



# Metropolitan Policy Program

at BROOKINGS

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## **ZONING CHILDREN OUT OF GOOD SCHOOLS AND OPPORTUNITY**

*New Brookings report shows housing and zoning policies segregate low-income students, creating education gaps that undermine economic futures, especially for blacks and Hispanics*

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Municipal zoning laws that restrict affordable housing are creating economic segregation that prevents millions of American children from getting the quality education they need.

That's the conclusion of a new report from the Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program, "Housing Costs, Zoning, and Access to High-Scoring Schools."

The report analyzes national and metropolitan data on public school populations and state standardized test scores in 2010 and 2011 for more than 84,000 American schools and finds gaps in housing costs and school performance that could undermine future economic opportunity for millions of low-income children. Across the country, metropolitan areas with restrictive zoning are preventing those children from attending quality schools. That, says the report's author, creates a pattern that is difficult to escape.

"Land use policy is education policy," said author Jonathan Rothwell, a senior research analyst and associate fellow at the Program, "and we have found that land use decisions are creating large gaps in educational opportunity. People don't usually think of local zoning laws in this way, but they have a tremendous effect on what kind of education children receive, which ultimately affects their economic futures and those of their communities.

"A good education is essential to a child's economic future, and where you can afford to live has a lot to do with whether your child gets that education," Rothwell said. "In most metro areas, the only way to attend high-scoring schools is to live in an expensive neighborhood. This makes it very difficult for children born at the bottom to rise to the top."

Among the key findings of the report:

- **Students from middle and high-income families attend better-performing schools than low-income students**—Nationally, the average low-income student attends a school that scores at the 42<sup>nd</sup> percentile on state exams. The average middle/high-income student attends a school that scores at the 61<sup>st</sup> percentile on state exams. This *school test-score gap* is even wider between black/Latino students and white students. There is increasingly strong evidence that low-income students benefit from attending higher-scoring schools.
- **Northeastern metro areas with relatively high levels of economic segregation exhibit the highest school test-score gaps between low-income and other students**—Controlling for metro factors such as size, income inequality, and racial/ethnic diversity associated with school test-score gaps, southern metro areas such as Washington and Raleigh, and western metros like Portland and Seattle, stand out for having smaller-than-expected test-score gaps between schools attended by low-income and middle/high-income students.
- **Across the 100 largest metropolitan areas, housing near high-performing schools is much more expensive**—Housing costs an average of 2.4 times as much, or nearly \$11,000 more per year, near a high-scoring public school than near a low-scoring public school. This *housing cost gap* reflects that home values are \$205,000 higher on average in the neighborhoods of high-scoring versus low-scoring schools.
- **The less restrictive the zoning, the smaller the gaps**—Large metro areas with the least restrictive zoning have housing cost gaps that are 63 percent lower than metro areas with the most exclusionary zoning. Eliminating exclusionary zoning in a metro area would reduce its housing cost gap and lower its school test-score gap by 4 to 7 percent, a significant difference.

The new report includes individual profiles of the 100 largest metropolitan areas and an interactive tool that shows trends and compares various factors, including housing cost gaps, school rankings, test score gaps, and income inequality.

The report concludes that, as the country searches for solutions to the growing gap between rich and poor and the economy increasingly relies on formal education, public policies should address housing market regulations that create obstacles to lower-income children attending high-scoring public schools. By doing this, we can help promote individual social mobility and broader economic security.

**The Metropolitan Policy Program at Brookings**—Created in 1996, the Metropolitan Policy Program (MPP) provides decision-makers with cutting-edge research and policy ideas for improving the health and prosperity of metropolitan areas including their component cities, suburbs, and rural areas. To learn more visit: [www.brookings.edu/metro](http://www.brookings.edu/metro). For more on the State and Metropolitan Innovation series, please visit: <http://www.brookings.edu/projects/state-metro-innovation.aspx>. Follow us on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/BrookingsMetro](http://www.twitter.com/BrookingsMetro)

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