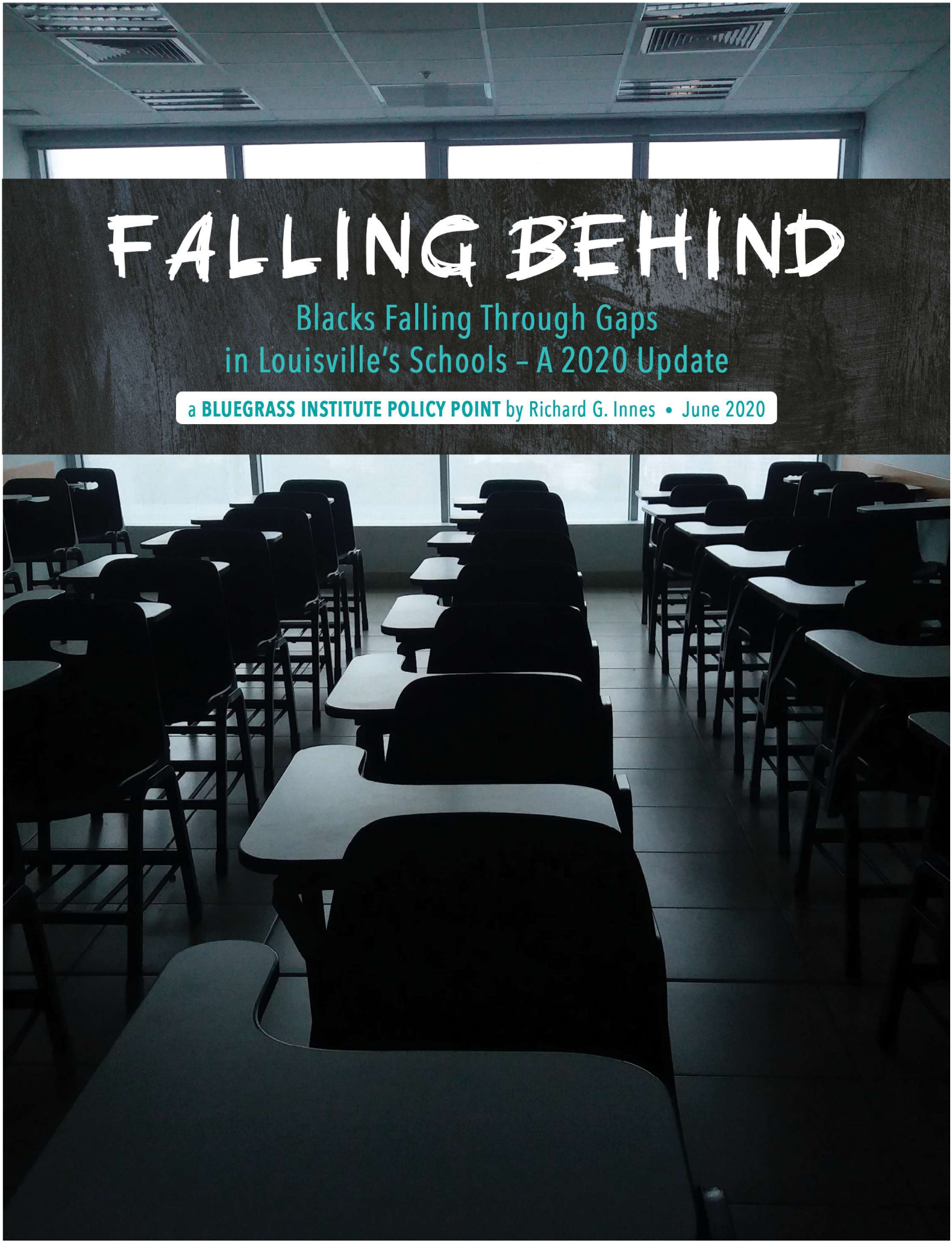
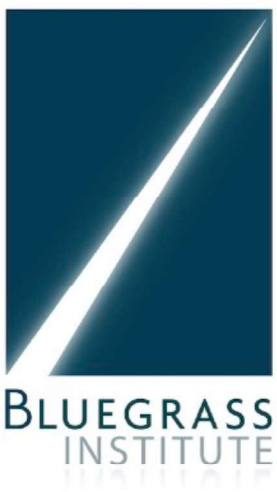


FALLING BEHIND

Blacks Falling Through Gaps in Louisville's Schools – A 2020 Update

a **BLUEGRASS INSTITUTE POLICY POINT** by Richard G. Innes • June 2020



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FALLING BEHIND

Blacks Falling Through Gaps in Louisville's Schools

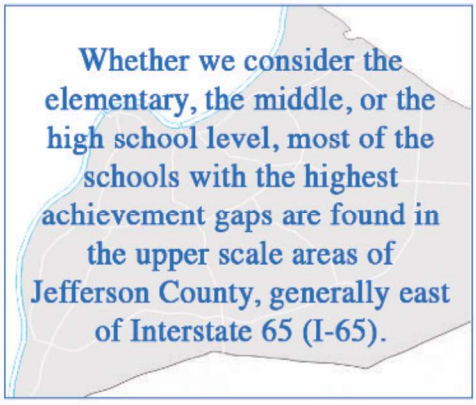
A 2020 Update

By Richard G. Innes

Summary

This Bluegrass Institute Policy Point provides an update to our 2016 report, "Blacks Continue Falling Through Gaps in Louisville's Schools, The 2016 Update."[1] This 2020 update shows that academic math performance and graduation rate information for Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) as of 2019 continue to be highly problematic despite many decades of busing and other expensive efforts trying to improve the situation.

As we found in our 2016 report, the locations of schools with the largest mathematics proficiency-rate achievement gaps continue to be geographic in nature. Whether we consider the elementary, the middle, or the high school level, most of the schools with the highest achievement gaps are found in the upper scale areas of Jefferson County, generally east of Interstate 65 (I-65). These "East Side" schools receive a lot of bused-in black students from West Louisville, so continued high gaps in these schools certainly raise concerns that, despite good intentions, busing isn't really helping students of color.



To be sure, some of the math achievement gaps in the "East Side" are extraordinarily high. Both the Bloom and Norton Commons Elementary schools, to name two examples, posted white minus black achievement gaps of over 50 percentage points in 2019. In fact, despite the fact it's located east of I-65, only 7.3% of Bloom's black students scored proficient or above on the 2019 Kentucky Performance Rating for Educational Progress math assessment – a truly dismal performance.

For comparison, blacks attending the Portland Elementary School, which is solidly located in high-poverty West Louisville, scored 42.9% proficient. Busing a student away from the Portland area might actually be doing harm, not good.

The situation only seems to get worse as students work their way through to the upper grades. A majority of JCPS high schools posted only single-digit math proficiency rates for black students in 2019 testing. These dreadfully disappointing statistics certainly don't provide confidence that decades of busing have really helped.

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[1] Innes, Richard, "Blacks Continue Falling Through Gaps in Louisville's Schools, The 2016 Update," Bluegrass Institute for Public Policy Solutions, February 2016. http://www.bipps.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Blacks-Continue-Falling-Through-Gaps-2016-.pdf.

In addition to the math data, we also update our 2016 report's examination of high school graduation rates, discussing the obvious social promotion to diplomas that's currently occurring in both JCPS and across all of Kentucky. Using a complimentary statistic now called the "Transition Ready Rate," we show that large numbers of graduates don't have the skills needed for success after high school. We additionally show that only looking at the clearly inflated graduation rate statistics can hide some serious equity situations that only become apparent once the Transition Ready situation is also considered.

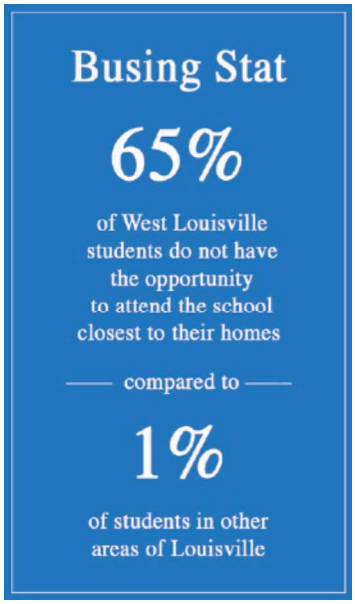
For example, the official four-year high school graduation rate for JCPS blacks in 2019 is 74.9%. However, once we consider the proportion of those blacks who completed high school with an adequate preparation for either college or a living wage career, our "Transition Ready Graduation Rate" statistic shows only a dismal 27% of blacks who entered the ninth grade in the 2015-16 school year graduated on time in 2019 with an education that shows evidence of adequate preparation for the rest of their lives. It's an astonishingly different –and highly disappointing – picture.

