

Disparity continues in Southeast Texas public schools: An eight-year study

Dr. Richard Lee Pollock

*Ph.D. Health Sciences & M.S. Biology Lamar State College-Port Arthur
P. O. Box 310 Port Arthur, Texas 77641-0310 USA*

ABSTRACT: The aim of this eight-year study was to compare the grades of African American, Caucasian, Hispanic-Latino, and Asian descent college students to determine if significant differences in grades still occur after 65 years of Brown versus Board of Education decision. Data indicates that African American and Hispanic-Latino students still fall significantly behind the other races when it comes to studying to make the “grade” in Southeast Texas. African American and Hispanic-Latino students need access to middle schools and high schools that are highly ranked to prepare them for college and then earning the “high paying” jobs. Bussing might be needed to transport minority students to Lumberton, Nederland, and Port Neches-Groves, and Bridge City High Schools to desegregate and equalize learning abilities for all students in Southeast Texas.

KEYWORDS: African American student, Brown versus Board of Education, Desegregation, Kruskal-Wallis test, Southeast Texas

I. INTRODUCTION

In 1954, the United States Supreme Court, in the landmark the decision of Brown versus Board of Education, declared the concept of separate-but-equal unconstitutional in the field of public education, thereby presenting a racially divided nation with work to desegregate its public schools [1]. Subsequent lower courts required school districts to “desegregate” their public schools [2]. Southeast Texas including Beaumont, Port Arthur, and Orange were forced to desegregate their public schools with an aggressive effort to cut off federal funds, as well as threats of litigation. The Port Arthur Independent School District, along with thousands of other school districts, continued to operate a dual system of segregated education until forced to do otherwise by the federal government [1].

During the 1960s and 1970s, several important developments occurred which changed the character of the campaign to desegregate the schools in Texas. Of utmost importance during this period was the participation of a variety of interest groups in the campaign to desegregate public schools [3]. After the Brown versus Board of Education decision, southern school districts balked and evaded, but between 1965 and 1975 they went from being the most segregated to the most integrated public-school districts in the country [4]. The Supreme Court stated that lower federal courts should consider all relevant factors such as the physical conditions of the school buildings, transportation systems, difficulties in revising school districts and attendance zones, and other necessary local laws when creating a remedy and considering any plans by the school districts to remedy illegal segregation [5]. Southeast Texas desegregated its public schools by merging their middle and high schools. Port Arthur Memorial High School was established in August 2002 after a merger of Thomas Jefferson High School, Lincoln High School (mainly African American), and Stephen F. Austin High School. The campus of West Orange-Stark High School was constructed in 1966, as a part of the West Orange Independent School District (ISD). West Orange ISD and Orange ISD which had Litcher-Stark High School, consolidated 1967. In 1977, the two campuses consolidated. Forest Park High School in Beaumont, Texas, was one of three high schools in the South Park Independent School District, along with South Park High School and the majority black Hebert High School. In 1982, Forest Park High School was merged with Hebert to form West Brook Senior High School in order to achieve racial integration. South Park High School was also merged into West Brook, which now occupies the former Forest Park campus.

Sixty-five years have passed since the Supreme Court outlawed racial segregation in the nation's public schools. Has the 1954 ruling of desegregation equalized learning ability between African American students and Caucasian students in 2019 Southeast Texas? The aim of this study was to compare grades of African American, Caucasian, Hispanic-Latino, and Asian descent students to determine if significant differences in grades still occur. The research question:

After 65 years of Brown versus Board of Education ruling; is there any significant differences between African American students' grades and Caucasian, Hispanic-Latino, and Asian descent grades in Southeast Texas?

II. METHODS

Different college students (N=886) were graded for a period of eight years in a local community college in Southeast Texas from 2011 to 2018. The courses graded were biology anatomy & physiology I & II labs and biology nutrition-diet therapy. The grades included A=90-100, B=80-89.9, C=70-79.9, D=60-69.9 and F=below 60. No curves nor extra credit were given during the eight years and students who dropped the courses during the semester were not counted in this study. The students included 182 Hispanic-Latino, 459 Caucasian, 57 Asian descent, and 188 African Americans. The same Ph.D. instructor taught all the students for the entire eight-year period. Students' race was determined by the instructor via face-to-face contact with each student. Specific age of the students was not reported during this study and every student's grades were kept private via Texas state law. However, student population appeared to be similar during the eight-year period with most students being young and recently arriving from high school.

