

Enclaves of Privilege: Access and Opportunity for Students with Disabilities in Urban K-8 Schools

Christine Ashby, Julia M White, Beth Ferri, Siqu Li, and Lauren Ashby

Middle grades education has been the object of efforts to remediate US education to address an array of social problems. Districts have sought out K-8 models to create smaller learning communities, require fewer school transitions, and allow sustained student connections. This paper offers a historical analysis of K-8 schools, drawing on statistical and spatial methods and a DisCrit intersectional lens to illustrate how creating K-8 schools produced enclaves of privilege in one urban school district. K-8 schools in our target district became whiter and wealthier than district averages. Students with disabilities attending K-8 schools tended to be placed in more inclusive classrooms, where they were more likely to be integrated alongside nondisabled peers than counterparts attending traditional middle schools. We consider how the configuration of K-8 schools, which could be considered an administrative decision to better serve students, has obscured interworkings of power and privilege.

Key Words: K-8 education, DisCrit, disability studies, critical race spatial analysis, special education history, GIS

Middle grades education has long been the object of efforts to remediate US education in order to address a wide array of social problems. Districts have sought out K-8 models to create smaller learning communities, require fewer school transitions, and allow more sustained connections with students. This paper offers a historical analysis of K-8 schools, drawing on statistical and spatial methods and using a

Christine Ashby, Julia White, and Beth Ferri are faculty members in Inclusive Education and Disability Studies at Syracuse University. Siqu Li is an independent researcher in the area of environmental resources engineering. Lauren Ashby attends Sarah Lawrence College, where she focuses on geography. The authors gratefully acknowledge the editorial support of Kate Rousmaniere and Jason Ellis, whose contributions and suggestions have significantly strengthened this manuscript.

DisCrit¹ intersectional lens to illustrate how creating K-8 schools in one urban district performed another important function—producing enclaves of privilege.

Since the mid-1980s, K-8 schools in our target district have become both whiter and wealthier than district averages. Although the enrollment patterns of students with disabilities as a whole tend to parallel enrollment patterns for all students with regard to race, in K-8 schools, students with particular disability labels had a greater likelihood of enrollment in their neighborhood K-8 school. Thus, because students of color associated with particular disability categories were overrepresented, enrollment patterns of students with disabilities such as autism, intellectual disability, and emotional disturbance intensified racial segregation in the district.

Students with disabilities attending K-8 schools also tended to be placed in more inclusive classrooms, where they were more likely to be integrated alongside nondisabled peers than counterparts attending traditional middle schools, who tended to be placed in more restrictive (e.g., segregated) special education classrooms. It could be that as K-8 schools offered more inclusive settings for students with disabilities, families with the means to move into these attendance zones did so. It is also possible that families with more cultural capital attending these schools pushed for more inclusive settings for their disabled children. In either case, over time K-8 schools in the district became increasingly white, privileged, and inclusive.

Historical Context

Since 1975, the federal special education law, now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), mandated that students with disabilities be educated “to the maximum extent appropriate” with students without disabilities and that their removal “from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.”² The principle of the least restrictive environment (LRE) is one of six foundational tenets of special education

¹DisCrit is a theoretical framework that incorporates analysis of both race and disability, drawing on disability studies and critical race theory. See, for example, David J. Connor, Beth A. Ferri, and Subini A. Annamma, *DisCrit: Disability Studies and Critical Race Theory in Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2015).

²Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 USC 1412 § 61(a)(5)(A) (2004); and Education for All Handicapped Children Act, Pub. L. 94-142, (1975).

policy and practice, and the basis for inclusive education.³ States must report the percent of students aged six through twenty-one with disabilities served by the general education class—the generally accepted federal metric for “inclusion” for students with disabilities is participation in general education settings for 80 percent of the school day or more. However, access to general education environments for students with particular disability labels varies widely, such as intellectual disability and emotional disturbance.⁴ For example, in the most recent Office of Special Education Programs report to Congress, 63.1 percent of students with disabilities were educated in inclusive environments (80 percent or more of the school day), 13.4 percent in mainly special classes (less than 40 percent of the school day), and 5.1 percent in other environments. However, this varies both within and across states and by disability category. For students served under the IDEA categories of intellectual disability and emotional disturbance, 17.0 percent and 47.2 percent, respectively, are taught in inclusive contexts nationally.⁵ However, little research has been done examining factors associated with the wide variability in educational environments.

Over four decades of research indicates that students with disabilities—regardless of severity or type of disability—have better, or at least comparable, academic and social outcomes in general education contexts than in segregated ones.⁶ In the few observational studies

³The other principles are (1) free appropriate public education (FAPE), (2) nondiscriminatory evaluation, (3) individualized education plan (IEP) (4) parental participation, and (5) procedural safeguards.

⁴Jennifer A. Kurth, Mary E. Morningstar, and Elizabeth B. Kozleski, “The Persistence of Highly Restrictive Special Education Placements for Students with Low-Incidence Disabilities,” *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities* 39, no. 3 (Sept. 2014), 232.

⁵US Department of Education, *40th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2018* (Washington, DC: Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2018), 55, 148, 157.

⁶James Q. Affleck et al., “Integrated Classroom Versus Resource Model: Academic Viability and Effectiveness,” *Exceptional Children* 54, no. 4 (Jan. 1988), 342; Janice M. Baker and Naomi Zigmond, “Are Regular Education Classes Equipped to Accommodate Students with Learning Disabilities?” *Exceptional Children* 56, no. 6 (April 1990), 520; Madhabi Banerji and Ronald Dailey, “A Study of the Effects of an Inclusion Model on Students with Specific Learning Disabilities,” *Journal of Learning Disabilities* 28, no. 8 (Oct. 1995), 518; Eric A. Hanushek, John F. Kain, and Steven G. Rivkin, “Inferring Program Effects for Special Populations: Does Special Education Raise Achievement for Students with Disabilities?” *Review of Economics and Statistics* 84, no. 4 (Nov. 2002), 584; Conrad Oh-Young and John Filler, “A Meta-Analysis of the Effects of Placement on Academic and Social Skill Outcome Measures of Students with Disabilities,” *Research in Developmental Disabilities* 47 (Dec. 2015), 89; and Diane Ryndak, Lewis B. Jackson, and Julia M. White, “Involvement and Progress in the General

conducted to compare the learning environments of segregated and inclusive contexts, students with disabilities tend to have more access to the general education curriculum and more opportunities to engage in the general education curriculum in inclusive contexts.⁷

Although variation exists, the larger body of research on post-school outcomes for students with disabilities shows a positive relationship between placement in general education contexts and improved postschool outcomes for students with both mild and more complex disabilities.⁸ Another body of research highlights what is commonly referred to as *disproportionality*, which shows how, even controlling for socioeconomic status, race is an undeniably significant factor in the likelihood that a child will be labeled as disabled in school.⁹ Moreover, in addition to being overrepresented in particular disability categories, students of color are also more likely to be placed in more restrictive (or segregated) educational environments. Because

Curriculum for Students with Extensive Support Needs: K–12 Inclusive-Education Research and Implications for the Future,” *Inclusion* 1, no. 1 (June 2013), 34.

