

## II. Characteristics of MSAP Districts

In this chapter, we present a general description of the 57 school districts that received MSAP grants in 1998.<sup>1</sup> Our intent is to provide information about the context in which the MSAP-supported schools and programs operate and the factors that may affect their ability to meet their desegregation objectives. We describe the types of desegregation plan, the demographic and enrollment characteristics of the MSAP districts, the trends in enrollment by race-ethnicity, the distribution of students in schools with high minority enrollments, and the school choices available to students in these districts. Our descriptions of the demographic and enrollment characteristics generally refer to the 1997–98 school year, as this represents a baseline for evaluation of the MSAP projects. The trends are examined for the period from 1993–94 to 1997–98.

### Type of Desegregation Plan

MSAP funds are intended to assist districts operating under either a *required* desegregation plan (i.e., one required by a court, state agency, or the Office for Civil Rights in the U.S. Department of Education [ED]), or a *voluntary* plan approved by ED. At the beginning of the grant cycle, 31 districts (54 percent) of the 57 districts with 1998 MSAP grants were operating their projects as part of voluntary desegregation plans, while the remaining 26 districts (46 percent) were operating under required desegregation plans.<sup>2</sup>

### Demographic and Enrollment Characteristics of Districts

Most 1998 MSAP grants were awarded to urban districts that serve large student populations consisting of a high proportion of minority students and students from lower-income families (i.e., students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch meals). These characteristics are detailed below.

### Type of Community

Almost all of the MSAP districts are located in metropolitan areas.<sup>3</sup> Two thirds (67 percent) of the districts primarily serve central city students in large metropolitan areas. By comparison, less than 5 percent of districts nationally are located in central cities.<sup>4</sup> Nearly one third (32 percent) of the districts mainly serve suburban students; that is, students in metropolitan areas that are primarily outside of the central city. Only one of the 57 districts lies outside of a large metropolitan area.<sup>5</sup> By comparison, over

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<sup>1</sup> One of the projects is a collaborative effort of five districts acting as a single district.

<sup>2</sup> See Table A-II-1 in Appendix II.

<sup>3</sup> The U.S. Census Bureau concept of a metropolitan area is a core area containing a large population nucleus and adjacent communities that have a high degree of economic and social integration with the core. Metropolitan areas identified by the U.S. Census Bureau must contain either one city with 50,000 or more inhabitants or an urbanized area of 50,000 and a total metropolitan population of at least 100,000 inhabitants. Metropolitan areas are subdivided into “inside central city” and “outside central city.” The largest city in a metropolitan area is designated as a “central city.” Additional cities in a metropolitan area may also qualify as a central city if they meet the Bureau’s requirements for population size and commuting patterns. (Source: [www.census.gov/population/www/estimates/aboutmetro.html](http://www.census.gov/population/www/estimates/aboutmetro.html)).

<sup>4</sup> Data from the 1997-98 Common Core of Data (CCD) show that 4.5 percent of U.S. school districts are located in a central city of a metropolitan area, 42.1 percent are located in metropolitan areas outside of the central city (i.e., suburban), and 53.4 percent of districts are located outside of a metropolitan area.

<sup>5</sup> See Table A-II-2 in Appendix II.

half of school districts nationally are located outside of metropolitan areas. In short, MSAP districts are more likely to be in metropolitan areas and particularly in central cities, as compared with school districts nationally.

### **District Enrollment**

MSAP districts tend to be quite large compared to U.S. school districts in general. In the 1997–98 school year, nearly two thirds of the districts (63 percent) had between 10,000 and 50,000 students, compared with one in 20 (5 percent) districts nationally. Another 19 percent of MSAP districts enrolled over 50,000 students, compared with less than 1 percent (0.5 percent) of all U.S. school districts. Only 10 of the 57 districts (18 percent) had fewer than 10,000 public school students.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, over 9 in 10 (94.5 percent) public school districts in the U.S. serve fewer than 10,000 students.<sup>7</sup>