We should note that the impetus to update our 2016 report comes from recent presentations by Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) Superintendent Dr. Marty Pollio to the Kentucky Board of Education and his local school board. These presentations indicate that Kentucky's largest school district might finally be getting serious about the chronic lack of equitability for some students in its highly controversial, decades-long school busing system – more formally titled the Student Assignment Plan.

Certainly, the findings in our 2020 update provide impetus to these current discussions about making the JCPS Student Assignment Plan more equitable for the many poor students found in West Louisville and throughout the JCPS system. Clearly, if busing were going to work, it should have happened by now. The data in this update show that current performance remains seriously unacceptable, and it's time for serious changes.

Introduction

The impetus for this report comes from an admission by JCPS Superintendent Dr. Marty Pollio that the district's busing policy has a major inequity.

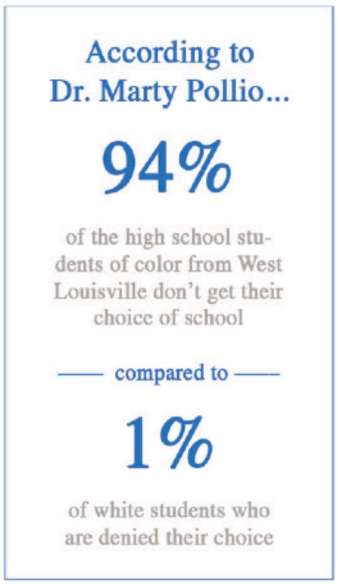


During the Dec. 4, 2019, meeting of the Kentucky Board of Education, Pollio admitted the Student Assignment Plan clearly wasn't working well for residents in one specific area, West Louisville, where most of the racial-minority population resides. Pollio said 65% of the students from West Louisville were not getting a choice to go to a local "Resides" area school, compared to only 1% of the students from other areas of the district being denied such a choice. Instead, and without their desiring it, those West Louisville students were being bused away to other areas of the district, sometimes as far as 22 miles away.[2]

Pollio continued his candor about the Student Assignment Plan in his formal presentation during the state board's April 2020 meeting

[2] This discussion between Seymore and Pollio is covered in greater detail in Innes, Richard, "More on question-stifling with the reconstituted KY Board of Education," a blog which links to the actual video of the state board meeting. https://www.bipps.org/more-on-question-stifling-with-the-reconstituted-ky-board-of-education/.

about progress being made in JCPS on a wide number of projects. Pollio was speaking this time to a totally new state board, which had been installed under dubious – if not outright illegal – circumstances (Gov. Andy Beshear's first executive order after taking office in December 2020 removed all former state board members before their terms expired). Pollio made general comments to the reconstituted state board that students from West Louisville are — unlike other JCPS students — being denied the choice of attending schools closest to their homes.[3] It's been that way for the many decades that busing – supposedly for equity – has been going on in the district.



Still more evidence of real problems with school-choice equity in West Louisville came with Pollio's comments to his local JCPS Board of Education on April 21, 2020. Pollio told his own board that the vast majority of the high school students in West Louisville forced to attend a school away from home that isn't their choice are students of color. Per Pollio, an astonishing 94% of the high school students of color from this high minority region of JCPS don't get their choice of school. In very sharp contrast, only 6% of the white students are denied their choice.[4] Recalling Pollio's comments from the December state board meeting, some of the students of color from West Louisville might be getting forced to take bus rides as long as 22 miles one way each day just to reach their out-of-living-zone high school.

As Polio has now made clear, JCPS' current Student Assignment Plan contains serious inequities as students from West Louisville aren't getting anything close to the kind of school-choice equity offered to residents from other areas of the district.

Does busing help?

The in-equitability of JCPS' Student Assignment Plan might be more palatable if students were performing better after being bused a long way from home. However, evidence examined by the Bluegrass Institute in several earlier reports – the latest being our 2016 Blacks Falling Through Gaps report – indicates that just busing black students to a supposedly better-performing school provides no guarantee they will perform better.

Previous reports published by the institute show that just because a JCPS school does notably better for whites is no guarantee it does well with black students. In fact, there are some cases where blacks being bused to supposedly upper-scale area schools perform worse than black students who attend a school in the "Resides" area for those black students.

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[3] A discussion of Pollio's comments on April 9, 2020 are found in Innes, Richard, "Suppressing KY Board of Education questions regarding oversight of JCPS isn't transparency," a blog which also links to actual video from the state board meeting. https://www.bipps.org/suppressing-ky-board-of-education-questions-regarding-oversight-of-jcps-isnt-transparency/.

[4] Pollio's comments to his own board are discussed in Innes, Richard, "Shocking statistics on JCPS busing bias get more disturbing," a blog which links to the video of the JCPS meeting. https://www.bipps.org/shocking-statistics-on-jcps-busing-bias-get-more-disturbing/.

However, it's been four years since the 2015 data used in the 2016 Blacks Falling Through the Gaps report became available. With busing now under serious discussion, it seems worthwhile to provide updates on math gaps and graduation rates from JCPS using the latest available data from 2019.

The math achievement gaps remain an issue – and it's still geographic

We look first at the picture from the 2018-19 school year's math results from the statewide Kentucky Performance Rating for Educational Progress (KPREP) tests.

In our 2016 report, the institute presented a series of maps of Louisville showing locations of the schools by school level (elementary, middle and high school) where the largest white minus black math achievement gaps were found. In general, the preponderance of schools with the largest gaps, regardless of school level, were found in the upper scale East Side of the district.

Let's update those maps with 2019 test data.

2019 JCPS elementary school achievement gap picture

Figure 1 summarizes the information for those JCPS elementary schools that had math scores reported for both white and black students and had a math proficiency rate gap of at least 25 percentage points. Out of 88 elementary schools that had scores available, the 27 shown on the map had white minus black math proficiency rate achievement gaps over 25 percentage points. Eighteen of these 27 schools are found east of I-65, a rough border between the less wealthy and more wealthy sections of JCPS. Among the eight schools with the very largest achievement gaps – all having gaps exceeding an enormous 40 percentage points – seven are found east of I-65.