⁷Julie Causton-Theoharis et al., “Does Self-Contained Special Education Deliver on Its Promises? A Critical Inquiry into Research and Practice,” *Journal of Special Education Leadership* 24, no. 2, (Sept. 2011), 72; Jennifer Kurth, Kiara Born, and Hailey Love, “Ecobehavioral Characteristics of Self-Contained High School Classrooms for Students with Severe Cognitive Disability,” *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities* 41, no. 4 (Dec. 2016), 235; and Jane H. Soukup et al., “Classroom Variables and Access to the General Curriculum for Students With Disabilities,” *Exceptional Children* 74 no. 1 (Oct. 2007), 114.

⁸Michael Foster and Erin Pearson, “Is Inclusivity an Indicator of Quality of Care for Children with Autism in Special Education?,” *Pediatrics* 130, supplement 2 (Nov. 2012), S182; Mason Haber et al., “What Works, When, for Whom, and with Whom: A Meta-Analytic Review of Predictors of Postsecondary Success for Students With Disabilities,” *Review of Educational Research* 86, no. 1 (March 2016), 155–56; Valerie Mazzotti et al., “Predictors of Post-School Success: A Systematic Review of NLTS2 Secondary Analyses,” *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals* 39, no. 4 (Nov. 2016), 208; Lynn Newman et al., *The Post-High School Outcomes of Young Adults with Disabilities Up to 8 Years After High School* (Menlo Park, CA: SRI International, 2011); Jay W. Rojewski, In Heok Lee, and Noel Gregg, “Causal Effects of Inclusion on Postsecondary Education Outcomes of Individuals with High-Incidence Disabilities,” *Journal of Disability Policy Studies* 25, no. 4 (March 2015), 214; and Janis White and Jan Weiner, “Influence of Least Restrictive Environment and Community Based Training on Integrated Employment Outcomes for Transitioning Students with Severe Disabilities,” *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation* 21, no. 3 (2004), 150.

⁹Amanda L. Sullivan and Sherrie L. Proctor, “The Shield or the Sword? Revisiting the Debate on Racial Disproportionality in Special Education and Implications for School Psychologists,” *School Psychology Forum: Research in Practice* 10, no. 3 (Fall 2016), 278–88; and Catherine Kramarczuk Voulgarides, Edward Fergus, and Kathleen A. King Thorius, “Pursuing Equity: Disproportionality in Special Education and the Reframing of Technical Solutions to Address Systemic Inequities,” *Review of Research in Education* 41, no. 1 (March 2017), 61–87.

receiving special education services often results in some degree of exclusion from general education settings, particularly for students of color who tend to be placed in more restrictive settings, special education has historically functioned as a form of racial resegregation in otherwise desegregated schools.¹⁰ The relationship between racial segregation and disability exclusion has a long and interconnected history.

Historians of education have explored the history and development of special education by analyzing archival documents, including government records, school board records, newspaper articles, and editorial pages. In tracing the development of special education, historians have documented the ways that school practices have perpetuated race, class, and ability privilege. Mandated to serve a broader population of students, many of whom had been previously excluded from public education, schools created special classes and even special schools as a means to manage the influx of less desirable students.¹¹ Over time, these practices have taken on a variety of forms and configurations yielding similar results.

Despite the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954, for instance, students of color are now more likely than ever to be educated in racially segregated schools in communities struggling with concentrated poverty. Similarly, although the IDEA guaranteed students with disabilities the right to be educated in an LRE, these students continued to spend significant portions of their day isolated in self-contained classrooms.¹² Although we could point to the failings of both *Brown* and the IDEA, it is the collusive nature of racism and ableism that has contributed to students of color being overidentified and hypersegregated in schools.

In analyzing editorials marking the ten year anniversaries of *Brown*, for instance, principals and teachers often pointed to perceived

¹⁰David J. Connor and Beth A. Ferri, "Integration and Inclusion—A Troubling Nexus: Race, Disability, and Special Education," *Journal of African American History* 90, no. 1/2 (Winter 2005), 107–27; and Beth A. Ferri and David J. Connor, *Reading Resistance: Discourses of Exclusion in Desegregation and Inclusion Debates* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006).

¹¹Connor and Ferri, "Integration and Inclusion," 107–27; David J. Connor and Beth A. Ferri, "Historicizing Dis/Ability: Creating Normalcy, Containing Difference," in *Foundations of Disability Studies*, ed. Matthew Wappat and Katrina L. Arndt (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 29–67; Jason Ellis and Paul Axelrod, "Continuity and Change: Special Education Policy Development in Toronto Public Schools, 1945 to the present," *Teachers College Record* 118, no.2 (Feb. 2016), 1–42; and Barry M. Franklin, "Progressivism and Curriculum Differentiation: Special Classes in the Atlanta Public Schools, 1898–1923," *History of Education Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (Winter 1989), 571–93.

¹²US Department of Education, *40th Annual Report to Congress*, 52–56.

academic difference as a justification for segregating students of color in special education or remedial classes.¹³ Examining the shift from segregating students between schools based on race (before desegregation) and within schools based on ability (after desegregation) highlights the role that special education, like ability tracking more generally, played in creating schools within schools, demarcated by race, but under the guise of perceived dis/ability. In other words, special education often conceived as a benevolent system of supports for students, in practice, has a more complex and problematic relationship to racial oppression. Likewise, the configuration of K-8 schools, which can be seen as simply an administrative decision or a way to better serve students, has obscured the interworkings of power and privilege that may have resulted from or motivated their creation.

Leveraging Race, Class, and Ability

Schools, regardless of configuration, always reflect the interests of dominant groups. School zones, for instance, have long been gerrymandered to ensure race and class homogeneity.¹⁴ Recent movement of middle-class families back to urban communities may provide a welcome influx of “cultural, material, and social capital” to urban communities and schools. Middle-class parents may choose to send their children to urban schools in response to a commitment to multiculturalism, a desire for their children to have a more cosmopolitan identity, or simply out of a commitment to supporting public schools. Yet middle-class parent involvement in schools can also have a “troubling underside . . . leading to greater levels of inequality within and across schools.”¹⁵ Benefits largely depend on whether parents are individually focused on advantages accrued to their own children or on more collective benefits to the school community as a whole.¹⁶

¹³Waldo E. Martin, *Brown v. Board of Education: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford St. Martin's Press, 1998), 199–229. See also Ferri and Connor, *Reading Resistance*, [48–49]; Beth A. Ferri and David J. Connor, “In the Shadow of *Brown*: Special Education and Overrepresentation of Students of Color,” *Remedial and Special Education* 26, no. 2 (March 2005), 97–98; and Daniel J. Losen and Gary Orfield, eds., *Racial Inequality in Special Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2002).