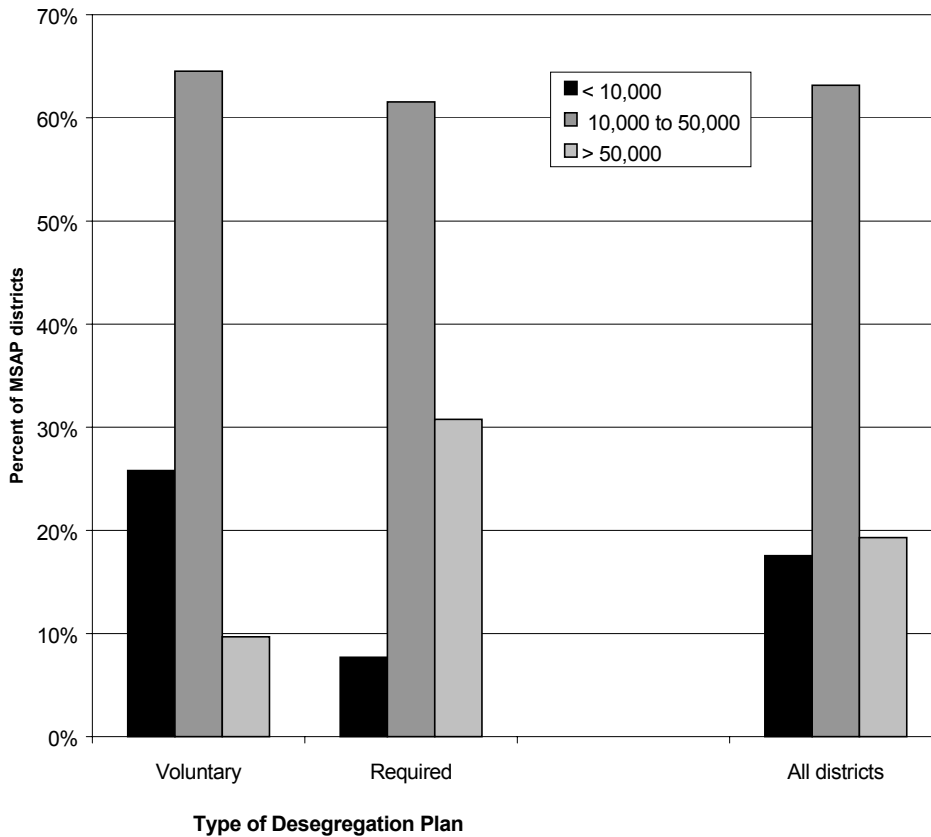
As Figure II-1 shows, a higher proportion of districts with voluntary desegregation plans had enrollments of fewer than 10,000 students than districts with required plans did (26 percent in voluntary plan districts vs. 8 percent in required plan districts). The percentages were reversed for the largest districts. Nearly a third (31 percent) of districts with required desegregation plans enrolled over 50,000 students, compared to 10 percent of districts with voluntary desegregation plans.

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<sup>6</sup> See Table A-II-3 in Appendix II.

<sup>7</sup> The source of information on all U.S. school districts is *Characteristics of the 100 Largest Public Elementary and Secondary Districts in the United States: 1997-98*. <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs99/1999318/discussion.html>

**Figure II-1**  
**Size of District Enrollment, by Type of Desegregation Plan**



Source: NCES 1997–98 Common Core of Data

### Socioeconomic Status

MSAP districts serve a high proportion of socioeconomically disadvantaged students. Over half (60 percent) of all students in MSAP districts qualify for free or reduced price lunches.<sup>8</sup> In comparison, about one third (33 to 38 percent) of students nationally are estimated to be eligible for free and reduced price lunches.<sup>9</sup> On average, over half (54 percent) of the students within an MSAP district qualify for free or reduced price lunches.<sup>10, 11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> The percent is based on data for 51 of the 57 MSAP districts from NCES’s 1998-99 Common Core of Data (CCD) for data on Eligibility for Free and Reduced Lunch. Data on free and reduced price lunch were not available in the CCD for 6 districts. Although not available for all districts, the 1998-99 revisions to the NCES collection of data on Free and Reduced Price Lunch provide more accurate data than for previous years.

<sup>9</sup> An estimated 33.2 percent of students nationally are eligible for Free or Reduced Price Lunch based on data from the 1993-94 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS). (See <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2000/digest99/d99t379.html>). The estimate from the 1998-99 CCD for districts on which free and reduced price lunch information is available (82 percent of districts) is that 38 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced price lunch.

<sup>10</sup> See Table A-II-4 in Appendix II.

<sup>11</sup> Note that the mean percentages reported in Figure I-4 of Chapter I summarize student eligibility for MSAP-supported schools and non-MSAP-supported schools of comparable grade levels within districts. The mean percentage reported here refers to student eligibility across all grade levels within districts.

