THE IMPACT OF SCHOOL DESEGREGATION PLAN FEATURES ON WHITE REJECTION[1]

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INTRODUCTION

The present study examines selected factors associated with the withdrawal of whites from desegregated public schools to segregated private schools. The analysis is based upon a sample survey of parents of elementary and secondary school children in seven desegregated school districts in Florida, conducted in the winter and spring of 1973. Several official school district sources were consulted to identify white rejecters--parents with a child attending public school in a district in 1971-72, but enrolled in a local private school in 1972-73. A total of 1,386 white rejecters were interviewed. For comparison purposes, interviews were obtained from a sample of 2,112 white compliers--parents with a child attending public school in the same district in both 1971-72 and 1972-73. The data have been weighted to reflect the estimated "true" ratio of compliers to rejecters within the districts.[2]

Several factors have been associated with rejection of desegregation.[3] Each of the factors was an element in the implementation of desegregation in the seven school districts under examination. The independent variables and their operationalizations are as follows:

1. Busing to achieve racial balance.
   a) No Bus - Bus: children were not bused in 1971-72, but were scheduled to be bused in 1972-73.
   b) No Bus - No Bus: children were not bused in either 1971-72 or 1972-73.
2. School reassignment to achieve racial balance.
   a) Transferred: children were assigned to different schools between 1971-72 and 1972-73.
   b) Not transferred: children remained in the same school between 1971-72 and 1972-73.
3. Percent black enrollment.
   a) Black ratio increased: the proportion of black students in assigned public schools increased between 1971-72 and 1972-73.
   b) Black ratio not increased: the proportion of black students in assigned public schools stayed the same or decreased between years.
4. Distance from school.
   a) Distance increased: the mileage from home to school increased between 1971-72 and 1972-73.
   b) Distance not increased: the mileage from home to school remained the same or decreased between years.

The racial balances in public schools attended by respondents' children in 1971-72 were taken from official school records. Racial balance data for the 1972-73 school year and information on transfers were recorded for the public schools to which rejecters' children were assigned, and for the public schools attended by compliers' children. Information on the busing and distance variables was obtained from the survey instrument. The contribution of each of these factors to rejection is examined through the use of conditional probabilities.

FINDINGS

If each of the factors contributes to white withdrawal, we would expect the probability of rejection to increase with the onset of busing, school transfer, black ratio increase and distance increase. As Table 1 shows, each of these factors appears to be significantly related to rejection. The probability of rejection is greater under the presence of these conditions, and lower under their absence.

TABLE 1

CONDITIONAL PROBABILITY OF REJECTION UNDER EACH CONDITION

Condition	Probability	z†
Busing:		
No Bus - Bus	.053	8.674*
No Bus - No Bus	.029	
Reassignment:		
Transferred	.047	9.840*
Not transferred	.023	
Percent black enrollment:		
Black ratio increased	.038	6.780*
Black ratio not increased:	.022	
Distance from school:		
Distance increased	.043	5.783*
Distance not increased	.028	

†Standard normal deviate[4]

*Significant at $\alpha = .01$

These four factors, however, are confounded by intercorrelation. For example, children who are transferred may, simultaneously, experience the onset of busing to a school a greater distance from home. Table 2(a) indicates that for those parents whose children are transferred to different schools, neither busing nor increased distances, alone, influence the decision to reject. Parents whose children were bused were no more likely to reject than those whose children were not bused. Similarly, parents whose children traveled increased distances to school were no more likely to reject than those whose children did not.

TABLE 2

PROBABILITY OF REJECTION UNDER THE CONDITIONS OF TRANSFER, BUSING AND DISTANCE INCREASE

a)

Condition	Probability	z
Transferred:		
Bused	.044	.652n.s.
Not - bused	.040	
Transferred:		
Distance increased	.042	1.697n.s.
Distance not increased	.064	

b)

Condition	Probability	z
Transferred:		
Bused and distance increased	.042	.196n.s.
Not - bused and distance not increased	.043	

n.s.: not significant at $\alpha = .05$

Perhaps the onset of busing and increased distances, conjointly, influence rejection decisions for the transfer group. If this is the case, those who experience busing and increased distances should be more likely to reject than those who experience neither. As Table 2 (b) shows, this is not the case. Among those transferred, parents whose children experienced both conditions were no more likely to reject than parents whose children experienced neither condition. Thus, we may conclude that the reassignment variable, and not the busing and distance variables, appears to be the main determinant of rejection.

Whether or not students are transferred, they may experience an increase in the black ratio in their assigned schools. When white students are reassigned to achieve racial balances, the transfers are often from predominantly white schools to schools that were predominantly black, particularly at the outset of desegregation. Students not reassigned may experience an increase in the black ratio as a result of black students from other neighborhoods being transferred into their schools to replace white students reassigned elsewhere. Table 3(a) shows that an increase in the black ratio contributes to rejection irrespective of reassignment. For both the transferred and not transferred groups, the probability of rejection increases with an increase in the black ratio. Does this mean that black ratio increase and not school transfer is the determining factor in rejection? Table 3(b) shows that when the reassignment variable is controlled by the black ratio variable, the effect of being transferred is not entirely eliminated. Reassignment to a different school remains related to rejection when the black ratio is increased, but not when the black ratio remains the same or decreases. For those who experienced an increase in black ratio, parents whose children are transferred are more likely to reject than parents whose children are not. Thus, there is a tendency for rejection to increase when the black ratio increases, particularly when this condition is combined with reassignment to a different school.