¹⁴Ellen Brantlinger, *Dividing Classes: How the Middle Class Negotiates and Rationalizes School Advantage* (New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2003), 53.

¹⁵Maia Bloomfield Cucchiara and Erin McNamara Horvat, “Perils and Promises: Middle-Class Parental Involvement in Urban Schools,” *American Educational Research Journal* 46, no. 4 (Dec. 2009), 975.

¹⁶Cucchiara and Horvat, “Perils and Promises,” 975.

In a groundbreaking study of parents (primarily mothers) in high-income elementary schools in 2003, for instance, Brantlinger identified the contradictory desires of middle-class white parents who “were attracted to socially inclusive, integrated ideals of education, but were intent on having advantaged circumstances for their own children.”¹⁷ In subtle ways, parents in her study espoused ideologies that allowed them to deny or downplay their own advantaged positioning, while further legitimizing that privilege. The ability to leverage parent involvement becomes all the more important to interrogate as the state assumes less and less responsibility for educating students through neoliberal reforms (e.g., school choice, charter schools, and voucher programs) and parents are increasingly expected to take on an ever greater responsibility for advocating for their own children’s education.¹⁸ In fact, high levels of parent involvement are now perceived as essential elements of good parenting. Thus, parents who can gain greater access to educational resources may ensure that the educational system benefits their own children, but not necessarily in ways that benefit others.¹⁹

Because of the clinical and bureaucratic nature of special education discourse, parents of disabled children have an added layer of complexity to negotiate.²⁰ Although special education laws require and expect parent involvement, and this is seen as essential to due process rights, parents from less privileged backgrounds continue to face higher “rates of stigmatizing disability diagnoses among their children; more placements in special education contexts that segregate their children from mainstream students; and inferior special education services.”²¹ In fact, “rather than leveling the playing field, [special education] legislation and its focus on parent involvement has created new opportunities for children of privileged parents to enjoy a relative advantage in the public education system, further entrenching the social class and racial-ethnic hierarchies within the relationship between families and schools.”²² Students of color and students from less privileged backgrounds experience less access to inclusive education and general education content and curriculum, with significant negative consequences as a result of labeling. Despite an overwhelming body of research suggesting that students with disabilities

¹⁷ Brantlinger, *Dividing Classes*, 589.

¹⁸ Colin Ong-Dean, *Distinguishing Disability: Parents, Privilege, and Special Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 44.

¹⁹ Ong-Dean, *Distinguishing Disability*, 41–42.

²⁰ Ong-Dean, *Distinguishing Disability*, 45.

²¹ Ong-Dean, *Distinguishing Disability*, 121.

²² Ong-Dean, *Distinguishing Disability*, 114.

experience improved academic and social-behavioral outcomes when given access to general education settings, students with disabilities continue to have inequitable access to general education curriculum and contexts and poor outcomes.²³

Development of K-8 Schools

In September of 2005, the Board of Education of SCSD, a large urban school district in a mid-size city in New York State, initiated a Small Schools Plan designed to reconfigure several elementary schools in the district into K-8 school buildings. The plan would eliminate the only remaining traditional middle school in one quadrant of the city. Administrators touted the plan, claiming the K-8 schools would “improve graduation rates by lessening student transitions and offering programs of excellence in all schools.”²⁴ In the Board minutes, administrators also expressed a desire to “establish safe and secure schools.”²⁵ Although these were not the first K-8 schools in the district (the district had opened one K-8 school in 1984, another in 1993, and two others in 1995), the 2005 Board decision marked a significant shift in the building configuration and enrollment patterns in an area of Syracuse adjacent to several public and private universities and hospitals.²⁶ In other words, the quadrant of the city that stood to benefit the most by this change included many highly educated and relatively more affluent families than other quadrants of the district.

The creation of K-8 schools in SCSD over the last four decades is part of a larger tradition of school reform initiatives designed to solve social problems by configuring and then reconfiguring middle grades education.²⁷ In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many children entered the workforce upon leaving school, regardless of the number of years successfully completed. During the first half of

²³Cecil Fore et al., “Academic Achievement and Class Placement in High School: Do Students with Learning Disabilities Achieve More in One Class Placement Than Another?,” *Education and Treatment of Children* 31, no. 1 (Feb. 2008), 65; Kurth, Morningstar, and Kozleski, “Persistence of Highly Restrictive Special Education Placements,” 232; and Ryndak, Jackson, and White, “Involvement and Progress,” 34.

²⁴Syracuse City School District Board of Education Meeting Minutes, Sept. 14, 2005, School Board Records, Syracuse, NY. School Board documents are maintained in binders at the Syracuse City School District Board of Education main office.

²⁵Syracuse City School District Board of Education Meeting Minutes, Sept. 14, 2005, School Board Records, Syracuse, NY.

²⁶Gonzalez, “Roberts Elementary Parents,” B1.

²⁷James A. Beane, “Middle Schools Under Siege,” *Middle School Journal* 30, no. 4 (March 1999), 3.

the twentieth century, a variety of different educational models and grade configurations emerged to provide academic and social opportunities for adolescent students prior to entering high school.²⁸ Tracing these various reforms across the decades, Kelly Bedard and Chao Do suggest that reformers aimed to provide middle grade students access to developmentally appropriate curriculum and instruction without exposing them to older teenagers.²⁹ The changing bodies and minds of middle grade students also made them an inappropriate or unwelcome presence in elementary schools, due to the onset of puberty and their need for a more rigorous curriculum. Thus, the emergence of school spaces devoted to the middle grades meant that young adolescents would be the sole focus of this newly configured “middle” school.³⁰

By the mid-1990s, however, studies began to show declines in academic performance and other areas as students transitioned from middle school to high school. Students making this transition were found to experience academic achievement loss and increased dropout rates, lowered self-esteem and self-perception, and decreased social supports and involvement with school.³¹ Some districts, particularly in urban areas, began to convert their middle schools to K-8 schools in an attempt to increase academic performance.³² Other districts,

²⁸Vaughan Byrnes and Allen Ruby, “Comparing Achievement between K-8 and Middle Schools: A Large-Scale Empirical Study,” *American Journal of Education* 114, no. 1 (Nov. 2007), 102; Thomas Dickinson and Deborah Butler, “Reinventing the Middle School,” *Middle School Journal* 33, no. 1 (Sept. 2001), 7-13; C. Kenneth McEwin, Thomas S. Dickinson, and Michael G. Jacobson, “How Effective Are K-8 Schools for Young Adolescents?,” *Middle School Journal* 37, no. 1 (Sept. 2005), 24; and Mary Beth Schaefer, Kathleen F. Malu, and Bogum Yoon, “An Historical Overview of the Middle School Movement, 1963-2015,” *RMLE Online* 39, no. 5 (May 27, 2016), 5.

²⁹Kelly Bedard and Chau Do, “Are Middle Schools More Effective?: The Impact of School Structure on Student Outcomes,” *Journal of Human Resources* 40, no. 3 (Summer 2005), 660.