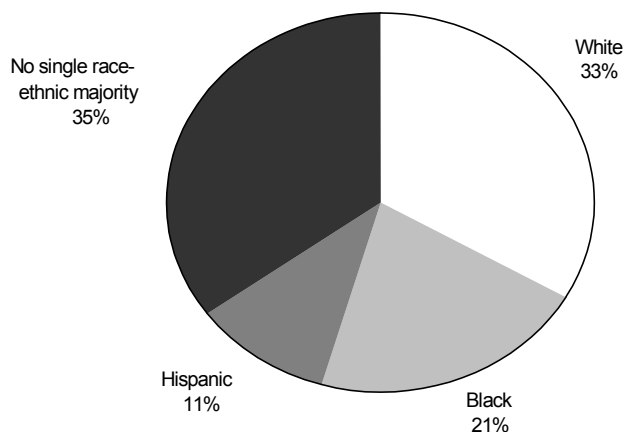
## Race and Ethnic Group Levels of Enrollment

On average, minority students represent nearly two-thirds (62 percent) of students in MSAP districts for the 1997–98 school year.<sup>12</sup> Blacks represent the largest minority group, with about one third (35 percent) of all students in MSAP districts. Hispanics are the next largest group, averaging about one fifth (21 percent) of students. Asian and Pacific Islanders represent one twentieth (5 percent) of students in MSAP districts, and American Indian or Alaskan Natives on average constitute less than 1 percent of all students in the MSAP districts.<sup>13</sup>

Districts with voluntary desegregation plans have a slightly higher average percentage of minority students (about 65 percent) than districts with required desegregation plans (59 percent).<sup>14</sup> The difference is mainly due to a larger proportion of Asian and Pacific Islanders in the voluntary plan districts (7 percent versus 3 percent). The average percentage of blacks, Hispanics, and American Indians is similar for voluntary and required desegregation plan districts.<sup>15</sup>

These averages, however, do not convey the racial and ethnic variability in the student composition of MSAP districts. Figure II-2 summarizes the racial-ethnic groups that represent a majority of the students in MSAP districts. White students represent the majority of students in one third (33 percent) of the districts; black students represent the majority in about one fifth (21 percent) of the districts; and Hispanic students represent the majority in 11 percent of the districts. In over one third (35 percent) of MSAP districts, no single racial-ethnic group constitutes a majority of the students.<sup>16</sup>

**Figure II-2**  
**Percentage of Districts by Racial-Ethnic Group Representing a Majority of Students Enrolled in District Schools: 1997–98**



Source: NCES 1997–98 Common Core of Data

<sup>12</sup> See Table A-II-5 in Appendix II.

<sup>13</sup> See Table A-II-6 in Appendix II.

<sup>14</sup> See Table A-II-5 in Appendix II.

<sup>15</sup> See Table A-II-6 in Appendix II.

<sup>16</sup> The overall pattern for voluntary and required plan districts is similar. See Table A-II-7 in Appendix II.

## **Trends in District Enrollment by Race and Ethnicity**

During the 1990s, prior to the start of the current MSAP grants, the representation of minority students in MSAP districts increased, with the largest increase occurring among Hispanics. The average percentage of minority students in MSAP districts increased from 58 percent in 1993–94 to 62 percent in 1997–98. Districts with voluntary and required desegregation plans experienced a similar increase of 4 percentage points in the proportion of minority student enrollment.<sup>17</sup>

Figure II-3 compares the average percent enrollment of students for each racial-ethnic group in 1993–94 and 1997–98. While the proportion of white students declined by 4 percentage points (from 42 percent to 38 percent), the largest gains occurred among Hispanic students, whose average representation increased by 2 percentage points (19 percent to 21 percent). Enrollments of black students in MSAP districts on average increased by one percent between 1993–94 and 1997–98. The representation of Asian and American Indian students stayed about the same in the MSAP districts.<sup>18</sup>

The increase in enrollment among Hispanic students between 1993–94 and 1997–98 also is seen in an increase in the number of MSAP districts in which Hispanics represent a majority of the students. During this four-year period, Hispanics became the student majority in two MSAP districts. One of those districts previously had a white majority, and the other had had no racial or ethnic group in the majority. No other race-ethnic group became the majority in MSAP districts during this period.<sup>19</sup>