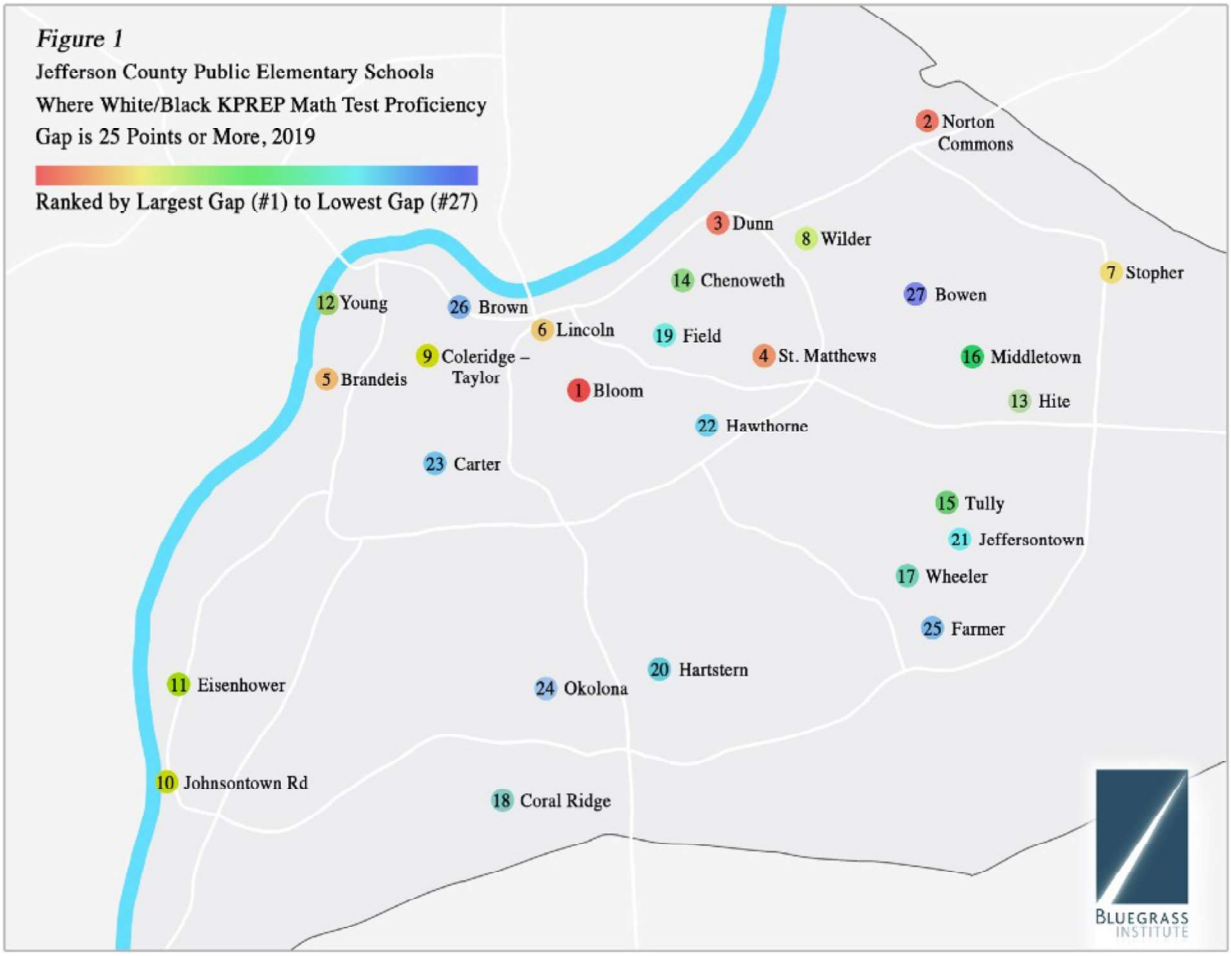
In fact, as we found in our earlier report, the Portland Elementary School – located in high-poverty West Louisville but not shown on the map as its gap is less than 25 percentage points – posted a black math proficiency rate of 42.9% in 2019. Meanwhile, a very East Side JCPS school, Dunn Elementary, posted only a 25.0% proficiency rate for blacks.

Portland Elementary is listed in the Kentucky Department of Education's school report card website[5] as 95.1% economically disadvantaged and 50% African-American. Kennedy is listed as 76.1% economically disadvantaged and 78% African-American. The same website shows Dunn is only 28.1% economically disadvantaged and just 13.4% African-American. Given those statistics, one would expect Dunn to seriously outperform both Portland and Kennedy, but it isn't happening for kids of color.

Neither is Portland the only example. Another West Louisville school, Kennedy Elementary, posted an even higher math proficiency rate for blacks of 50.0%.

So, busing elementary students out of West Louisville to other areas of the district might not actually result in anything approaching equitable education for kids of color – certainly not for those bused to Dunn Elementary School.

[5] The Kentucky Department of Education's School Report Card: https://www.kyschoolreportcard.com/home?year=2019.



The elementary school math-gap data used to assemble Figure 1 comes from Table 1, which covers the gap for all 88 elementary schools in JCPS that had both white and black scores reported in 2018-19. Table 1 – and Tables 2 and 3, which follow later – were created using data from the Kentucky Department of Education's 2018-19 School Report Card Data Set Excel file titled "ACCOUNTABILITY_PROFICIENCY_LEVEL."[6]

[6] The KPREP math proficiency rates come from an Excel file, ACCOUNTABILITY_PROFICIENCY_LEVEL, downloaded from the Kentucky Department of Education's web site upon release in October 2019. https://openhouse.education.ky.gov/Data/Download?file=ACCOUNTABILITY_PROFICIENCY_LEVEL.xlsx&path=SRC%5CDatasets%5C20182019.

Table 1
Jefferson County Public Elementary Schools: KPREP Math Achievement Gaps for Whites Minus Blacks, 2018-19 School Term

School Name	Whites Percent Proficient or More	Blacks Percent Proficient or More	White Minus Black Achievement Gap (Ranking Column)	Rank for Gap (1 = largest gap)
Bloom Elementary	62.0	7.3	54.7	1
Norton Commons Elementary	73.5	21.4	52.1	2
Dunn Elementary	72.3	25.0	47.3	3
St Matthews Elementary	71.1	27.3	43.8	4
Brandeis Elementary	84.0	41.5	42.5	5
Lincoln Elementary Performing Arts	67.8	26.3	41.5	6
Stopher Elementary	73.0	32.4	40.6	7
Wilder Elementary	66.4	26.2	40.2	8
Coleridge-Taylor Montessori Elementary	43.6	6.2	37.4	9
Johnsontown Road Elementary	52.8	18.3	34.5	10
Eisenhower Elementary	57.6	25.4	32.2	11
Young Elementary	42.9	11.4	31.5	12
Hite Elementary	64.8	34.3	30.5	13
Chenoweth Elementary	66.4	36.7	29.7	14
Tully Elementary	75.5	46.2	29.3	15
Middletown Elementary	59.6	30.9	28.7	16
Wheeler Elementary	78.8	50.7	28.1	17
Coral Ridge Elementary	51.3	23.5	27.8	18
Field Elementary	58.7	31.1	27.6	19
Hartstern Elementary	55.7	28.1	27.6	20
Jeffersontown Elementary	47.0	19.6	27.4	21
Hawthorne Elementary	42.5	15.4	27.1	22
Carter Traditional Elementary	68.0	41.3	26.7	23
Okolona Elementary	43.6	17.8	25.8	24
Farmer Elementary	68.8	43.2	25.6	25
J. Graham Brown School	86.7	61.3	25.4	26
Bowen Elementary	75.3	50.0	25.3	27
Lowe Elementary	74.8	50.0	24.8	28
Shelby Traditional Academy	38.8	15.3	23.5	29
Smyrna Elementary	42.2	19.8	22.4	30
Foster Traditional Academy	35.3	12.9	22.4	31

Watterson Elementary	41.5	19.1	22.4	32
Laukhuf Elementary	63.5	41.2	22.3	33
Chancey Elementary	51.4	29.3	22.1	34
Audubon Traditional Elementary	74.0	52.3	21.7	35
Sanders Elementary	43.4	21.7	21.7	36
Bates Elementary	61.7	40.4	21.3	37
Rangeland Elementary	32.4	11.2	21.2	38
Slaughter Elementary	50.0	28.8	21.2	39
Medora Elementary	44.8	24.0	20.8	40
Minors Lane Elementary	23.7	3.5	20.2	41
Cochran Elementary	53.7	34.0	19.7	42
Stonestreet Elementary	43.2	23.5	19.7	43
Luhr Elementary	49.5	29.9	19.6	44
Camp Taylor Elementary	36.8	17.5	19.3	45
Fern Creek Elementary	48.5	29.3	19.2	46
Kennedy Montessori Elementary	40.0	21.7	18.3	47
Jacob Elementary	28.8	10.7	18.1	48
Wilt Elementary	62.4	44.4	18.0	49
Breckinridge-Franklin Elementary	23.3	5.4	17.9	50
Zachary Taylor Elementary	30.4	13.0	17.4	51
Greathouse/Shryock Traditional	93.0	76.5	16.5	52
Alex R. Kennedy Elementary	65.9	50.0	15.9	53
Klondike Lane Elementary	32.8	17.0	15.8	54
Schaffner Traditional Elementary	69.4	54.0	15.4	55
Engelhard Elementary	28.0	12.7	15.3	56
Dixie Elementary	29.6	14.6	15.0	57
Goldsmith Elementary	43.9	29.0	14.9	58
Gutermuth Elementary	33.3	18.5	14.8	59
Norton Elementary	80.3	65.5	14.8	60
Cochrane Elementary	39.7	25.0	14.7	61
Kerrick Elementary	35.2	20.5	14.7	62
Blake Elementary	29.0	14.5	14.5	63
Crums Lane Elementary	38.2	24.0	14.2	64
Auburndale Elementary	45.8	32.7	13.1	65
Atkinson Academy	30.0	17.4	12.6	66
Rutherford Elementary	37.3	24.7	12.6	67
Greenwood Elementary	21.5	9.5	12.0	68
Layne Elementary	27.4	15.8	11.6	69

