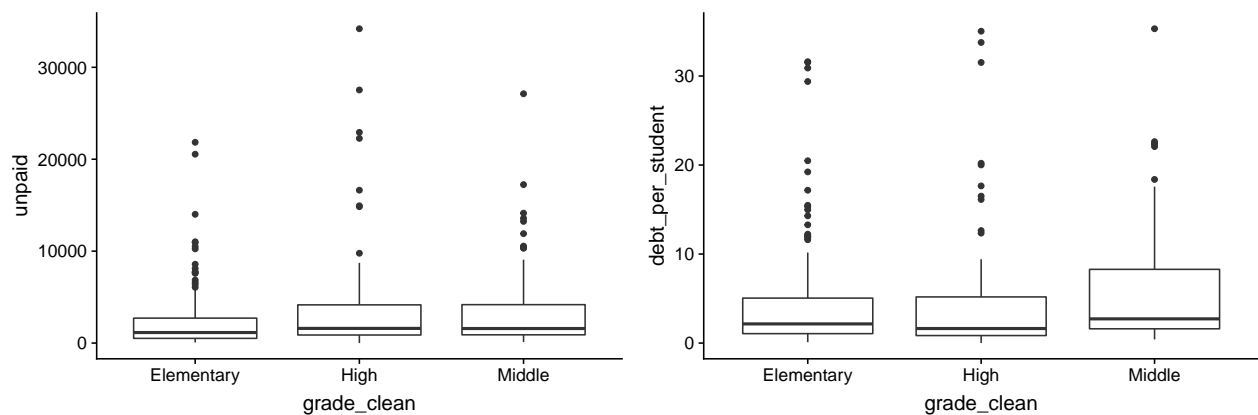
On average, we also don't see any major differences in race by locale. However, there is a subset of rural schools that seem to primarily be white.

Debt and grade

```
## # A tibble: 3 x 3
##   grade_clean mean_debt mean_dps
##   <chr>         <dbl>     <dbl>
## 1 Elementary    2181.      4.10
## 2 High          4016.      4.94
## 3 Middle        3541.      5.70
```



On average, high schools have the most total debt. However, middle schools, on average, have the most debt per student.



CEP Schools

In this section, I explore the differences between schools that gained CEP status and schools that did not.

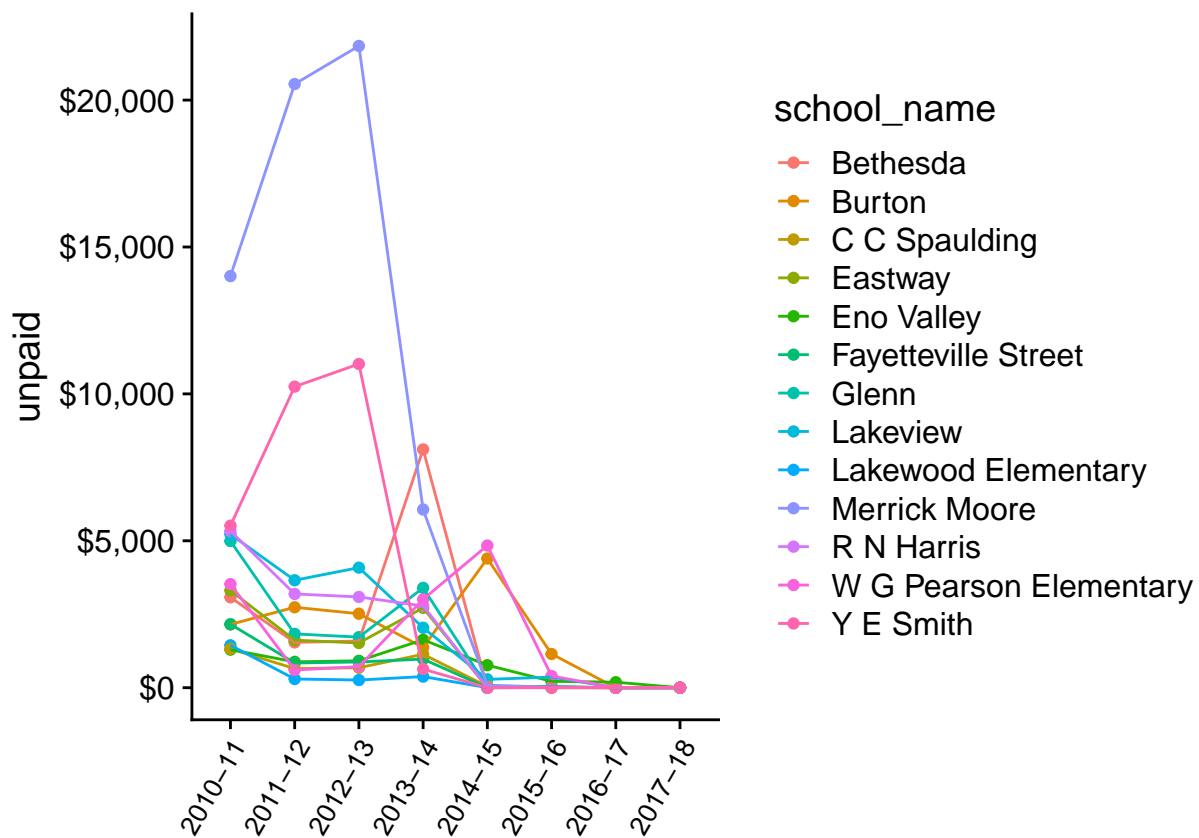
Eligibility

```
##   elig part near
## 1    25    13   11
```

Eligible but non-participating CEP schools

```
## # A tibble: 3 x 6
## # Groups:   eligible_to_participate [?]
##   eligible_to_par~ currently_parti~ unpaid mean_dps avg_free_reduced
##         <dbl>         <dbl>    <dbl>    <dbl>         <dbl>
## 1           0           0 1.29e+5  5.28e+0         0.506
## 2           1           0 7.97e+4  1.03e+1         0.752
## 3           1           1 8.00e-1  9.96e-5         1
## # ... with 1 more variable: avg_pct_minority <dbl>
## [1] 0.3811623
```

CEP Status and Grade Level



Most CEP schools are elementary schools. However, we're also seeing that the schools with the most debt are, on average, middle and high schools.

Percent Minority

```
## # A tibble: 2 x 2
##   cep_long mean_minority
##   <fct>         <dbl>
## 1 0           0.712
## 2 1           0.931
```

CEP schools also have a higher concentration of minority students, on average.

Debt before CEP status

```
## # A tibble: 2 x 3
##   cep_long mean_dps mean_debt
##   <fct>      <dbl>      <dbl>
## 1 0          3.45      2297.
## 2 1          7.58      3039.
```

CEP schools also had, on average, higher debt and more debt per student than non-CEP schools prior to CEP assignments.

NOTES:

- CEP provisions began in 2014-15 in NC
- data collected at different times so numbers won't match perfectly
- 353 is housed in Durham Tech, which complicates some of the data
- For the most part, aside from missing data, it seems like schools with no debt are CEP schools. We can't get CEP status starting in 2010-11, since those were pilot years.
- CEP schools for 2017-18 all have > 90% free/reduced, setting to 100% (doesn't affect analysis since excluded from regression)

REPORTING QUESTIONS: - how do students get assigned to schools? any diversity initiatives? - does the district track when debt is payed off? - can a student graduate with debt? are they barred from anything? what are consequences besides food?