TABLE 3

PROBABILITY OF REJECTION UNDER THE CONDITIONS OF TRANSFER AND BLACK RATIO INCREASE

a)

Condition	Probability	z
Transferred:		
Black ratio increased	.049	5.951*
Black ratio not increased	.021	
Not transferred:		
Black ratio increased	.026	2.362**
Black ratio not increased	.020	

TABLE 3 (continued)

b)

Condition	Probability	z
Black ratio increased:		
Transferred	.049	6.735*
Not transferred	.026	
Black ratio not increased:		
Transferred	.021	.309n.s.
Not transferred	.020	

**Significant at $\alpha = .05$

Let us now reexamine the busing variable to determine its potential effect on rejection in combination with the school reassignment and black ratio variables. We observed above that for the transferred group the onset of busing did not contribute to rejection. Is this the case even in conjunction with an increase in the black ratio? Table 4(a) shows that irrespective of busing, parents of transferred children who experience an increase in the black ratio are more likely to reject than those who do not. Among the former, Table 4(b) further indicates that those who are bused are no more likely to reject than those who are not bused. Thus, the onset of busing appears to make no appreciable contribution to rejection.

TABLE 4

PROBABILITY OF REJECTION UNDER THE CONDITIONS OF TRANSFER, BUSING AND BLACK RATIO INCREASE

a)

Condition	Probability	z
Transferred and bused:		
Black ratio increased	.050	4.269*
Black ratio not increased	.021	
Transferred and not bused:		
Black ratio increased	.043	3.187*
Black ratio not increased	.021	

TABLE 4 (continued)

b)

Condition	Probability	z
Transferred and black ratio increased:		
Bused	.050	.996 n.s.
Not - bused	.043	
Transferred and black ratio not increased:		
Bused	.021	0.0 n.s.
Not - bused	.021	

DISCUSSION

This paper has examined the effects of four desegregation plan features on the decision of parents to withdraw their children from desegregated schools. Examined bivariately, each of the four factors appeared to be related to rejection. Under more detailed controls, however, the effects of busing and distance from school were washed out. The factor most consistently associated with rejection was black ratio increase. Thus, it would appear that some measure of white withdrawal will take place whenever desegregation is implemented, since by definition desegregation means increasing the proportion of blacks attending schools with whites.

Beyond this, however, our findings suggest that busing can be employed by school decision makers to achieve satisfactory racial balances without fear of incurring additional rejection.

The tendency for rejection to increase with black ratio increases held independent of whether school reassignment occurred. However, the probability of rejection under the condition of increase in the black ratio was greater when transfer took place than when it did not. When the condition of black ratio increase was not present, parents of transferred children were no more likely to reject than parents of children who were not transferred. This suggests that school reassignment can be employed as a useful desegregation plan feature, provided that transfers do not take place simultaneously with increases in the black ratio. Of course, this would not be possible in the initial year of desegregation. It would be possible thereafter, but only if black ratios in all of a district's schools were approximately the same. Thus, a policy of equalizing racial balances throughout a school district receives empirical support from our study.

FOOTNOTES

[1]The research reported herein was conducted under a grant from the National Science Foundation, Division of Social Systems and Human Resources, GI-34955. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and should not be construed as representing the opinions or policy of any agency of the United States Government.

[2]The sample weights are based on the ratio of new rejecters to compliers for 1973-74 among the original group of compliers, all of whom were screened in January, 1974, to determine their most recent compliance/rejection status. The 1973-74 ratios were used to estimate the actual distributions of compliers to rejecters for 1972-73. Since rejecters were over-sampled, the N for compliers was weighted upwards, accordingly.

[3]Micheal W. Giles, Douglas S. Gatlin, and Everett F. Cataldo, "The Impact of Busing on White Flight," Social Science Quarterly, forthcoming; Micheal W. Giles, Everett F. Cataldo, and Douglas S. Gatlin, "White Flight and Percent Black: The Tipping Point Reexamined," Florida Atlantic University, mimeo; Carl Hansen, Danger in Washington (West Nyack, N.Y.: Parker Publishing Company, 1968); Arthur L. Stinchcombe, Mary McDill, Dollie Walker, "Is There a Racial Tipping Point in Changing Schools?" Journal of Social Issues (25,2) 1969, pp. 127-34; Nicolaus Mills, ed., The Great School Bus Controversy (New York: Teachers College Press, 1973); U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Racial Isolation in the Public Schools (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1967).

[4]Testing criterion z is presented in John H. Mueller, Karl F. Schuessier, and Herbert L. Costner, Statistical Reasoning in Sociology 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970) pp. 429-431.

$$\text{Where } z = \frac{p_1 - p_2}{\sqrt{pq\left(\frac{1}{n_1} + \frac{1}{n_2}\right)}}, \quad p = \frac{n_1 p_1 + n_2 p_2}{n_1 + n_2}$$