Hazelwood Elementary	40.4	28.9	11.5	70
Mcferran Preparatory Academy	25.0	13.9	11.1	71
Kenwood Elementary	48.4	38.0	10.4	72
Blue Lick Elementary	46.7	37.1	9.6	73
Mill Creek Elementary	20.0	10.8	9.2	74
Wilkerson Elementary	30.5	21.3	9.2	75
Semple Elementary	23.9	15.7	8.2	76
Wellington Elementary	28.6	20.5	8.1	77
Shacklette Elementary	27.8	20.5	7.3	78
Gilmore Lane Elementary	14.6	8.3	6.3	79
Trunnell Elementary	22.2	16.9	5.3	80
Indian Trail Elementary	33.3	28.0	5.3	81
Price Elementary	16.0	12.9	3.1	82
Watson Lane Elementary	17.8	16.7	1.1	83
Frayser Elementary	3.7	4.3	-0.6	84
Portland Elementary	42.1	42.9	-0.8	85
Fairdale Elementary	34.9	37.5	-2.6	86
Cane Run Elementary	12.5	16.0	-3.5	87
Roosevelt-Perry Elementary	0.0	4.3	-4.3	88
District Overall Average	**53.7**	**21.3**	**32.4**	**N/A**
State Overall Average	**52.8**	**25.5**	**27.3**	**N/A**

Again, note that 88 elementary schools in JCPS had the test data required to compute a white minus black math achievement gap in 2018-19. Several other schools are not shown because they enrolled too few white students to be able to comply with privacy requirements for score reporting.

Of the 88 schools with reported test data, 41 have gaps exceeding 20 percentage points, compared to 40 schools showing similar gaps in our 2016 report. There are 72 schools in 2018-19 with a gap greater than 10 percentage points. Only 67 schools had gaps this large in the 2015 data used for our report in 2016. Eight schools have gaps exceeding an enormous 40 percentage points in 2018-19, which is scant improvement from our 2016 report which showed nine schools with gaps exceeding 40 percentage points.

With so many elementary schools still posting notable achievement gaps in 2018-19, busing clearly has not fixed the math gap in JCPS' elementary schools despite many decades of use.

Also note that among all the schools in Table 1 with white minus black math achievement gaps below 10 percentage points, the gaps are low only because the scores for white students are also low. Each of the low-gap schools has a white math proficiency rate below the JCPS district-wide white average. Most have extremely low white math proficiency rates trending all the way down to Roosevelt-Perry Elementary's zero math proficiency rate for whites, which is just astonishingly bad.

One of the low-gap schools found near the bottom of Table 1, however, merits discussion. It is the before-mentioned Portland Elementary School, where black students score at 42.9% proficient, the 13th-best black score in all JCPS and more than double the district-wide black math average. But Portland is squarely located in West Louisville, the high-poverty region of the district.

> (Note: Portland is listed on its website as having a magnet status yet requires no academic performance requirements to attend. This is different from some higher-level JCPS magnet schools like duPont Manual High, which includes prior academic performance as part of its admissions process.)

Ironically, black students who live in the Portland local "Resides" area but are bused away to another part of JCPS might be better off staying home and going to Portland, instead.

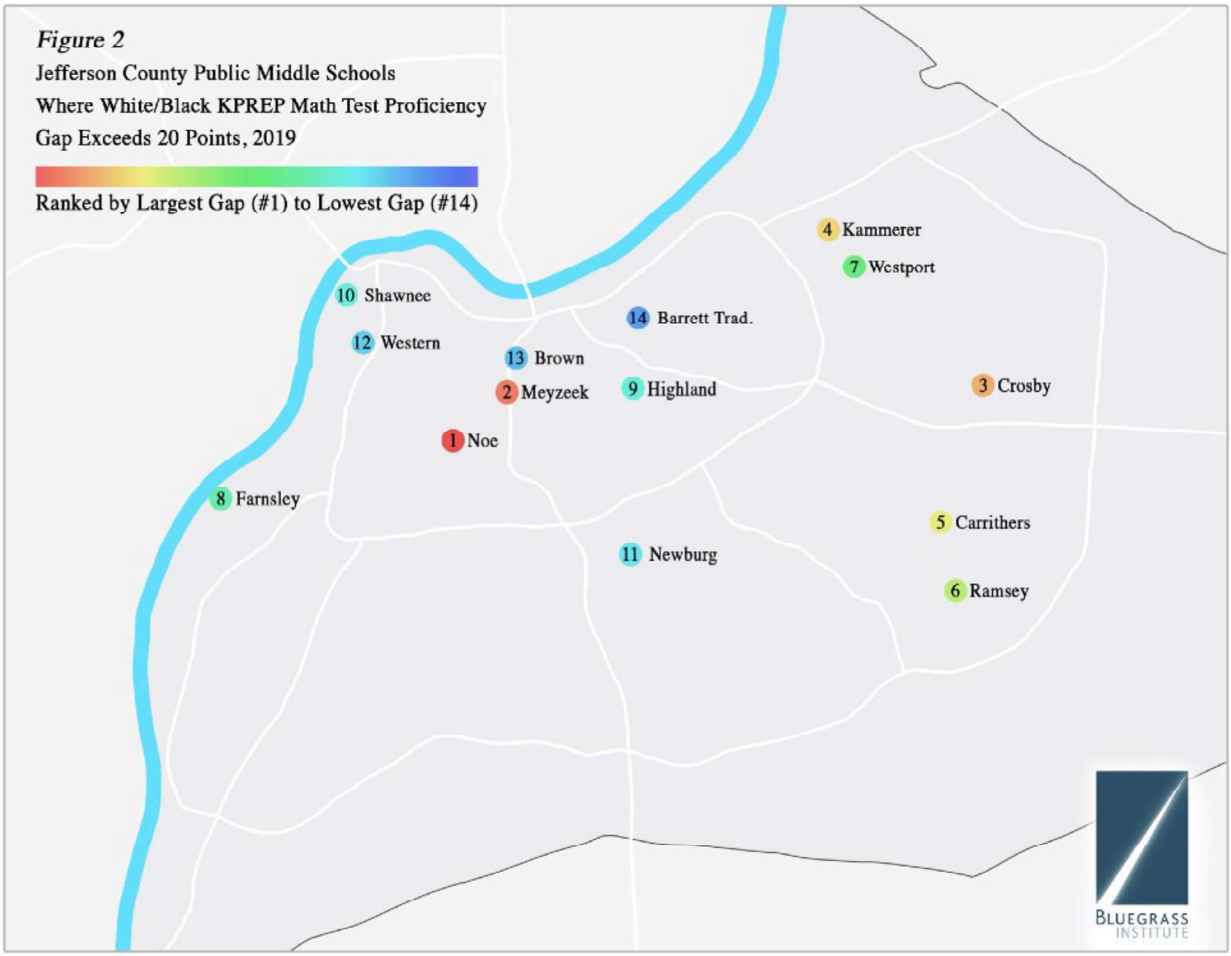
Middle school gap picture

There are 25 middle schools in JCPS with both white and black math proficiency rates posted for 2018-19. Figure 2 shows location information for the 14 JCPS middle schools with gaps larger than 20 percentage points. Only four of the 14 are found west of I-65.

Note on Figure 2 that Crosby Middle School is located far to the east. West Louisville's Johnson Traditional Middle School, located almost due south of Western Middle School and due west of Meyzeek Middle School, isn't shown since it doesn't have a large gap. However, Johnson's blacks had a math proficiency rate of 30.5% in 2019 while Crosby's only scored 18.2% proficient.