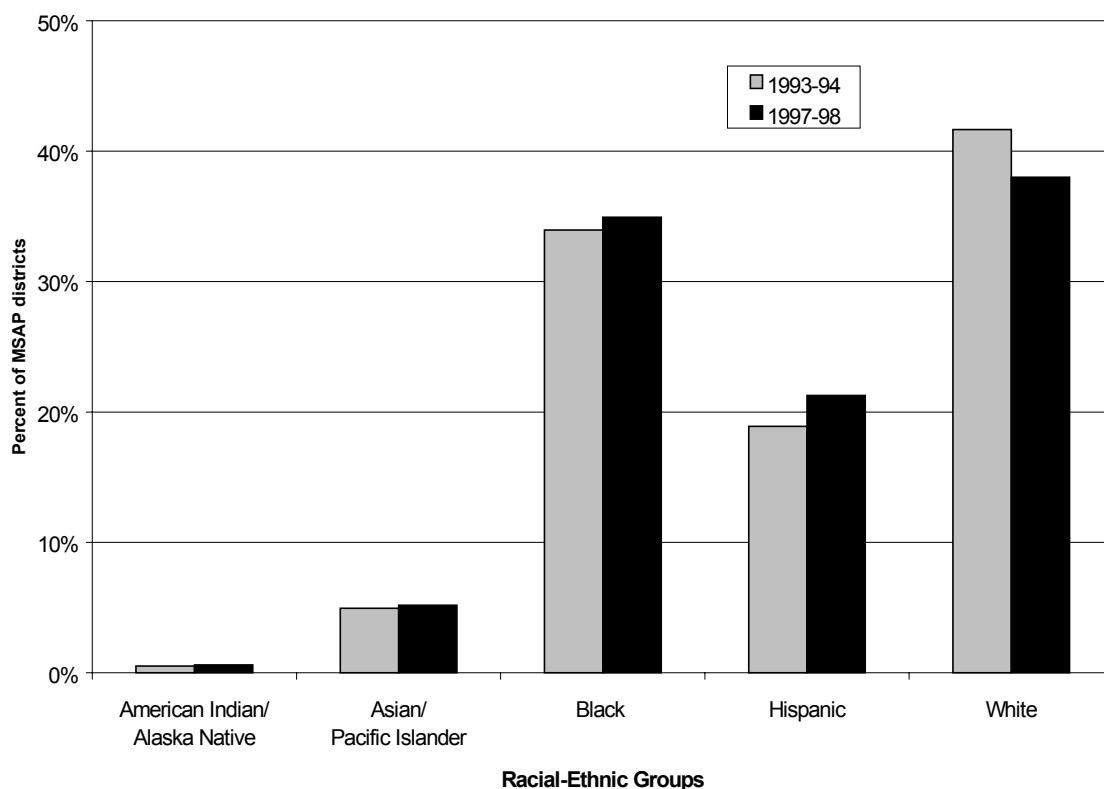
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<sup>17</sup> See Table A-II-5 in Appendix II.

<sup>18</sup> See Table A-II-8 in Appendix II.

<sup>19</sup> See Table A-II-9 in Appendix II.

**Figure II-3**  
**Average Percentage of Student Enrollment in MSAP Districts, by Race-Ethnicity: 1993–94 and 1997–98**



Source: NCES 1993–94 and 1997–98 Common Core of Data

### Distribution of Students in High Minority Enrollment Schools

In this section, we examine the degree of isolation of minority students in MSAP districts by describing the extent to which a district’s students were enrolled in high minority schools in 1997–98. We also examine the changes in those distributions that occurred between 1993–94 and 1997–98. We use three different thresholds for defining “high minority schools”: schools with a minority enrollment of at least 50 percent; schools with a minority enrollment of at least 75 percent; and schools with a minority enrollment of at least 90 percent. The first of these thresholds (50 percent) reflects the legal definition of minority group isolation. The two remaining thresholds reflect a higher level of segregation.<sup>20</sup>

