



How Segregation Manifests in Public High Schools across Passaic County



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Introduction (Background)

Segregation in New Jersey public schools is ranked among the highest in the United States due to zoning laws, all students must attend their designated school in their residential zone or the school nearest to them. Schools are faced with double segregation, which is contingent upon race and income isolation that leads to educational inequality. Passaic County comprises an array of cities and townships ranging from different household income levels and racial demographics. According to the 2020 U.S Census Bureau, Paterson has a median income of about \$45,141, Passaic has a median income of \$44,779, and Wayne has a median income of \$127,623. Paterson is roughly 61.4% Hispanic or Latinx, 25.7% Black or African American, and 8.3% white alone. Passaic is 73.8% Hispanic or Latinx, 8.7% Black or African American, and 15.6% white alone. Wayne is 12.7% Hispanic or Latinx, 2% Black or African American, and 75.2% white alone. This study highlights the lived experiences of students who identify as first generation and low income who attended high schools in these cities.

Public High Schools

Passaic County Technical Institute (Wayne, NJ)
Passaic High School (Passaic, NJ)
Rosa Parks High School (Paterson, NJ)
Passaic Preparatory Academy (Passaic, NJ)
International High School (Paterson, NJ)

Research Questions

How does segregation in Passaic County across public high schools manifest inside the classroom?
Is there a correlation between the type of educational opportunities and the demographics of a school's student body?

Statement of Purpose

As a native Patersonian who grew up in a low-income neighborhood and attended the Paterson Public School District from K-12, I was aware from a young age of the income and racial disparities in my school. I attended public school Number 8 and Rosa L. Parks High School of Fine and Performing Arts, while most were Latinx or Hispanic and Black, both of my schools were severely segregated and under-resourced. I explicitly remember my science and math teachers leaving mid school years and not having access to classes such as Biology, Environmental Science, and Algebra. I decided to pursue this research project due to lack of research in academia about the Passaic County, especially research that highlights students' voices and experiences. Paterson and Passaic are rich in cultural diversity yet due to the levels of poverty and lack of resources allocations, students in the public school system are disproportionately affected. This project is a space for students to vocalize their thoughts and highlight their experiences.

Methodology

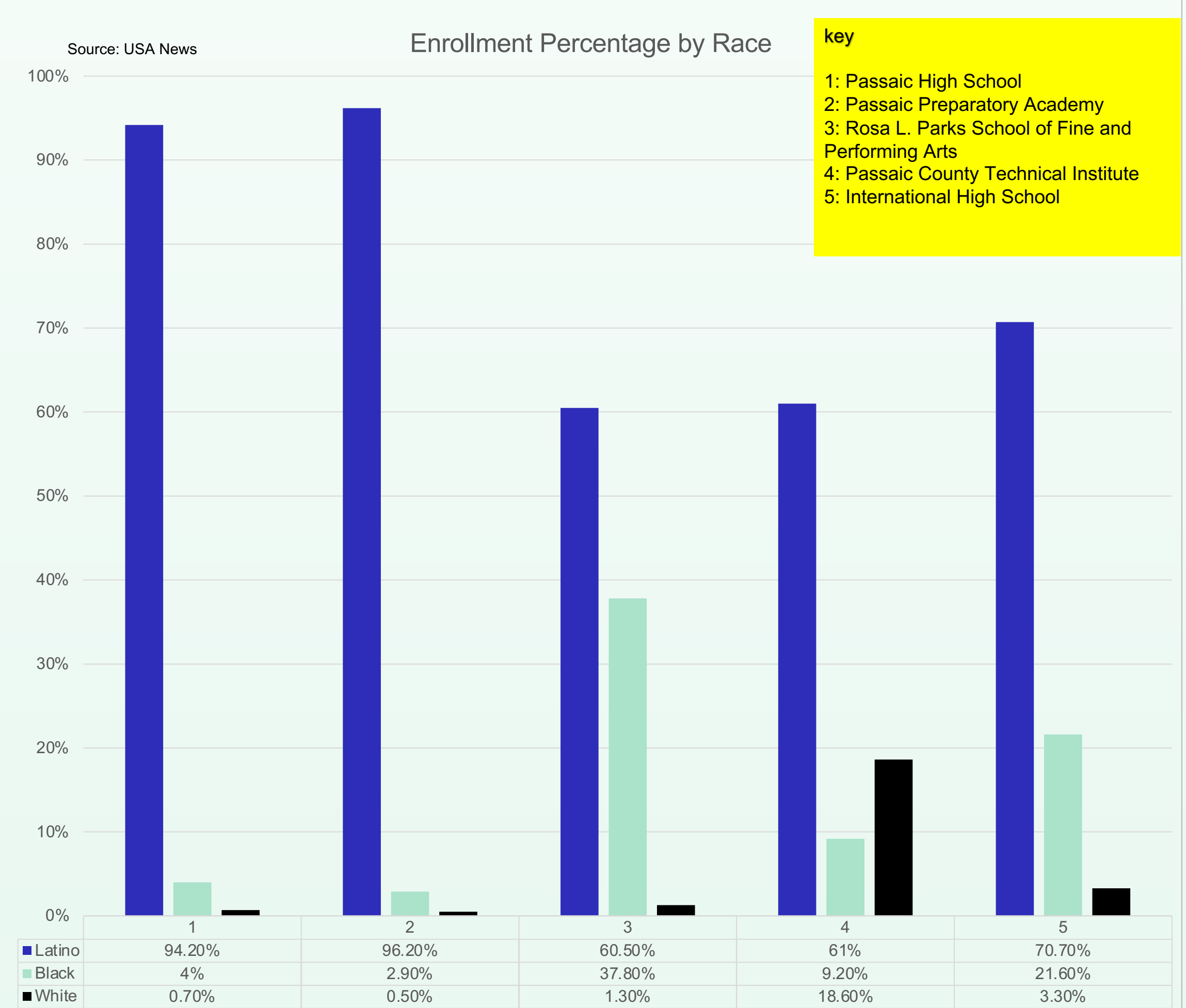
The interviews are semi-structured open-ended questions relevant to their educational experiences about 5 to 10 questions each session. The anonymous surveys are available through an online form with roughly 20 questions. All the demographic data is from the Census Bureau and US News and can be accessed publicly.