This is more notable because JCPS informs us that "Traditional Middle Schools" like Johnson in the district have no academic-based admission requirement.

Western Middle School is another place where blacks might be better off staying home. Despite its large white minus black math achievement gap, blacks in Western scored 30.4% proficient, nearly equaling Johnson's score. So, as we saw with the elementary schools, at least in some cases West Louisville black students might do better by not taking a long bus ride to an East Side school like Crosby.



The data used to create Figure 2, which includes those schools that had both white and black math scores reported in 2018-19, can be found in Table 2 below. Again, the source for Table 2 is the Kentucky Department of Education's ACCOUNTABILITY_PROFICIENCY_LEVEL Excel file for 2018-19.[7]

[7] See Footnote 6 for the location data for this Excel File.

Table 2 Jefferson County Public Middle Schools: KPREP Math Achievement Gaps for Whites Minus Blacks, 2018-19 School Term				
School Name	**Whites Percent Proficient or More**	**Blacks Percent Proficient or More**	**White Minus Black Achievement Gap (Ranking Column)**	**Rank for Gap (1 = largest gap)**
Noe Middle	83.6	25.8	57.8	1
Meyzeek Middle	75.3	20.6	54.7	2
Crosby Middle	69.2	18.2	51.0	3
Kammerer Middle	57.8	11.7	46.1	4
Carrithers Middle	45.4	16.7	28.7	5
Ramsey Middle	42.6	14.8	27.8	6
Westport Middle	46.1	18.4	27.7	7
Farnsley Middle	51.8	25.6	26.2	8
Highland Middle	35.2	9.3	25.9	9
The Academy @ Shawnee	41.7	16.7	25.0	10
Newburg Middle	45.3	20.6	24.7	11
Western Middle School for the Arts	54.2	30.4	23.8	12
J. Graham Brown School	91.8	68.2	23.6	13
Barret Traditional Middle	76.9	55.7	21.2	14
Johnson Traditional Middle	49.3	30.5	18.8	15
Jefferson County Traditional Middle	73.5	55.0	18.5	16
Lassiter Middle	32.2	15.6	16.6	17
Robert Frost Sixth-Grade Academy	29.9	14.4	15.5	18
Thomas Jefferson Middle	20.0	6.6	13.4	19
Frederick Law Olmsted Academy South	38.7	25.7	13.0	20
Marion C. Moore School	22.8	10.5	12.3	21
Conway Middle	19.1	6.9	12.2	22
Knight Middle	18.0	6.6	11.4	23
Stuart Academy	16.6	7.1	9.5	24
Frederick Law Olmsted Academy North	13.6	6.9	6.7	25

District Overall Average	**48.3**	**19.1**	**29.2**	**N/A**
State Overall Average	**50.7**	**22.2**	**28.5**	**N/A**

It's hard to see much good news in Table 2. Nine schools do have white math proficiency rates exceeding 50%; however, offsetting this is the fact that fewer than one in three whites score proficient in eight schools.

While the overall math proficiency rate for whites in the district is rather disappointing after 29 years of expensive education reform in Kentucky, the district's blacks fare much worse, with less than one in five scoring proficient. Only three JCPS middle schools have black math proficiency rates above 50%, but then there's a huge performance drop with all of the remaining schools showing black math proficiency rates no better than 30.5% – less than one in three. In the 2019 data, 15 of the 25 schools have black math proficiency rates below 20%. In our 2016 report, 15 of 27 middle schools had similar low scores for blacks. In 2019, six schools have abysmally low, single-digit math proficiency rates for black students compared to the 2015 data showing only five JCPS middle schools had single-digit black math proficiency rates.

When it comes to the achievement gaps, 23 out of the 25 middle schools post double-digit white minus black math proficiency rate gaps, a decay from the 2015 situation when only 19 out of 27 schools posted double-digit white minus black math proficiency rate gaps. A solid majority, 14 of 25 schools, in the 2018-19 school term post gaps exceeding 20 percentage points. Only 12 schools posted such high gaps in 2015. Even the selective J. Graham Brown School has a gap exceeding 20 percentage points, up from its 18.9-point gap in 2015. Three middle schools have simply enormous gaps exceeding 50 percentage points in 2019 while in 2015 only one school posted a 50-point plus gap.

Clearly, as with the elementary schools, busing certainly hasn't worked for JCPS middle school black students despite decades of use and 30 years of promises to address wide gaps following passage of the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 (KERA). In fact, the overall picture seems to have decayed over the last four years.

High school math gaps

Figure 3 shows the locations of JCPS high schools with white minus black math proficiency rate gaps of more than 20 percentage points. The story looks about the same as for lower grade schools.

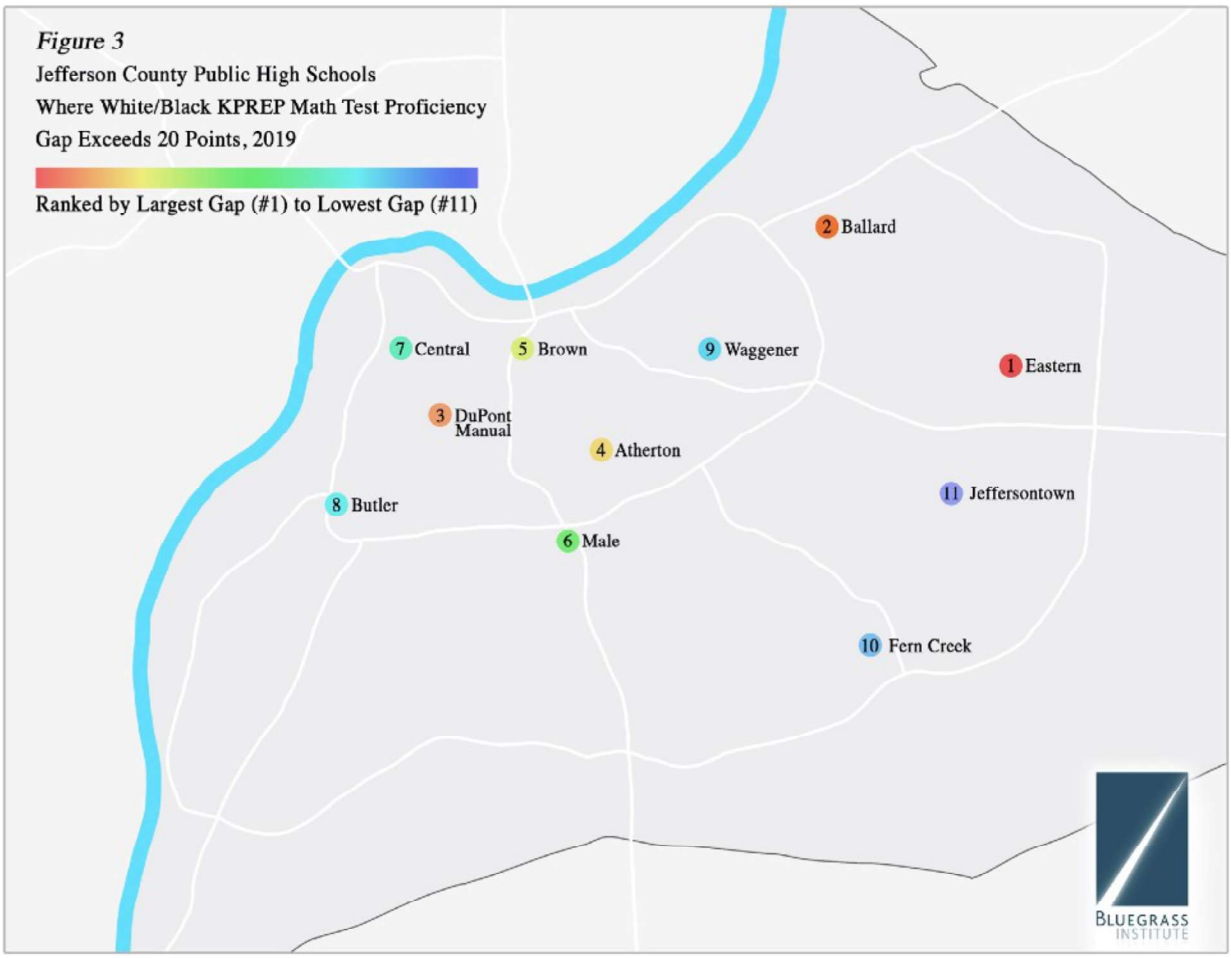
Again, most of the big white minus black math proficiency rate gap schools are found east of I-65.