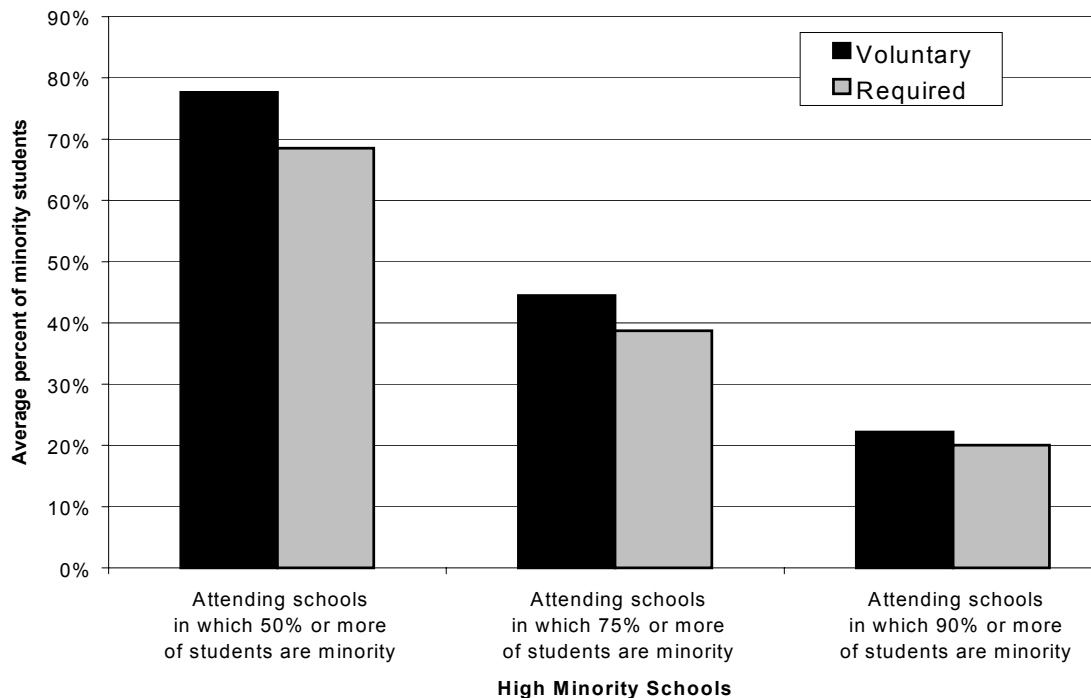
In 1997–98, an average of three-quarters (74 percent) of minority students in MSAP districts attended schools with at least 50 percent minority enrollment; two fifths (42 percent) attended schools with at least 75 percent minority enrollment; and about one fifth (21 percent) attended schools with 90

<sup>20</sup> Desegregation researchers use alternative thresholds of isolation as a means of describing variation in levels of segregation (e.g., Orfield et al., 1997; Orfield and Yun, 1999). In this report, we use three alternative thresholds to provide a more complete description of segregation in the MSAP districts.

percent or more minority students.<sup>21</sup> These averages at each of the three thresholds are four to five times greater for the MSAP districts than for school districts with minority students.<sup>22</sup>

Figure II-4 shows the average percent of minority students attending high minority schools in 1997-98 in MSAP districts with voluntary and required desegregation plans.<sup>23</sup> The average percentage of minority students attending high minority schools is slightly greater for districts with voluntary desegregation than for districts with required desegregation plans for each of the three definitions of “high minority school.” The average proportion of minority students who attend schools in which at least half of the students are minority is 9 percent greater in districts with voluntary desegregation plans than in districts with required desegregation plans (78 vs. 69 percent). Similar but smaller differences between districts with voluntary and required desegregation plans can be seen for other definitions of high minority schools.

**Figure II-4**  
**Average Percentage of Minority Students Attending High Minority Enrollment Schools in MSAP Districts, by Type of Desegregation Plan: 1997–98**



Source: NCES 1997–98 Common Core of Data

Figure II-5 shows the average percent of minority students attending high minority schools in MSAP districts in 1993–94 and 1997–98. The figure shows that for each of the three definitions of “high

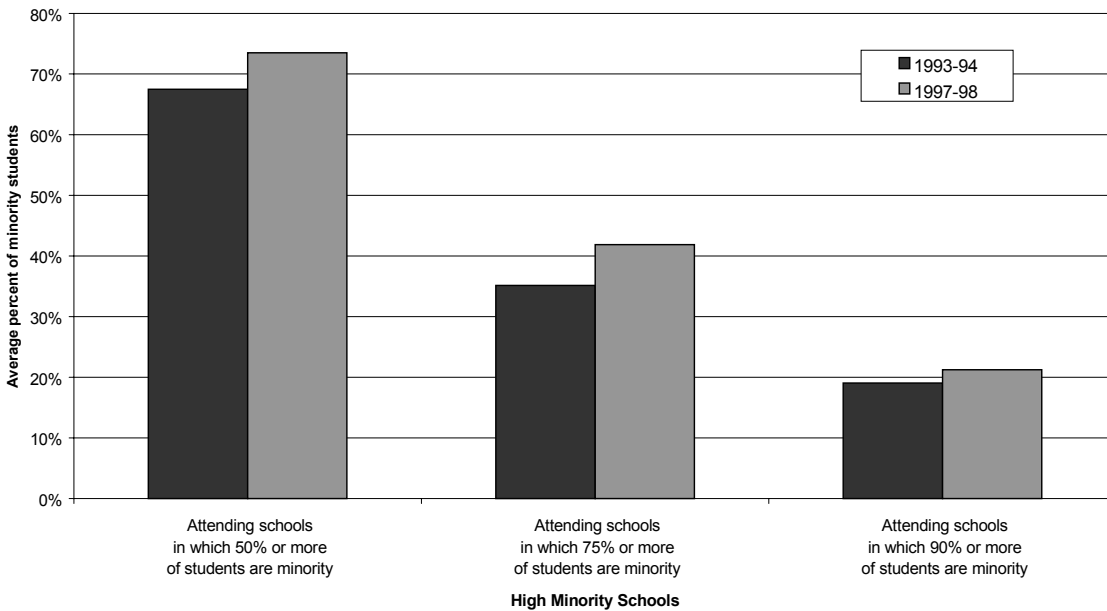
<sup>21</sup> See Table A-II-10 in Appendix II.