The community college is a member of The Texas State University System, accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), and a comprehensive public two-year college offering instruction leading to associate degrees and a variety of certificates. The college is an open-access, meaning any student with a high school degree including a General Educational Development (GED) certificate holder is welcome. The three face-to-face biology courses taken required long hours of study and an excellent memory to pass with a grade of A. The instructor supplied each student with learning tools to assist in memorizing the hundreds of Latin terms, models, photographs, and specimens needed to succeed. These learning tools included Quizlet flashcards, instructor-created YouTube videos and PowerPoints, and Google Sites placed on a BlackBoard platform used to communicate with students.

Data analysis All statistical analysis in this study was performed by the software package StatView for Windows, version 5.0.1 A Kruskal-Wallis test was performed to study the influence of student characteristics on their learning paths and learning strategies. Dunn's pairwise tests were carried out for the four pairs of groups adjusted using the Bonferroni correction to determine if significant differences occurred between the graded racial groups. A level of .05 was adopted to test for significance.

III. RESULTS

A Kruskal-Wallis test provided very strong evidence of a difference between the mean ranks of at least one pair of the four groups of students ($H(3) = 66.3, p < .0001$). Dunn's pairwise tests were carried out for the four pairs of groups. There was very strong evidence ($p < 0.0015$, adjusted using the Bonferroni correction) of a significant difference between; (1) **Hispanic-Latino** ($M = 76.94, SD = 14.94$) and **Caucasian** grades ($M = 80.94, SD = 12.55$). Comparing the other groups of students using Dunn's test and Bonferroni correction, results showed a significant difference ($p = .016$) between; (2) **Hispanic-Latino** grades and **Asian descent** grades ($M = 82.20, SD = 13.79$), significant difference ($p < .0001$) between; (3) **Hispanic-Latino** grades and **African Americans** grades ($M = 70.83, SD = 17.72$), significant difference ($p < .0001$) between; (4) **Caucasian** grades and **African Americans** grades, significant difference ($p < .0001$) between; (5) **Asian descent** grades and **African Americans** grades. There was no evidence of a difference between; (6) **Caucasian** grades and **Asian descent** grades ($p = .5332$). Fig. 1 shows the grade distribution of the four racial groups and their mean scores.

IV. DISCUSSION

Results of this eight-year study show evidence that African American students still fall significantly behind the other races when it comes to studying to make the "grade". Most of these students in this study desire to become some type of healthcare practitioner via being accepted to a healthcare program. These programs use a point system and they accept students that have the highest points. Points are earned by making high grades, for example, an A is worth more points than a B. Students compete with one another for these high paying jobs, and the best students get accepted to these programs no matter their race or gender. For financial