Table 3 shows even the exclusive duPont Manual High School, a highly selective magnet school, posts an extensive white minus black achievement gap of 35.9 percentage points.

To be fair, Manual's black students have the highest (though not terribly impressive) math proficiency rate (51.7%) for blacks in any high school in the district. Meanwhile, however, Manual is a very exclusive school and probably enrolls the best-performing blacks in the entire district. The fact that only about half of its black students score proficient in math causes major concern.

Our concerns grow even more after realizing that Table 3 lists black math proficiency rates in the majority of JCPS high schools as single-digit only in 2019. Averaged across the entire district, even with Manual's scores included, the average black math proficiency rate in KPREP testing was only 13.5% in 2019. Clearly, busing isn't doing anything notable for blacks in JCPS high schools.

For more insight about whether the current Student Assignment Plan works, consider that blacks in Jeffersontown High located in the far East End of the JCPS district had a math proficiency rate of only 10.1% in 2019. Compare that to West Louisville's Central High School where blacks scored 18.5% proficient. Neither school gets any bragging rights with scores that low, but Central is outperforming Jeffersontown, the most easterly located school in JCPS, which sits a long and expensive bus ride away from the West End.



We see more when we examine Table 3, which is the source used to create Figure 3. As with our earlier tables, the source for proficiency rates shown in Table 3 is the Kentucky Department of Education's ACCOUNTABILITY_PROFICIENCY_LEVEL Excel file for 2018-19.[8]

[8] See Footnote 6 for the location data for this Excel File.

Table 3 Jefferson County Public High Schools: KPREP Math Achievement Gaps for Whites Minus Blacks, 2018-19 School Term				
School Name	**Whites Percent Proficient or More**	**Blacks Percent Proficient or More**	**White Minus Black Achievement Gap (Ranking Column)**	**Rank for Gap (1 = largest gap)**
Eastern High	62.2	15.6	46.6	1
Ballard High	65.1	20.0	45.1	2
duPont Manual High	87.6	51.7	35.9	3
Atherton High	63.2	29.7	33.5	4
J. Graham Brown School	81.3	50.0	31.3	5
Louisville Male High	67.9	39.9	28.0	6
Central High Magnet Career Academy	45.0	18.5	26.5	7
Butler Traditional High	43.9	18.3	25.6	8
Waggener High	30.5	7.0	23.5	9
Fern Creek High	31.4	9.1	22.3	10
Jeffersontown High	32.0	10.1	21.9	11
The Academy @ Shawnee	27.3	8.7	18.6	12
Pleasure Ridge Park High	24.0	6.2	17.8	13
Valley High	18.9	2.5	16.4	14
Marion C. Moore School	18.9	4.5	14.4	15
Southern High	18.5	6.8	11.7	16
Iroquois High	9.5	1.2	8.3	17
Seneca High	18.0	9.7	8.3	18
Western High	12.5	4.5	8.0	19
Doss High	10.9	4.2	6.7	20
District Overall Average	**44.6**	**13.5**	**31.1**	**N/A**
State Overall Average	**39.0**	**13.5**	**25.5**	**N/A**

In Table 3, we find 11 of the 20 high schools have gaps exceeding 20 percentage points in 2019.

Those few schools in Table 3 with low gaps of only a single digit have those low gaps only because white math performance is – even being charitable – just abysmal.

Iroquois High School manages to turn in extremely low, single-digit math proficiency rates for both races in 2019, a notable decay from the school's performance in 2015. The 2015 data used in our earlier Blacks Falling Through Gaps report shows whites in Iroquois were 30.6% proficient in math and blacks scored 16.7% proficient.

> Note: Some concerns exist about comparing KPREP high school math scores for 2015 to 2019 since different tests were used. The 2015 KPREP high school math test scores were derived from the ACT, Inc.'s Quality Core Algebra II test.[9] In 2019, the math test used was the math portion of the ACT college entrance test.[10] Though both are from ACT, Inc., they aren't the same. In both cases, raw scores from the tests were adjusted into a KPREP scoring scale, and in theory the two test results should be linked and equated to provide continuity. However, such linking and equating is challenging, at best; hence our caution about comparability. Still, based on the data available, it appears that Iroquois' math performance has not moved in a good direction since our earlier report.

Doss High School, listed at the bottom of Table 3, also declined in both white and black math scores since 2015.

Overall, a majority of the 20 JCPS high schools, 11 of them, turned in only single-digit black math proficiency rates in 2019, a profoundly disturbing performance.

Summing up on the math gaps

Regardless of school level, busing clearly isn't a successful option for black students in West Louisville or for in JCPS in general. If more of the students being bused across the city were able to stay in schools closer to home, perhaps lower fatigue due to much shorter bus rides and improved family support would permit them greater academic success.

Currently, the math performances and gaps in JCPS are simply unacceptable and generally seem declined from what we saw in the earlier 2015 data. After many decades of these unacceptable gaps, math performance in JCPS indicates it's time to admit that, at the very least, busing isn't' helpful.

Graduation data also provides insights

We updated one more type of data originally discussed in our 2016 report – high school graduation rate information.

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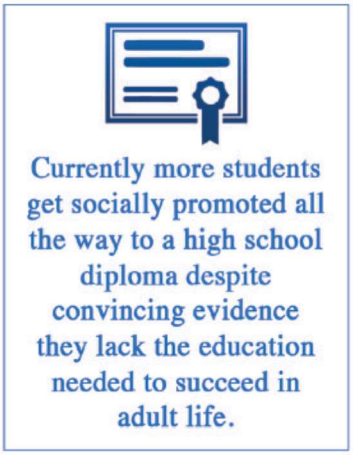
[9] See Page 5 in of the Kentucky Department of Education's "BRIEFING PACKET, STATE RELEASE, Unbridled Learning: College/Career-Readiness for All, 2014-15 Results," October 1, 2015. http://openhouse.education.ky.gov/Data/Download?file=Unbridled%20Learning%20Briefing%20Packet%20State%20Release%202015%20FINAL%202015_09_29%20v2.pdf&path=What%27s%20new.

[10] See Page 5 in the Kentucky Department of Education's "BRIEFING PACKET, STATE RELEASE, 2018-2019 Assessment and Accountability Results," October 1, 2019. https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/KYDE/2019/09/27/file_attachments/1293653/Media%20Briefing%20Packet%20State%20Release%202018-2019%20FINAL.pdf.

Using a better statistic

As we did in the 2016 report, we compare officially reported high school graduation rates to an alternative and more revealing statistic, which we now call the Transition Ready Graduation Rate. We do this because careful consideration of Kentucky's official high school graduation rates indicates that currently more students get socially promoted all the way to a high school diploma despite convincing evidence they lack the education needed to succeed in adult life.

That evidence of inflation in diploma handouts now comes from a relatively new, official statistic, the Transition Ready or Transition Readiness Rate, which has replaced the College and/or Career Ready statistic used in 2015. Using this transition data, we can see that while a high percentage of students are now graduating from high school, only a disturbingly low percentage of those graduates meet even one of about a dozen different ways a student can be considered ready to successfully transition to the next phase of their lives.



It should be noted that both the now discontinued College and/or Career Ready statistic and the new Transition Ready statistic were intended to measure whether high school graduates had obtained sufficient education to be ready to transition to either college or to a living wage career.

The newer Transition Ready statistic features more ways a student can qualify as either ready for college or a career while dropping some of the more questionable college placement tests used in the older College and/or Career Ready statistic. Those old college placement tests might have been less demanding than the current college readiness assessments, so caution is required when comparing the data across the years.

In any event, the actual 4-Year graduation statistic hasn't changed over the same time interval, so we examine that first.

Examining the 2019 graduation data

Table 4 below contains several different types of data for 2019. The first four data columns contain the officially reported high school graduation rates and the officially reported Transition Ready Rate statistics for white and black students in JCPS and for all students in Kentucky. This data warrants some explanation.