<sup>22</sup> The comparisons are to the national average for school districts with minority students. Data from the 1997-98 Common Core of Data indicate that an average of 15 percent of minority students within a school district attended schools with 50 percent or more minority students, 8 percent attended schools with 75 percent or more minority enrollment, and 5 percent attended schools with 90 percent or more minority enrollment.

<sup>23</sup> See Table A-II-10 in Appendix II.

minority school,” the average percentage of minority students attending high minority enrollment schools increased between 1993–94 and 1997–98.<sup>24</sup> The increases were not uniform across the three definitions of minority isolated schools. The increase in the proportion of minority students in schools with from 50 percent or more to 90 percent or more enrollment ranged from 7 percent to 2 percent. The inverse relationship between degree of change and the three levels of “high minority schools” may be due to a ceiling effect operating at the highest level. In any event, MSAP districts experienced an increase in the concentration of minority students enrolled in high minority schools.

**Figure II-5**  
**Average Percentage of Minority Students Attending High Minority Enrollment Schools in MSAP Districts, by School Year: 1993–94 and 1997–98**



Source: NCES 1993–94 and 1997–98 Common Core of Data

As shown in Figure II-6, black students represent the highest average percentage of students enrolled in schools with at least 50 percent minority enrollment, compared with other racial-ethnic groups in both 1993–94 and 1997–98. In both years, the average percentage is lowest for white students. Nevertheless, the average proportion of students attending schools with 50 percent or more minority enrollment increased for all racial-ethnic groups, including whites.<sup>25</sup> The average proportion of students attending schools with 75 percent or more minority students, and 90 percent or more minority students also increased for every racial-ethnic group.<sup>26</sup>

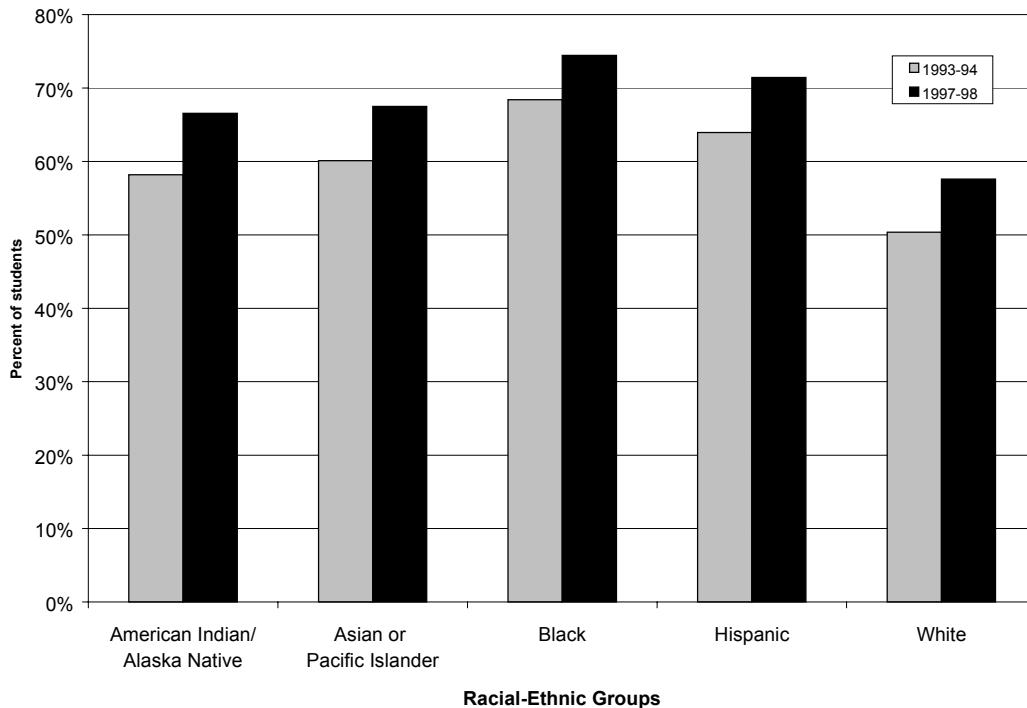
<sup>24</sup> See Table A-II-11 in Appendix II.