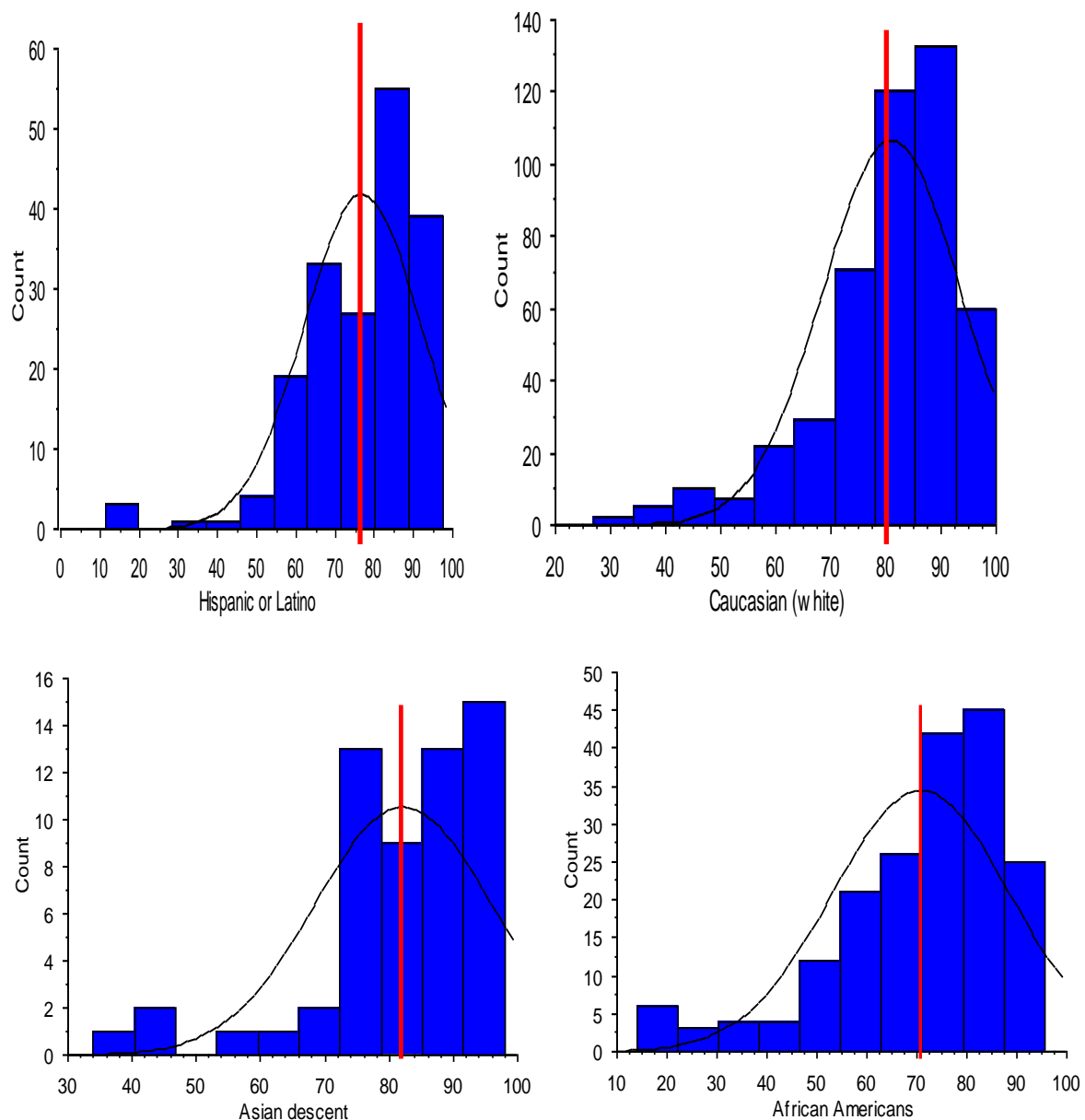


Figure 1. These four histograms show grade distributions of the four students' groups in this eight-year study. The mean grades for each racial group are indicated in red.

reasons, especially the average African American student in Southeast Texas needs to improve their study habits, reading memorization, and overall cognitive ability to catch up with the other races.

Decades of research support the positive impact of school desegregation and study after study has shown that all students, both African American students, and Caucasian students reap tremendous benefits from diverse classrooms and schools[2]. Since the Supreme Court struck down racial segregation in American public schools in *Brown versus Board of Education* ruling, the US has made great strides in eradicating educational inequities[6]. Yet, work remains to be done because, over the past quarter of a century, the Supreme Court's refusal to remain active in desegregation cases has led to inequitable results in many urban school systems like Southeast Texas [6]. In many southern communities, "white flight" has raised the specter of a return to dual school systems such as segregation[4]. There is some evidence of "white flight" in Southeast Texas, for example, Caucasians moving to predominately "white" towns of Lumberton, Nederland, and Port Neches, Groves, and Bridge City from Beaumont, Orange, and Port Arthur.

V. CONCLUSION

The African American brain is certainly not genetically inferior to any other race. Some of the best and brightest students in this study who made the highest grades were African American. However, the average grades of African American students were significantly 10.1 points lower than Caucasian students and significantly lower than all racial groups in this study. African American students need access to middle schools and high schools that are highly ranked to prepare them for college and then earning the “high paying” jobs that healthcare can provide. Bussing might be needed again to transport African American and Hispanic-Latino students to Lumberton, Nederland, and Port Neches-Groves, and Bridge City High Schools to desegregate and equalize learning abilities of all students in Southeast Texas. This study could be limited by not counting the number of drops of the students affecting statistical information. If student drops were not allowed, the mean scores of all students would be significantly lower. Also, the variances of the four student groups were not equal, so the less powerful non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test was chosen to compare groups instead of a one-way analysis of variance.

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