

Housing Costs, Zoning and Access to High-Scoring Schools

Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV metro area

Why school access matters

This report finds that anti-density zoning laws – local regulations that discourage inexpensive housing – lead to inflated housing costs near high-scoring schools, relative to housing costs near low-scoring schools. This housing costs gap drives economic segregation across schools and a higher test score gap between the schools attended by low-income and middle/high income students. Research shows that low-income students are more likely to succeed in higher-scoring schools, so reducing the financial and regulatory barriers to residential and school integration should be a priority.

Washington's school access rankings

ZONING RESTRICTIONS

46 out of 100

The metro area has the 46th most restrictive zoning, based on the prevalence of land-use law firms in the state. Restrictive zoning discourages inexpensive housing, driving economic segregation.

ECONOMIC SEGREGATION

50 out of 100

39% of low-income students would have to change ZIP codes to achieve an equal distribution across schools, ranking the metro area the 50th most economically segregated.

HOUSING COST GAP

80 out of 100

Housing costs near high-scoring elementary schools are 1.8 times higher than housing costs near low-scoring schools, ranking the metro area the 80th highest on this measure.

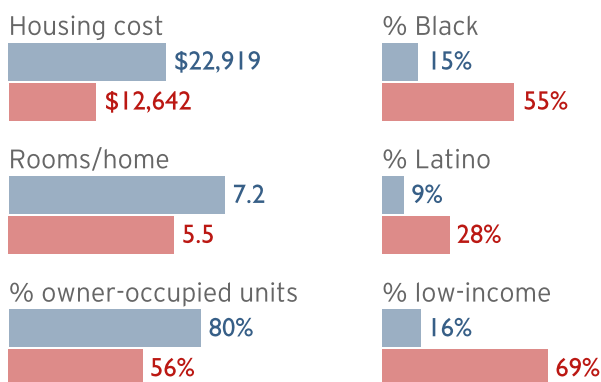
TEST SCORE GAP

68 out of 100

The average middle/high-income student attends a school that ranks 19 percentage points higher on state exams than the school an average low-income student attends, ranking the metro area the 68th highest on this measure.

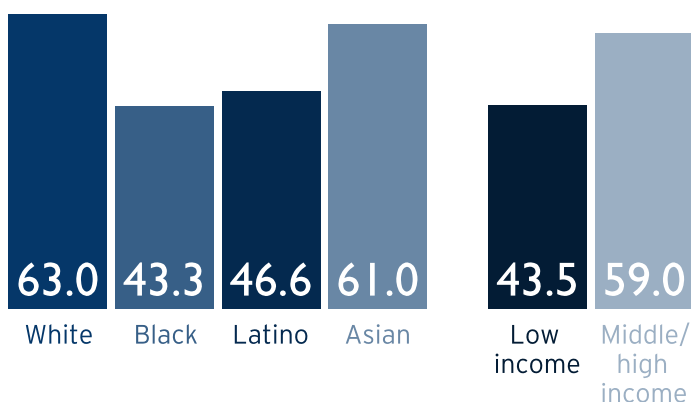
Washington school comparisons

These charts compare the average top quintile school (blue) and the average bottom-quintile school (red) in Washington across six categories. Quintiles are based on scores of standardized tests taken between 2010 and 2011.



Washington test scores by group

School percentile rankings in Washington for the average student, broken down by race and income. School test scores are adjusted by state average and ranked nationally.



Data notes

Notes: Housing data for schools are based on Census data from hypothetical attendance zones near schools. Housing costs are based on a weighted average of rental and ownership costs.

Source: From Brookings publication, "Housing Costs, Zoning, and Access to High-Scoring Schools." Data are derived from Brookings analysis of data from GreatSchools, the National Center for Education Statistics, various state education agencies, the 2005-2009 American Community Survey, and lawyers.com. See report for details.