³⁰Byrnes and Ruby, “Comparing Achievement,” 102; Dickinson and Butler, “Reinventing the Middle School,” 7; Paul S. George, “K-8 or Not? Reconfiguring the Middle Grades,” *Middle School Journal* 37, no. 1 (Sept. 2005), 9; and Schaefer, Malu, and Yoon, “An Historical Overview,” 5.

³¹John W. Alspaugh, “Achievement Loss Associated with the Transition to Middle School and High School,” *Journal of Educational Research* 92, no.1 (Sept. 1998), 20-25; Jay C. Hertzog and P. Lena’ Morgan, “Breaking the Barriers between Middle School and High School: Developing a Transition Team for Student Success,” *NASSP Bulletin* 82, no. 597 (April 1998), 94-98; and Edward Seidman et al., “The Impact of School Transitions in Early Adolescence on the Self-System and Perceived Social Context of Poor Urban Youth,” *Child Development* 65, no. 2 (April 1994), 507-22.

³²Byrnes and Ruby, “Comparing Achievement,” 103; Martha Abele Mac Iver and Douglas J. Mac Iver, “Which Bets Paid Off? Early Findings on the Impact of

like SCSD, selectively replaced some middle schools with K-8 schools, while retaining others. Despite persistent dissatisfaction with middle grades education, research shows mixed support for improvement in “students’ performance or well-being” associated with either of the two grade configurations.³³ C. Kenneth McEwin, Thomas Dickinson, and Michael Jacobson found that, overall, separately configured middle schools better met the developmental and academic needs of young adolescents.³⁴ However, other research suggested that K-8 schools provided the same or better academic and social outcomes for students as they transition to high school.³⁵ In three large-scale studies comparing grade configurations in Philadelphia, Vaughan Byrnes and Allen Ruby, Martha Abele Mac Iver and Douglas Mac Iver, and Christopher Weiss and Christine Baker-Smith found that older, more firmly established K-8 schools outperformed both middle schools and newer K-8 schools, and that newer K-8 schools were marginally more effective than middle schools.³⁶ Where better outcomes were noted, researchers found that in many cases the K-8 schools that outperformed their middle school counterparts were actually serving students from more advantaged neighborhoods. These researchers advise caution when translating research findings into policies to convert middle schools to K-8 schools, especially if the demographic and socioeconomic populations remain unchanged.³⁷ However, no existing studies looked at particular outcomes or factors related to students with disabilities who receive special education services and attend one or the other of these middle grade school configurations.

In this paper, we augment the historical surround of the formation of K-8 schools in one urban school district by drawing on statistical and

Private Management and K-8 Conversion Reforms on the Achievement of Philadelphia Students,” *Review of Policy Research* 23, no. 5 (Sept. 2006), 1077–93; and Christopher C. Weiss and E. Christine Baker-Smith, “Eighth-Grade School Form and Resilience in the Transition to High School: A Comparison of Middle Schools and K-8 Schools,” *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 20, no. 4 (Dec. 2010), 825–39.

³³Weiss and Kipnes, “Reexamining Middle School Effects,” 239.

³⁴McEwin, Dickinson, and Jacobson, “How Effective Are K-8 Schools,” 27.

³⁵Weiss and Baker-Smith, “Eighth-Grade School Form,” 836; Alspaugh, “Achievement Loss,” 24; and Byrnes and Ruby, “Comparing Achievement,” 127.

³⁶Byrnes and Ruby, “Comparing Achievement,” 103; Mac Iver and Mac Iver, “Which Bets Paid Off?” 1086; and Weiss and Baker-Smith, “Eighth Grade School Form,” 833.

³⁷Byrnes and Ruby, “Comparing Achievement,” 105–106; Seidman et al., “Impact of School Transitions,” 519; Debra Viadero, “Evidence for Moving to K-8 Model Not Airtight,” *Education Week* 27, no. 19 (Jan 19, 2008), para 10; and Weiss and Baker-Smith, “Eighth Grade School Form,” 828.

spatial methods.³⁸ Moreover, in addition to reviewing relevant documents and board proceedings, we also ground this work in a DisCrit intersectional lens to illustrate how these newly configured K-8 schools performed an important function as enclaves of privilege within one urban district.³⁹ Specifically, we explore how practices of inclusion and exclusion developed alongside and within these K-8 spaces within a district plagued by hypersegregation and situated within a city with some of the highest concentrations of African American and Latinx poverty in the nation.⁴⁰ By focusing on the complicit nature of racism and ableism, along with other social markers, and drawing on the tools of critical race spatial analysis (CRSA) and statistical analyses, we explore how schools function as fiercely contested sites of segregating/excluding practices, imbued with racist and ableist ideologies that are made to appear natural and neutral.⁴¹ In the particular contested site we examine in this study, the Syracuse City School District (SCSD), we show how creating K-8 schools maintained pockets of race and class privilege as well as allowed for more inclusive placements for students with disabilities within the district.

Our findings illustrate that using spatial and statistical analyses reveals how educational placement and school configuration reflect an interplay of social, historical, and political forces. As schools are inextricably linked to local contexts, their “relationship to political, economic, cultural, and racialized spaces makes schools . . . important

³⁸James A. Beane, “Middle Schools under Siege: Points of Sttack,” *Middle School Journal* 30, no. 4 (March 1999), 3–9; Nolan Blair, “A Comparative Study of the Effects of Grade Configuration on Middle School and K-8 School Value Added Scores” (EdD diss., Tennessee State University, 2007); Rolf K. Blank, Roger E. Levine, and Lauri Steel, “After 15 Years: Magnet Schools in Urban Education,” in *Who Chooses? Who Loses? Culture, Institutions, and the Unequal Effects of School Choice*, ed. Bruce Fuller and Richard F. Elmore (New York: Teachers College Press, 1996), 154–72; and Christopher C. Weiss and Lindsay Kipnes, “Reexamining Middle School Effects: A Comparison of Middle Grades Students in Middle Schools and K-8 schools,” *American Journal of Education* 112, no. 2 (Feb. 2006), 239–72.

³⁹One K-8 school opened in 1984, another in 1993, and two others in 1995. The first K-8 was created in response to the planned closure of a local middle school and the second to create more stability and fewer transitions for students. Daniel Gonzalez, “Roberts Elementary Parents, Teachers Push for K-8 School,” *Syracuse (NY) Herald-Journal*, Feb. 13, 1995, B1.

⁴⁰Paul Jargowsky, “The Architecture of Segregation: Civil Unrest, the Concentration of Poverty, and Public Policy,” The Century Foundation, Aug. 7, 2015, <https://tcf.org/content/report/architecture-of-segregation/>, Regional Variation.