<sup>25</sup> See Table A-II-12 in Appendix II.

<sup>26</sup> See Tables A-II-13 and A-II-14 in Appendix II.



**Figure II-6**  
**Average Percentage of Students Attending Schools with 50 Percent or More Minority Student Enrollment in MSAP Districts, by Race-Ethnicity and Year: 1993–94 and 1997–98**



Source: NCES 1993–94 and 1997–98 Common Core of Data

To summarize, the average proportion of minority students in MSAP districts attending minority-isolated schools in 1997–98 is greater than the national average for varying thresholds of isolation. The proportion of minority students attending minority-isolated schools is somewhat greater in districts with voluntary plans than in districts with required desegregation plans. During the four-year period prior to the start of the 1998 MSAP grants, the average percentage of minority students who attend high minority schools in MSAP districts increased. The average proportion of students who are enrolled in high minority schools in MSAP districts increased for all minority groups and for whites at different thresholds for identifying high minority schools.

## School Choices within MSAP Districts

The school choices available to students within a district are an important part of the context within which MSAP-supported schools and programs operate. In some districts, the demand for access to federally funded magnet programs may be greater than MSAP projects can handle, and districts may try to manage this demand by using waiting lists. In other districts, the federally sponsored magnet programs may face competition from other educational programs, making recruitment of students more difficult. We examine two questions that reflect on the district context of school choice:

- To what extent do MSAP projects maintain waiting lists and how are they used?
- To what extent do other schools compete with MSAP-supported schools and programs for students?

## Waiting Lists

Nearly two-thirds (63 percent) of MSAP Project Directors report that waiting lists are maintained for one or more of their MSAP programs, either by the district or the school. More than three quarters (77 percent) of districts with required desegregation plans and more than one half (52 percent) of districts with voluntary desegregation plans maintain waiting lists.<sup>27</sup>

Almost all of the projects that maintain waiting lists use them into the school year, permitting students on the list to be admitted after the start of the school year if space becomes available. In only a few districts is the list kept beyond a year, and students must reapply if they are still eligible for entry in a subsequent year.

## Educational Alternatives to MSAP Programs

Federally funded magnet programs may be one of several options available to students. More than half (54 percent) of the MSAP Project Directors report a great deal of competition for students from one or more educational programs.<sup>28</sup> Strong competition for students is more likely to be reported in districts with required desegregation plans than in those with voluntary plans (67 percent vs. 41 percent, respectively), as shown in Figure II-7. The figure also indicates that the largest factor in this difference is that over one third (37 percent) of districts with required desegregation plans report competition from non-MSAP magnets (that is, magnets funded by the district), as compared with less than one tenth (7 percent) of districts with voluntary plans. MSAP districts with required desegregation plans have a median of six non-MSAP magnets in the district; districts with voluntary plans have a median of two.<sup>29</sup>

Other public schools present a great deal of competition for students in about one fifth of districts with either voluntary or required desegregation plans (21 and 22 percent, respectively), and religious schools provide a great deal of competition in a similar proportion of districts.<sup>30</sup> Private non-sectarian schools are seen as a major source of competition by almost one quarter (24 percent) of districts with voluntary desegregation plans, compared with about one tenth (11 percent) of districts with required plans.

Neither charter nor home schools are seen as major sources of competition for students in districts with either required or voluntary desegregation plans. In fact, when asked whether various forms of schooling provided no competition, some competition, or a lot of competition for students, approximately 70 percent of MSAP Project Directors reported that there was no competition from charter schools in their district.