Sample

2 interviews
4 survey responses
Participants were graduating seniors or alumni from a Passaic County Public High School eighteen or older. 60% of the students surveyed identified as Latinx and 40% identified as Black.

Departmental Affiliation

Key Findings



Common themes

All five schools lacked support in the following areas; **college preparation, mental health and wellness, and social life.** There is a lack of support in the college application process; many students vocalize not having access to an SAT preparation class or access to their academic counselors. Rather than providing support for first-generation low-income students, students felt discouraged and disengaged not knowing how to tackle the college application process. Race, ethnicity, and cultural background also played a crucial role in the power imbalance between the student body and professional staff.

“Majority of the students are first-gens, so I wished they emphasized the importance of education and how far it can get you ahead. I wish the counselors were more personal to students, but I can understand their caseload can be a lot. There are some teachers that are known for being able to connect with students; however, I wish there were more of them.”

– Alumna from Passaic High School and Passaic Preparatory Academy 20’

“I usually felt excluded for not speaking the language. My “counselor” had no experience dealing with migrant students despite there being a large number of us. When they told me I'm not college material but workforce material– it marked me. “You are migrant and undocumented, you didn’t come here to study, people like you usually just go into the workforce” ... I'm over 30 now and I still remember that conversation.”

– Alumna from Passaic High School 04’

“I wish we had more black teachers in my senior year. Before that our school was amazing, we had a predominately black administration (which all student both black and non- black loved). We had a lot more black teachers. With their presence I very rarely experienced micro or macro aggressions. But in their absence, I found myself having multiple arguments and discussions with white male teachers on race, gender, economic class status, etc.”

– Alumna from International High School 22’

Conclusions & Next Steps

- Students who share multiple marginalized identities are the most vulnerable and disproportionately affected by the lack of resources, knowledge, and social awareness in public high schools in Passaic County.
- High schools with a high concentration of Latino and Black students in Passaic County are not equipped to serve their student body.
- Students who attend these schools are aware of the lack of resources due to segregation.

Next Steps

Meeting and working with community members and nonprofit organizations to help address these issues. The Latino Action Network Foundation has established programs such as the “ School Desegregation Project” that aims to tackle these inequalities.

References

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