⁴¹Subini Ancy Annamma, David J. Connor, and Beth A. Ferri, “Touchstone Text: Dis/Ability Critical Race Studies (DisCrit): Theorizing at the Intersections of Race and Dis/ability,” in Connor, Ferri, and Annamma, *DisCrit*, 14.

locales for spatial inquiry.”⁴² Mapping disability, race, and class as interrelated functions of school configuration, this work reveals the “unjust geographies” that magnify marginalized students’ experience within urban contexts, as well as how whiteness, ability, and goodness serve as interlocking forms of property in schools.⁴³

CRSA is a powerful tool for illuminating the complex interplay of race, class, disability, and socioeconomic status.⁴⁴ Drawing on CRSA, we spatially examine “how structural and institutional factors influence and shape racial [and disability] dynamics and the power associated with those dynamics over time.”⁴⁵ In addition to CRSA, DisCrit provides key analytic tools for tracing the collusive nature of racism and ableism, which disproportionately impacts how minoritized students with disabilities experience compounding forms of educational disadvantage.⁴⁶ Like Ellen Brantlinger, however, we also look at the workings and maintenance of privilege and how the actions of dominant groups leverage and solidify that privilege.⁴⁷ In other words, rather than focus on the marginalization and oppression that minoritized groups experience, we instead turn the analytic lens to uncovering how the creation of K-8 schools functioned to create pockets of privilege within one urban school district.

Location matters when it comes to educational variables, in addition to social, cultural, political, and resource factors.⁴⁸ As a majority of local government decisions are made with geography in mind, it is

⁴²Verónica N. Vélez and Daniel G. Solórzano, “Critical Race Spatial Analysis: Conceptualizing GIS as a Tool for Critical Race Research in Education,” in *Critical Race Spatial Analysis: Mapping to Understand and Address Educational Inequity*, ed. Deb Morrison, Subini Ancy Annamma, and Darrell D. Jackson (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2017), 17.

⁴³Edward Soja, *Seeking Spatial Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 40; and Zeus Leonardo and Alicia Broderick, “Smartness as Property: A Critical Exploration of Intersections between Whiteness and Disability Studies,” *Teachers College Record* 113, no. 10 (Oct. 2011), 2220.

⁴⁴Federico Waitoller and Joshua Radinsky, “Geospatial Perspectives of Neoliberal Education Reform: Examining Intersections of Ability, Race, and Social Class,” in Morrison, Annamma, and Jackson, *Critical Race Spatial Analysis*, 155.

⁴⁵Vélez and Solórzano, “Critical Race Spatial Analysis,” 20.

⁴⁶Annamma, Connor, and Ferri, “Touchstone Text,” 14.

⁴⁷Brantlinger, *Dividing Classes*, 26–27; and Ellen Brantlinger, Massoumeh Majd-Jabbari, and Samuel L. Guskin, “Self-Interest and Liberal Educational Discourse: How Ideology Works for Middle-Class Mothers,” *American Educational Research Journal* 33, no. 3 (Sept. 1996), 589.

⁴⁸Mark Hogrebe and William Tate, “Place, Poverty, and Algebra: A Statewide Comparative Spatial Analysis of Variable Relationships,” *Journal of Mathematics Education at Teachers College* 3, no. 2 (Fall 2012), 14.

crucial for education researchers to consider spatial factors.⁴⁹ A geographic information system (GIS) is an important computer-based tool for exploring, visualizing, and analyzing data. GIS analyses make visible both variable values and their spatial relationships and reveal relationships that are difficult to ascertain through descriptive or inferential statistics.⁵⁰ Thus, this research responds to K. Animashaun Ducre and Eli Moore's call to use the concept of "racialized spaces . . . to describe the partition of urban spaces," in the context of the formation of K-8 schools in the SCSD.⁵¹ Informed by DisCrit, our analysis accounts for intersecting domains of race/ethnicity, disability category, and rates of inclusion.

K-8 Schools in Syracuse, New York

Syracuse is a mid-size, postindustrial city located in Onondaga County, New York. It is situated on land and on the shores of Onondaga Lake, which are both sacred to the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) people, who are members of the Onondaga Nation located in territory just south of Syracuse. Syracuse is also one of the largest refugee resettlement areas and one of the most hypersegregated cities in the country, with the highest concentration of African American and Latinx poverty in the nation.⁵² In the 1950s, a primarily African American and Jewish neighborhood was razed in order to build US Route 81, a major interstate that bisects the city today.

The SCSD has twenty-six schools serving students from kindergarten through 8th grade (fifteen elementary schools, six middle schools, and five K-8 schools). Students are assigned a "neighborhood" school within their particular attendance zone; however, the SCSD has an extensive school choice program and families may apply for placement in most of the twenty-six schools in the district. Further, many students with disabilities are placed in "nonneighborhood" schools due to limited availability of some special education programs and services. The district also includes two lottery-only schools, two charter schools, one gifted elementary school that requires a testing/application process, and four alternative schools. Approximately 20 percent of SCSD students are classified as students with disabilities, well above

⁴⁹ Sean Mulvenon et al., "A Case Study: Using Geographic Information Systems for Education Policy Analysis," *Educational Research Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (Dec. 2006), 48.

⁵⁰ Hogrebe and Tate, "Place, Poverty, and Algebra," 16.

⁵¹ K. Animashaun Ducre and Eli Moore, "Extending the Time Line of Environmental Justice Claims: Redlining Map Digitization Project," *Environmental Practice* 13, no. 4 (Dec. 2011), 338.

⁵² Jargowsky, "Architecture of Segregation," 8.

the 14 percent national classification rate. The interstate that runs through the middle of the city bisects the SCSD, dividing it racially and socioeconomically, rendering some SCSD quadrants hypersegregated by race and socioeconomic status. Additionally, the northwestern quadrant hosts the majority of resettled refugee families. The SCSD has several schools in receivership and one of the lowest graduation rates in the state for students with disabilities. Despite having more inclusive placements than some of the other large urban districts in the state, district-level administrators are concerned about the large number of students taught in self-contained classes and the lack of data informing inclusive reform efforts.

Out of eighteen school districts located in Onondaga County, only three districts have K-8 schools: SCSD (the only urban district in the county); the LaFayette Central School District, which has the only Indigenous nation school in the county; and the Lyncourt Union Free School District, one of the most rural districts in the county. There are currently no K-8 schools in any of the suburban districts that surround the SCSD.

Although one local elementary school in the district transitioned to a K-8 model in 1984, another in 1993, and two more in 1995, the most significant restructuring involving K-8 schools in the SCSD occurred in the mid-2000s, when two additional elementary schools were reconfigured to K-8 buildings in the fall of 2007.⁵³ Located in the southeast quadrant of the city, *all* students in these newly formed K-8 schools would now feed directly into one of the high schools, as no traditional middle school would remain in that quadrant of the city. The stated goal of the reconfiguration was to “improve education all the way up the line, especially in middle school, [and] to increase graduation rate.”⁵⁴ The plan was promoted as offering greater flexibility, creating smaller communities within schools, and providing more sustained opportunities for teachers to get to know their students.