The official high school graduation rate

The officially reported high school graduation rate is formally called the "4-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate" (ACGR) and is based on a specific formula directed by federal law. According to the Kentucky Department of Education:

> ***"The '4-year adjusted cohort graduation rate' is defined as the number of students who graduate in four years with a regular high school diploma divided by the number of students***

who entered high school four years earlier adjusting for transfers in and out, émigrés and deceased students."[11]

Transition readiness

The Transition Ready Rate shows the percentage of graduates who successfully met at least one of a dozen different official criteria indicating they're truly ready for the next event in their lives, be that college or a living wage career. The Kentucky Department of Education explains:

> ***"…transition ready students should be able to enter and succeed in entry level postsecondary courses without remediation or enter the workforce possessing the knowledge and technical skills needed for employment in their desired career field. At high school, in order to be transition ready, a student must earn a high school diploma and meet one type of readiness (Academic or Career). In addition, for English Learners, performance on the English Language proficiency assessment as measured by WIDA ACCESS for ELLs must be met for any student who received English Language Services during high school."***[12]

A student can demonstrate transition readiness in several different ways such as obtaining adequate scores on the ACT or a college placement test, thereby avoiding any required college remedial course work. Students can also meet muster in other academically oriented ways, including achieving adequate grades in a dual credit (high school + college) course, getting high enough Advanced Placement scores or by achieving acceptable grades in the International Baccalaureate program. There are also career-oriented ways to qualify, such as earning an approved industry certificate (such as a welder's certificate), successfully passing career and technical education end-of-program exams, completing an approved apprenticeship or completing exceptional work experience.[13] Graduates only need to qualify under just one of these numerous criteria to be scored Transition Ready.

Unfortunately, back when our 2016 report was created, a somewhat different statistic called the College and/or Career Ready rate was being used instead of the current Transition Readiness rate.[14] Because ways to qualify as College and/or Career Ready differ in a number of ways from the current statistic, comparison of the 2019 statistics to the 2015 data is problematic. So, we make only limited comparisons here.

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[11] The department's definition: https://education.ky.gov/AA/Reports/Pages/Graduation-Rate.aspx.

[12] The department's information about Transition Readiness: https://education.ky.gov/AA/Acct/Pages/Transition-Readiness.aspx.

[13] The Transition Readiness criteria are discussed in the Kentucky Department of Education's "BRIEFING PACKET, STATE RELEASE, 2018-2019 Assessment and Accountability Results," October 1, 2019. https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/KYDE/2019/09/27/file_attachments/1293653/Media%20Briefing%20Packet%20State%20Release%202018-2019%20FINAL.pdf.

[14] A discussion of the ways graduates could meet the College and/or Career Ready statistic in 2015 is found in notes beneath Table 10 on Page 12 of the Kentucky Department of Education's "BRIEFING PACKET, STATE RELEASE, Unbridled Learning: College/Career-Readiness for All, 2014-15 Results," October 1, 2015. http://openhouse.education.ky.gov/Data/Download?file=Unbridled%20Learning%20Briefing%20Packet%20State%20Release%202015%20FINAL%202015_09_29%20v2.pdf&path=What%27s%20new.

Looking at the official data

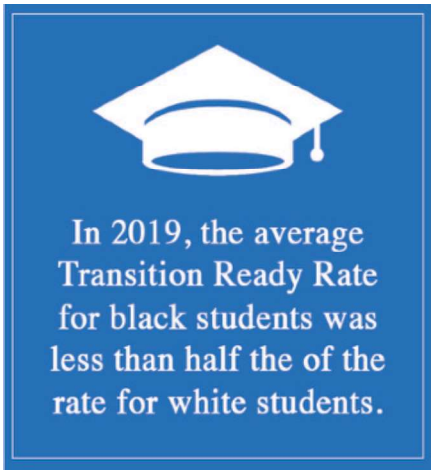
Table 4 lists officially reported graduation and transition-readiness rates along with some additional calculations from that data, including our Transition Ready Graduation Rate for both white and black students. Data sources are listed at the bottom of the table.

Table 4

Jefferson County Public Schools: Official High School Adjusted Cohort 4-Year Graduation Rates, Official Transition Ready Rates, Transition Ready High School Graduation Rates, and Differences, White and Black Students, 2019 Graduation Year

		Officially Reported Data				Calculated Data					
District/State	School Name/State	White 4-Yr Grad Rate	Black 4-Yr Grad Rate	White Transition Ready Rate	Black Transition Ready Rate	White Transition Ready Grad Rate	Black Transition Ready Grad Rate	Difference in Transition Ready Grad Rate (Sort Column)	Whites, Difference in 4 Yr Grad Rate and Trans Ready Grad Rate	Blacks, Difference in 4 Yr Grad Rate and Trans Ready Grad Rate	Difference in Differences for Grad Rates, Black Minus White Rate
Jefferson County	Eastern High	93.9	73.6	80.9	36.1	76.0	26.6	49.4	17.9	47.0	29.1
Jefferson County	Atherton High	97.1	93.8	77.0	38.1	74.8	35.7	39.0	22.3	58.1	35.7
Jefferson County	Southern High	89.9	87.6	62.2	23.8	55.9	20.8	35.1	34.0	66.8	32.8
Jefferson County	Louisville Male High	98.3	100.0	88.6	54.7	87.1	54.7	32.4	11.2	45.3	34.1
Jefferson County	Ballard High	94.1	91.9	78.1	45.3	73.5	41.6	31.9	20.6	50.3	29.7
Jefferson County	Fairdale High	92.1	74.5	63.0	39.1	58.0	29.1	28.9	34.1	45.4	11.3
Jefferson County	Fern Creek High	89.9	85.4	64.4	36.8	57.9	31.4	26.5	32.0	54.0	22.0
Jefferson County	Jeffersontown High	89.6	78.9	72.0	48.8	64.5	38.5	26.0	25.1	40.4	15.3
Jefferson County	Western High	81.8	76.9	50.0	19.4	40.9	14.9	26.0	40.9	62.0	21.1
Jefferson County	Marion C. Moore School	82.1	89.7	65.4	31.2	53.7	28.0	25.7	28.4	61.7	33.3
Jefferson County	Waggener High	87.3	84.5	61.7	33.6	53.9	28.4	25.5	33.4	56.1	22.7
Jefferson County	Valley High	82.8	82.1	60.4	31.7	50.0	26.0	24.0	32.8	56.1	23.3
Jefferson County	duPont Manual High	100.0	100.0	93.8	72.9	93.8	72.9	20.9	6.2	27.1	20.9
Jefferson County	Butler Traditional High	97.0	98.8	72.9	51.2	70.7	50.6	20.1	26.3	48.2	21.9
Jefferson County	J. Graham Brown School	100.0	100.0	86.5	66.7	86.5	66.7	19.8	13.5	33.3	19.8
Jefferson County	Pleasure Ridge Park High	90.4	89.3	55.3	35.3	50.0	31.5	18.5	40.4	57.8	17.4
Jefferson County	Doss High	82.9	84.5	38.4	21.4	31.8	18.1	13.8	51.1	66.4	15.4
Jefferson County	Seneca High	80.9	83.1	51.6	37.3	41.7	31.0	10.7	39.2	52.1	12.9
Jefferson County	The Academy @ Shawnee	75.9	72.1	32.4	20.0	24.6	14.4	10.2	51.3	57.7	6.4
Jefferson County	Iroquois High	64.3	75.9	23.2	11.6	14.9	8.8	6.1	49.4	67.1	17.7
Jefferson County	**---District Total---**	**84.4**	**79.4**	**68.6**	**34.0**	**57.9**	**27.0**	**30.9**	**26.5**	**52.4**	**25.9**
State	**---State Total---**	**92.1**	**83.2**	**70.6**	**38.1**	**65.0**	**31.7**	**33.3**	**27.1**	**51.5**	**24.4**
Data Sources	Graduation Rates	https://openhouse.education.ky.gov/Data/Download?file=GRADUATION_RATE.xlsx&path=SRC%5CDatasets%5C20182019									
	Transition Ready Rates	https://openhouse.education.ky.gov/Data/Download?file=TRANSITION_READINESS_ACCOUNTABILITY.xlsx&path=SRC%5CDatasets%5C20182019									

Overall, the district-wide 4-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR) for whites was 84.4% and it was 79.4% for blacks. Back in 2015, the official ACGR was 80.1% for the district's whites and 76.5% for the blacks. Thus, looking at the official rates indicates some progress for both races, but the whites improved more, thus slightly increasing the gap, as well. Also, for both years, the white versus black differences in the official graduation rates are not terribly notable.