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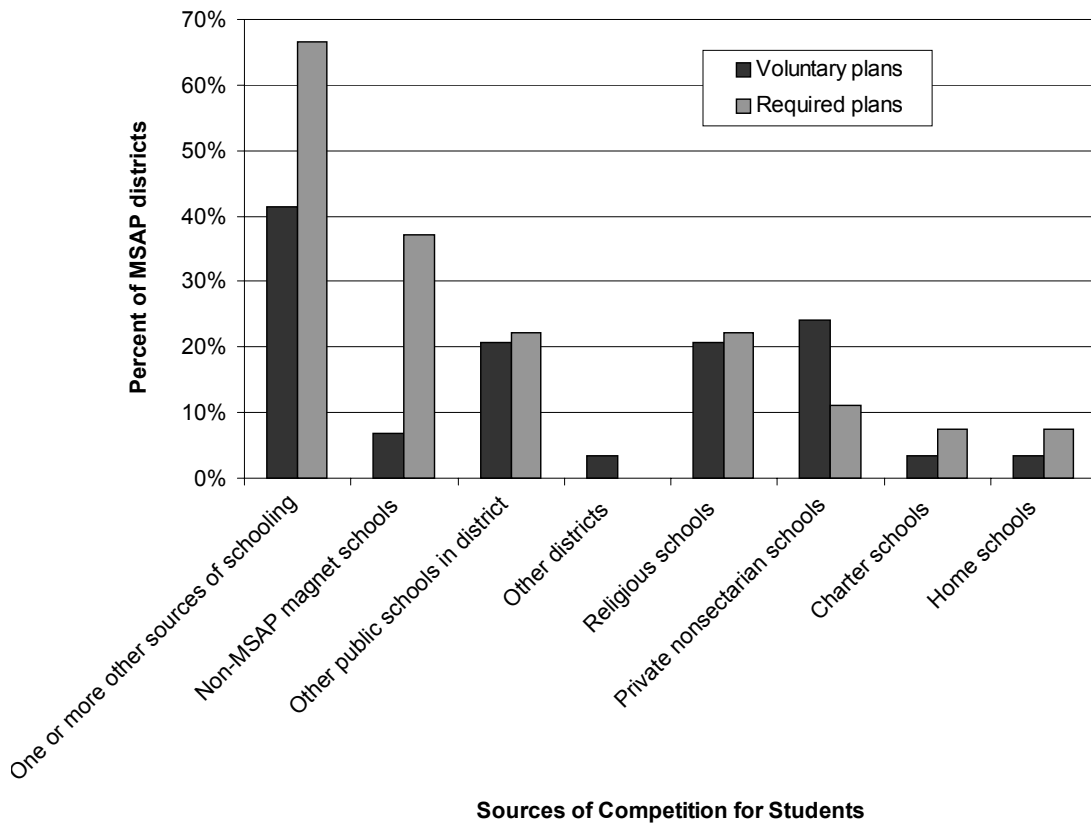
<sup>27</sup> See Table A-II-15 in Appendix II.

<sup>28</sup> See Table A-II-16 in Appendix II.

<sup>29</sup> See Table A-II-17 in Appendix II.

<sup>30</sup> Although the data are not shown in Figure II-7, MSAP Project Directors in 27 percent of the voluntary districts and 23 percent of the required districts report a great deal of competition from at least one of the two types of private educational institutions: religious and nonsectarian.

**Figure II-7**  
**Percentage of Districts Reporting a Great Deal of Competition for Students from Other Types of Schools, by Type of Desegregation Plan**



Source: MSAP Project Survey, 1999–2000, Item 8

## What We Have Learned

- MSAP districts are almost exclusively metropolitan districts, and the overwhelming majority service central city schools.
- MSAP districts tend to be large, with over three-quarters having enrollments of 10,000 or more students.
- Minority students represent an average of nearly two-thirds (62 percent) of students in MSAP districts.
- Black students represent the largest minority group, with an average of about one third of all students in MSAP districts.
- Minority students outnumber white students in two thirds (66 percent) of MSAP districts, with black students constituting a majority in 21 percent of MSAP districts and Hispanic students representing a majority in 11 percent of MSAP districts.
- The average percentage of minority students in MSAP districts increased by four percent between 1993-94 and the start of the MSAP grant period in 1998.
- The proportion of Hispanic students in MSAP districts increased more than that of any other racial-ethnic group.

- The average proportion of minority students attending minority-isolated schools in MSAP districts is four to five times greater than the average for school districts nationwide.
- The average proportions of both minority and non-minority students attending high minority schools increased between 1993-94 and the start of the 1998 MSAP programs.
- Over half of the MSAP Project Directors report that their programs face a great deal of competition for students from other educational programs.
- Districts with required desegregation plans are more likely to report strong competition for students than districts with voluntary desegregation plans. The largest factor in this difference is that competition comes more frequently from other magnet schools (not funded by MSAP) in districts with required desegregation plans.

## **What We Hope to Learn**

- District characteristics and trends in the enrollment and distribution of students represent the context within which federally funded magnet schools and programs operate. As the data become available to assess the success of projects in meeting their program goals, we hope to learn more about the types of district characteristics, and the trends in enrollment and distribution of students, that are associated with the success MSAP projects have in meeting those goals.