The SCSD school board’s argument for the restructuring rested largely on a concern about retaining middle-class families from this section of the city, which was located adjacent to a private research university, two smaller public universities, and several public and private hospitals. District leadership outwardly expressed a goal of curbing the “attrition of middle-class families” from this area.⁵⁵ In other words, although many factors may have motivated the district to

⁵³Gonzalez, “Roberts Elementary Parents,” B1.

⁵⁴Maureen Nolan, “Several at Forum Seek to Save Solace Elementary,” (*Syracuse Post-Standard*, Feb. 12, 2003, B3).

⁵⁵Nancy Smothergill, “Look More Deeply at Ed Smith Before Blaming Teachers for Ills,” (*Syracuse Post-Standard*, Sept. 2, 2002, A7).

pursue the restructuring plan, it seems likely to have been a response to shifting demographics and a stated desire to keep more middle-class and white families in the city. In particular, there was a growing concern at the time that more financially secure families were opting to leave the city district for neighboring suburban districts or choosing to attend private schools once their children left the elementary grades.⁵⁶ Families quoted in the local paper at the time expressed concerns about the safety of middle schools in the district and the quality of the academic opportunities that were available to their children in district schools.⁵⁷ One parent, who expressed concern about maintaining “standards for excellence,” worried that the parents of the “cream of the crop, [or] the kids at the top level” at this particular elementary school were not going to send their children to the middle school.⁵⁸ A chorus of parents shared similar stories of families planning to move out of the district or send their children to private schools because they perceived SCSD middle schools as unsafe and substandard.⁵⁹ As parents across the district weighed in, proposed changes sent a ripple effect across the district. A parent at one of the schools that was slated to close as a result of the plan was dismayed that the district was closing her daughter’s school in order to offer a “safety net” for parents not wanting to send their children to SCSD middle schools.⁶⁰ The struggles in the district have a much longer history—one that cannot be separated from the history of the city itself.

Then and Now: Redlining and Syracuse

Syracuse was one of over two hundred cities mapped by the federal government’s 1933 Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC). The HOLC was created to provide refinancing for home mortgages to stave off foreclosure due to the 1929 Wall Street crash and the subsequent housing market crisis. The HOLC maps were created to chart and assess lending risk by neighborhood type and, in fact, constituted “racial geograph[ies]” of these cities.⁶¹ Neighborhood areas were graded and color-coded by purported quality: Grade A (green),

⁵⁶Grant Reeber, “Preserving Diversity in City Schools,” (*Syracuse Post-Standard*, Aug. 16, 2002, A11.

⁵⁷Ngoc Huynh, “Don’t Judge School by Its Cover: Principals Tell Concerned Parents that Levy Middle School Is a Good Place for Children to Be Educated,” (*Syracuse Post-Standard*, Oct. 9, 2003, 3.

⁵⁸Huynh, “Don’t Judge School by Its Cover,” 3.

⁵⁹Huynh, “Don’t Judge School by Its Cover,” 3; and Reeber, “Preserving Diversity in City Schools,” A11.

⁶⁰Nolen, “Several at Forum,” B3.

⁶¹Ducre and Moore, “Extending the Time Line,” 327.

Grade B (blue), Grade C (yellow), and Grade D (red). The maps were accompanied by Security Area Descriptions, which rated neighborhoods according to building type, price, and construction; the state of building repairs; and the percent of owner-occupied buildings. The area descriptions also provided a demographic rating that adopted the “scientific” vocabulary of the eugenics movement, which included residents’ class and occupation; percentage of “foreign born” and “Negro” families; percentage of “relief families”; an indicator of whether the population was increasing, decreasing, or static; and the quality of housing.⁶² The maps also included a designation for “infiltration,” which specified an influx of any particular groups moving into a neighborhood—infiltrating groups were also named on the maps. The presence of any type of resident, other than the unnamed “white” resident, decreased the ratings of neighborhoods; rankings indicated a direct inverse relationship between percentage of inhabitants deemed “foreign-born,” “Negro,” or “Semitic”—what the Federal Housing Authority labeled “inharmonious racial groups”—and the area’s grade.⁶³

For example, Grade A areas were described as being inhabited by business people and professionals, whose homes showed a “pride of ownership.”⁶⁴ In other words, Grade A areas had no relief families, foreign-born, or Negro, and no infiltration other than “an influx of the Semitic race”⁶⁵ in one A neighborhood. Grade B areas were characterized as such because of a slight infiltration of French- or German-born inhabitants, “higher type of factory employee”⁶⁶ or “junior executive”⁶⁷ residents. The B grade area was diminished by the “proximity

⁶²Jennifer S. Light, “Nationality and Neighborhood Risk at the Origins of FHA Underwriting,” *Journal of Urban History* 36, no. 5 (Sept. 2010), 635–36.

⁶³Federal Housing Administration, *Underwriting Manual: Underwriting and Valuation Procedure Under Title II of the National Housing Act* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, April 1936), Part II, Section 2, Para 229.

⁶⁴Federal HOLC Security Area Descriptions for City of Syracuse (1937), Area A-3, Records of the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC) Record Group 195.3, HOLC City Survey File, 1935–40, Library of Congress, Washington, DC. Digital copies are available through Robert K. Nelson, et al., “Mapping Inequality,” *American Panorama*, ed. Robert K. Nelson and Edward L. Ayers, <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=11/43.008/-76.383&city=syracuse-ny>.

⁶⁵Federal HOLC Security Area Descriptions for City of Syracuse (1937), Area A-3.

⁶⁶Federal HOLC Security Area Descriptions for City of Syracuse (1937), Area B-3.

⁶⁷Federal HOLC Security Area Descriptions for City of Syracuse (1937), Area B-7.

of [a] state school for mental defectives,”⁶⁸ a tubercular sanatorium, an eleemosynary institution (i.e., a poorhouse), as well as “cheap construction.”⁶⁹ Grade C areas were characterized by many “relief” families, residents who were railroad or factory workers, with a high percentage of infiltration of Polish and Italian families, presence of “half-breeds from the Indian reservation located to the south,”⁷⁰ and “evidence of little pride”⁷¹ in their homes. The Grade D areas were inhabited by laborers and factory workers, a large number of relief families, and high percentages of Italian, Polish, Jewish, and African American families. These areas were also designated as “shunned by lenders.”⁷²

We can still see the impact of the 1930s HOLC practices eighty years later.⁷³ Of the over two hundred cities the HOLC mapped, former Grade A neighborhoods are still overwhelmingly (91 percent) white and in higher income brackets, and 75 percent of Grade D neighborhoods remain communities of color (African American and Latinx) and in lower income brackets.⁷⁴ This holds true in Syracuse. We overlaid the current SCSD K-8 and other elementary and middle schools onto the 1937 HOLC map (see [Figure 1](#)). This map shows that, with the exception of one K-8 school in a former Grade D neighborhood, K-8 schools in the SCSD are located in Grade A and Grade B areas. Other than schools in the north of the district, few schools outside of K-8 schools are represented in Grade A or B areas.