In sharp contrast to the official graduation rates, Table 4 shows the differences across JCPS for the official 2019 Transition Ready Rates are dramatic, and the rates themselves are also often disturbingly low, especially for black students.

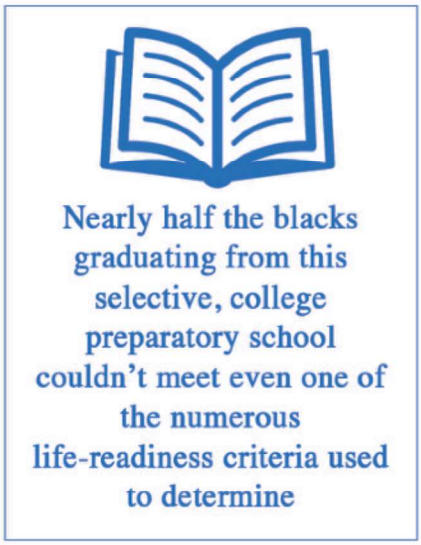
The average white Transition Ready Rate for the entire JCPS district was only 68.6% in 2019, but for blacks it was much lower at only 34.0%, less than half the white rate. In other words, only about one in three black JCPS high school graduates in 2019 got an education that likely prepared them for what they want/need to do next in their lives.

Of note, the College and/or Career Ready Rate for whites back in 2015 was higher at 74.5% and it was 44.8% for blacks, though,

again, we note that the statistic used in 2015 is different from the current Transition Ready statistic found in the 2019 data.

The 2019 graduation picture becomes even more disturbing when we examine official data for individual schools.

Louisville Male High School, whose website proclaims it is a college preparatory magnet,[15] has high official graduation rates for both whites and blacks. In fact, the black graduation rate of 100% is actually slightly higher than the white rate of 98.3%. However, the Transition Ready rates are 88.6% for whites but only 54.7% for blacks. Essentially, nearly half of the blacks graduating from this selective, college preparatory school couldn't meet even one of the numerous life-readiness criteria used to determine transition readiness. That most notably includes failing to get adequate scores on both college entrance and placement exams. This certainly is quite a concern for a school claiming to be a college preparatory institution.



Further examining Transition Ready rates by school, we find the top rate for whites is duPont Manual's at 93.8% and the lowest white rate is in Iroquois High where only 23.2% of the 2019 graduates were ready for what would come next in their lives.

For black students, the best rate for transition readiness was duPont Manual at 72.9% while the lowest rate of 11.6% was found in Iroquois High.

The statewide gaps between white and black Transition Ready rates are similarly substantial and much larger than the statewide difference in the white and black 4-Year graduation rates.

Clearly, the difference between just graduating and actually being ready for life in Kentucky and in JCPS is significant – a situation not revealed when only the official high school graduation rate statistics are considered.

A more revealing graduation statistic – The Transition Ready Graduation Rate

To get a more useful measure of real graduation success, we multiply the two statistics – the 4-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (AFGR) and the Transition Ready Rate – together to create our "Transition Ready Graduation Rate." The Transition Ready Graduation Rate shows the percentage of entering ninth-grade students who successfully graduate on time after four years in high school and are ready to take on the next event in their lives – either more education or a living wage career.

The Transition Ready Graduation Rate calculation uses essentially the same process used to generate our "Effective High School Graduation Rate" statistic in the 2016 report on the gaps. Those desiring more details should refer to the earlier report for an expanded explanation of the calculation.

[15] See: https://www.jefferson.kyschools.us/schools/profiles/louisville-male.

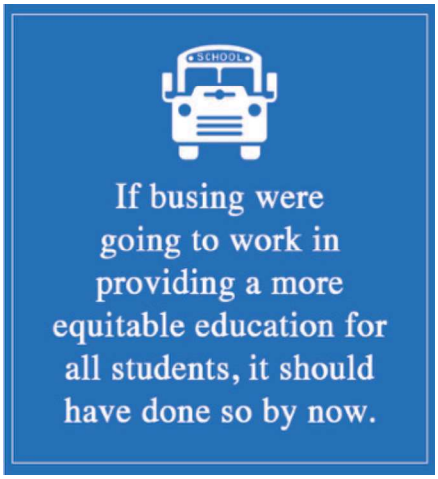
Comparing the Transition Ready Graduation Rate to the officially reported ACGR

Major differences sometimes exist between the percentages of students receiving a diploma and those getting credible preparation for adult life.

Refer again to Table 4. Recall that Male High School actually shows a slightly higher official 4-Year graduation rate for blacks (100%) than for whites (98.3%). However, note that Male's white Transition Ready rate is much higher than that of blacks (88.6% versus only 54.7%). Using these numbers to calculate the white and black Transition Ready Graduation Rates reveals 87.1% of the whites graduate ready compared to only 54.7% of blacks. These sharp differences highlight how social promotion to a diploma is getting out of hand in Kentucky and JCPS. Blacks are falling through graduation gaps while the wrong picture gets painted and serious problems with education equity remain hidden by only considering official graduation rates.

Continuing in Table 4, reading along to the right side of the data for Male High, we see the difference between the two graduation rates is only 11.2 percentage points for white students while the difference for black students is *much* larger at 45.3 percentage points. This indicates a very sharp disconnect in one of JCPS' most competitive magnet high schools between the quality of high school diplomas earned by whites versus those earned by blacks.

The duPont Manual High School, JCPS' other top high school, shows a somewhat similar, though less extreme, pattern. Manual reports it graduated 100% of both its white and black students, but the Transition Ready rates vary considerably. While 93.8% of the whites were transition-ready, only 72.9% of the black graduates were similarly prepared. In the end, the difference between the official graduation rate and the Transition Ready Graduation Rate at Manual High was only 6.2 percent for whites but 27.1% for blacks. As with Male, this difference implies the standards for blacks to graduate at Manual are lower than for whites. Both whites and blacks get paper, but not the same educations. That's not equitable.



At the other end of the spectrum, Iroquois High School claims an already-disappointing black graduation rate of 75.9%. Yet, when we calculate a Transition Ready Graduation Rate for Iroquois' blacks, it's only an abysmal 8.8%. Incredibly, the white Transition Ready Graduation Rate is a bit higher at 14.9% even though the official graduation rate for whites is actually lower than the black graduation rate at Iroquois. So, as with higher-performing schools, even Iroquois shows a tendency to hand out more dubious diplomas to blacks than to whites.

When comparing the data in Table 4 to some of the high schools with large math gaps in Figure 3, notice that Eastern – a long bus ride from West Louisville – also ranks at the very top for the difference between its white and black Transition Ready Graduation Rates. In 2019, the Transition Ready Graduation Rates for whites and blacks were 76.0% and 26.6%, respectively. Also, notice on the right side of Table 4 that Eastern had a much larger difference between its official black graduation rate and its Transition Ready High School Graduation Rate than did its whites had. Again, this points to notably different graduation standards that shortchange black students.

Conclusion

Which brings us back to the busing question.

Considering the glaringly different standards involving levels of life-preparation for white and black students, JCPS blacks clearly fare poorly despite intensive busing going on since the 1970s.

In closing, the academic performance in JCPS is simply unacceptable. Related to that, if busing were going to work in providing a more equitable education for all students, it should have done so by now, but that clearly hasn't happened. It's time to look at more rational education approaches which make schools equal whether they're in West or East JCPS, and busing doesn't look like a viable option to improve the situation.

— Richard G. Innes is an education analyst for the Bluegrass Institute, Kentucky's free-market think tank (www.bipps.org). Reach him at dinnes@freedomkentucky.com..

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