⁶⁸Federal HOLC Security Area Descriptions for City of Syracuse (1940), Area B-6.

⁶⁹Federal HOLC Security Area Descriptions for City of Syracuse (1940), Area B-15.

⁷⁰Federal HOLC Security Area Descriptions for City of Syracuse (1937), Areas C-10 and D-6.

⁷¹Federal HOLC Security Area Descriptions for City of Syracuse (1937), Area C-13.

⁷²Federal HOLC Security Area Descriptions for City of Syracuse (1937), Areas D-2 and D-4.

⁷³Daniel Aaronson, Daniel Hartley, and Bhashkar Mazumder, “The Effects of the 1930s HOLC ‘Redlining’ Maps,” *Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago Working Papers (Revised February 2019) (WP 2017–12)*, <https://www.chicagofed.org/publications/working-papers/2017/wp2017-12>.

⁷⁴Ian Appel and Jordan Nickerson, “Pockets of Poverty: The Long-Term Effects of Redlining,” *Social Science Research Network* (Oct. 2016), 2–3; and Bruce Mitchell and Juan Franco, *HOLC “Redlining” Maps: The Persistent Structure of Segregation and Economic Inequality* (Washington, DC: National Community Reinvestment Coalition, 2018), 4–5, https://nrcr.org/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/2018/02/NCRC-Research-HOLC-10.pdf.

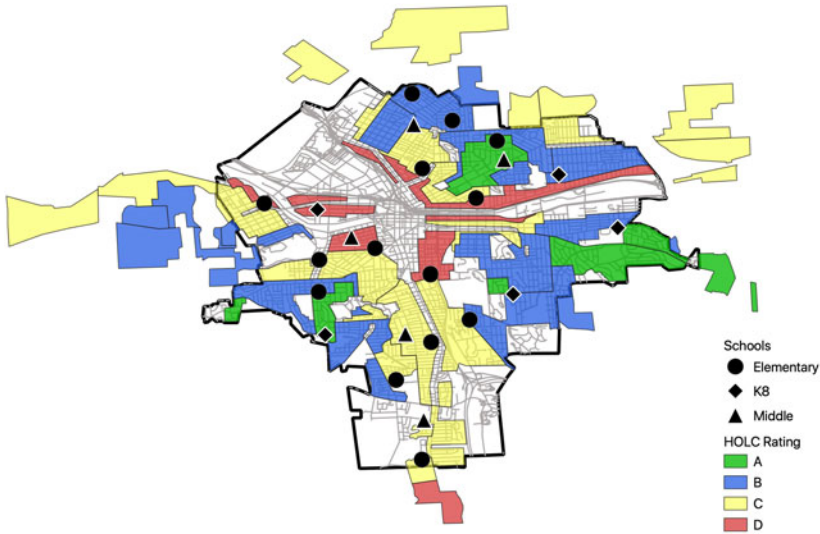


Figure 1. SCSD K-8, elementary, and middle schools overlaid with the HOLC map.

In this study we analyzed and mapped demographic, educational environment, and school type for students with disabilities in the SCSD. Although students with disabilities are increasingly receiving special education services in general education contexts, students with particular disability labels, such as intellectual disability, emotional disturbance, and autism, and students of color with disabilities, continue to be taught in more restrictive (segregated) environments and have poorer outcomes.⁷⁵ Our analysis was broadly focused on the racial and ethnic distribution of students with disabilities who were enrolled in K-8 schools in the SCSD. We also looked for trends in the data related to K-8 enrollment and disability categories.

Findings from statistical and geospatial analysis of special education, as well as elementary and middle school attendance data from the SCSD, indicate that K-8 schools can (and do) produce whiter, wealthier, and more inclusive pockets of school attendance within larger,

⁷⁵James McLeskey et al., “Are We Moving toward Educating Students with Disabilities in Less Restrictive Settings?,” *Journal of Special Education* 46, no. 3 (Nov. 2012), 135; Mary Morningstar, Jennifer Kurth, and Paul Johnson, “Examining National Trends in Educational Placements for Students with Significant Disabilities,” *Remedial and Special Education* 38, no. 1 (Jan. 2017), 8; and Russell Skiba et al., “Risks and Consequences of Oversimplifying Educational Inequities: A Response to Morgan et al. (2015),” *Educational Researcher* 45, no. 3 (April 2016), 222.

more diverse urban districts. This is particularly true in districts like the SCSD, where several school configurations exist within the same district.

K-8 Schools: Enclaves of Privilege

The 2010 median household income by census tract data remains closely aligned with the eight-decades-old HOLC maps (see [Figure 2](#)). Of the five K-8 schools in the SCSD, three of them are at the borders of the highest income tracts in the city (which are also former Grade A or Grade B HOLC areas), one is in the next highest income tract (a former Grade B HOLC area), and one is in the second lowest income tract (a former Grade D HOLC area). Two of the schools are close, almost adjacent to the district border, while three are further inside the district, but still relatively close to the border.

Demography, Space, Race, Ability, and Schooling

On average, students in K-8 schools are whiter and wealthier than district averages and than their counterparts in traditional elementary and middle schools, a finding that our study corroborated.⁷⁶ Fewer Latinx and African American students with disabilities were enrolled in their neighborhood K-8 schools than Asian, Native American, and white students. Of the five K-8 schools in the SCSD, three are both whiter and wealthier than the district average. Of the remaining two, one is whiter and the other is wealthier. During the 2016–2017 school year, only five other schools in the entire district were both whiter and wealthier than the district average, including the two lottery schools. Schools with higher percentages of white students with disabilities were geographically concentrated at the periphery of the SCSD. Students with autism, orthopedic impairment, and visual impairment were more likely to be enrolled in K-8 schools, while students with emotional disturbance, multiple disabilities, and traumatic brain injury were less likely to be enrolled in K-8 schools.

Students with disabilities who were enrolled in K-8 schools continued to be highly included (integrated with nondisabled peers) compared with students in other types of schools. For example, one K-8 school, in the southwest quadrant, had the highest levels (90–100 percent) of inclusion for students with disabilities. Another K-8 school, in the northeast quadrant, had extremely high (80–90 percent) levels of inclusion, two K-8 schools (one in the northeast quadrant and one in the southeast quadrant) had high (70–80 percent) levels of inclusion,

⁷⁶Viadero, *Evidence for Moving*, para 10; and Weiss and Kipnes, “Reexamining Middle School Effects,” 241.

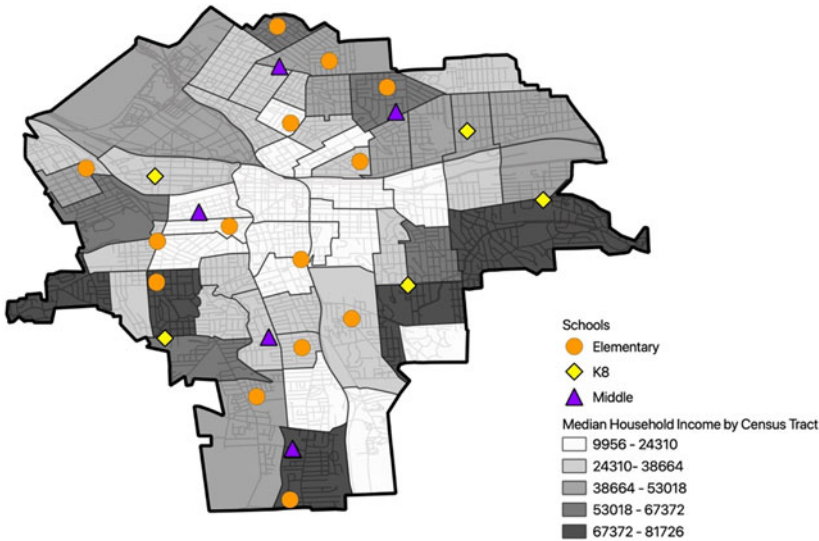


Figure 2. SCSD K-8, elementary, and middle school location overlaid with 2010 median household income by census tract map

and one school in the northwest quadrant had a lower rate, but still relatively high, of inclusion (50–70 percent) than almost all of its surrounding elementary and middle schools (see [Figure 3](#)).

Discussion and Implications

There were many stated (and unstated) reasons why the SCSD opted to restructure several schools into K-8 buildings, including a desire for smaller schools, fewer transitions for students, retention of white middle-class families within the district, and a response to growing concerns over safety. However, despite the motivations behind creating K-8 schools, it is clear that K-8 buildings in the SCSD do not match the district's larger demographic patterns. This first finding was not specific to students with disabilities but rather set the stage for the rest of the findings that followed. Of the five K-8 buildings currently in operation, student populations of three of the K-8 schools are both whiter and wealthier than the district average. Further, when we mapped the schools' locations onto the census tract and redlining maps, K-8 schools tended to be located in census tracts with higher median incomes and former A and B HOLC grades. While this data alone is insufficient to claim intentional maintenance of privilege, it is clear that advantages and disadvantages related to redlining persist many years after these decisions were made.

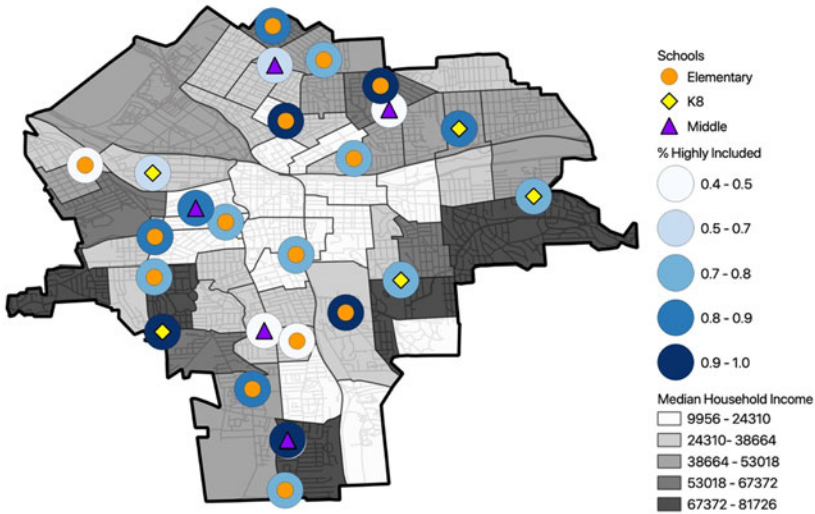


Figure 3. SCSD K-8 school enrollment and educational environment.

While the general demographic data tells an interesting story, seeking to account for how race and disability might complicate or amplify this larger story, we focused also on students with disabilities within the SCSD. In particular, we wanted to know how the various demographic factors, including race, class, disability category, and time in general education might reveal the workings of an intersectional relationship between and among these categories. Following the tenets of DisCrit⁷⁷, we explored what an intersectional lens might bring to the consideration of school enrollment and inclusion within the context of K-8 schools. Our findings were significant, but perhaps in many ways unsurprising. We found that Asian and White students with disabilities were more likely to be enrolled in their neighborhood K-8 school than their Black, Latinx, and Native American peers. In other words, the enrollment patterns of students with disabilities were similar to the larger enrollment patterns for all students with regard to race.

We also found that students with particular disability labels had a greater likelihood of enrollment in K-8 schools. It was particularly interesting to note the decreased likelihood of K-8 enrollment for students with the label of emotional disturbance. Students of color, particularly Black and Brown students, are disproportionately represented in the emotional disturbance category nationwide. If K-8 schools are

⁷⁷ Annamma, Connor and Ferri, “Touchstone Text, 14.

whiter, it stands to reason that certain disability categories will be more present in these schools. If one of the motivators for the move to K-8 in the SCSD was to keep middle-class white families in the city, perhaps particular bodies (e.g., those labeled with emotional disturbance, a disproportionate number who are also students of color) are less desirable in those spaces.

In addition to being whiter and more affluent on average, K-8 schools in the SCSD were also more inclusive. While far fewer students with disabilities are served in K-8 schools compared to traditional schools, those attending K-8 schools are more likely to be educated in inclusive settings. Said another way, students in K-8 settings are less likely to face segregated placements. It appears that K-8 schools are not only enclaves of racial and class privilege but they also afford disabled students greater opportunities for access to general education and typical peers.

Limitations and Future Research

This spatial, statistical, and historical analysis is only a first step, but it lays an important foundation upon which we can build and layer further analyses, and it illustrates the value in interdisciplinary methods. Although one study cannot tell us the *why* or *how* of these enrollment and inclusion patterns, examining archival sources to document parent and district voices provides a window into the social context and decision-making at the time. Neither can our study account for factors such as the presence or absence of particular programs within these schools that might explain why some disability categories are over- or under-represented—although history tells us that we should not assume that particular programs are placed without intention or purpose. We have also not accounted for parental education and other such markers of privilege that could explain particular placement decisions, nor have we linked these enrollment and inclusion statistics with student outcomes.

Additional research is needed to explore how and why this systemic privilege continues and the role that parental choice and parent advocacy, special education policies and service delivery, and even real estate practices and historical legacies of redlining work in tandem to uphold a system of continued privilege. We intend to pair statistical and spatial analyses with interviews and further analysis of district policies and documents to explore the interplay between policy and practice. We also hope to focus on student movement and placement patterns by analyzing particular case studies of individual schools. We further aim to consider student outcome data in relation to the placement patterns within the district. While many more avenues

can be explored, our current findings illustrate the value of an intersectional and multimodal analysis. Drawing on statistical methods, GIS mapping, and qualitative methods contributes to a more nuanced examination of how school structures and enrollment decisions both reflect and perpetuate complex and intersecting forms of advantage and disadvantage.