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The New Separate But Equal

By [James Chen](#)

Rising test scores and higher academic standards in public schools are usually a cause for celebration among parents of school-age children. But in the liberal suburbs of the San Francisco Bay Area, this development is triggering panic among white parents who are increasingly choosing to send their children to private schools, or moving to more exclusive neighborhoods.

Despite living in safe and desirable areas where diversity and tolerance are preached as gospel, white parents in the Bay Area are apparently avoiding many high-performing public school systems for the simple reason that they have too many Asians. The slow but steady disappearance of white students from suburban public schools is an obvious but rarely-discussed demographic trend that recalls the 'white flight' from America's largest cities decades earlier.

In a recent *Wall Street Journal* [article](#) ([\\$link](#)), reporter Suein Hwang delves into the racially-charged world of high school academics in Northern California. Hwang's "The New White Flight" is as interesting as it is disturbing:

By most measures, Monta Vista High here and Lynbrook High, in nearby San Jose, are among the nation's top public high schools. Both boast stellar test scores, an array of advanced-placement classes and a track record of sending graduates

from the affluent suburbs of Silicon Valley to prestigious colleges.

But locally, they're also known for something else: white flight. Over the past 10 years, the proportion of white students at Lynbrook has fallen by nearly half, to 25% of the student body. At Monta Vista, white students make up less than one-third of the population, down from 45% — this in a town that's half white. Some white Cupertino parents are instead sending their children to private schools or moving them to other, whiter public schools. More commonly, young white families in Silicon Valley say they are avoiding Cupertino altogether.

Whites aren't quitting the schools because the schools are failing academically. Quite the contrary: Many white parents say they're leaving because the schools are too academically driven and too narrowly invested in subjects such as math and science at the expense of liberal arts and extracurriculars like sports and other personal interests.

The two schools, put another way that parents rarely articulate so bluntly, are too Asian.

I've witnessed this phenomenon first-hand during recent house hunting searches in Alameda and San Mateo Counties. As the parent of two young children, I often check data on neighborhood schools for comparative purposes. Primarily, this means reviewing a school district's [SARC](#) (School Accountability Report Card), the state-mandated public report containing vital information on student achievement and demographics.

My survey of schools in the area revealed an interesting demographic trend: in a continuous arc of high-performing public school districts ringing San Francisco Bay, Asian student enrollments have climbed sharply over the past decade as white enrollments plummeted. These include middle-class neighborhoods in cities throughout [the most liberal region in the United States](#). Suburban cities in the area with both rapidly-growing Asian student populations and steadily-diminishing numbers of white students include [Alameda](#), [Albany](#), [Fremont](#) (Kerry by 51%) [Cupertino](#), [San Jose](#) (Kerry by 29%) and [San Mateo](#) (Kerry by 40%).

Among students, the view is that Asian-American parents are

more academically demanding of their children, which has resulted in a greater overall competitiveness level in the public schools, particularly within these middle-class suburbs. In classrooms throughout the area, Asian-American school children dominate academically, and often take a disproportionate share of student awards and scholarships.

For white parents, the most often-cited reasons for leaving their local public school system are a lack of diversity, intense competition and the "singlemindedness" of Asian students. A common complaint is that Asian students are not as 'well-rounded' as others, an often-used reference to the perception that Asians partake less frequently in extracurricular activities. Many cite Asian students' low participation rates in varsity sports such as football and basketball, and in activities such as [pep rallies, drama and cheerleading](#). These white parents insist that they are not biased against Asians, and blame the media for injecting a racial component into a non-racial issue.

Meanwhile, in nearby school systems such as [Palo Alto](#), [Los Altos](#) and [Piedmont](#), white parents have few complaints about the high test scores resulting from a rigorous curriculum and high academic standards. But unlike their counterparts in Alameda or Fremont, these school districts are overwhelmingly white, and homes in these neighborhoods are beyond the means of most middle-class families. Even with whites comprising over 70% of the student population, the schools' websites boast of having 'socially diverse' student bodies.

So what is wrong with this picture? Is it possible to conclude from the mountain of statistics, anecdotal evidence and visual signs that white students—who have nearly vanished from the nearby San Francisco (Kerry by 68%) and Oakland (Kerry by 51%) public school systems—are leaving public schools in the middle-class suburbs of blue-state California? And why is it that a school with a 70% white student body is considered 'diverse', while one with a 70% Asian population is not?

White liberals argue that the statistics are misleading, and that the decrease in the numbers of white students is being driven primarily by the retirement of the baby-boomer generation, and the immigration of Asian engineers to the Silicon Valley. Assuming this is all true, how do we explain the disproportionately low numbers of white students enrolled in the public schools? In cities like [Cupertino](#), whites make up half the overall population, but less than a third of the student body. At the top performing elementary school in all of California, [Faria Academic Plus School](#) of Cupertino—where

admission is based on a lottery under which all elementary—age students within the district are eligible—Asian—Americans compose an astounding 94% of the student body.

Clearly, there exists a double—standard among white liberals who claim to be advocates of public schooling and defenders of diversity, yet cannot bring it on themselves to send their children to public schools where children from other racial groups dominate both academically and numerically. This apparent disregard for liberal principles results from whites being placed in a situation where they no longer exert control over a minority group they claim to champion. One white parent called this double—standard 'the secret that everyone knows, but no one wants to talk about', adding, 'You'll be called a bigot (or worse) if you mention it.'

According to parents and students of both races, what white parents fear most is their children being marginalized in the college admission process by the academic achievements of their Asian—American peers. This fear is perhaps best summarized by the patron saint of white liberals, Bill Clinton. In a 1995 interview with the *Sacramento Bee*, then—President Clinton stated that excessive reliance on academic qualifications in higher education could have dire consequences. His [warning](#) that "there are universities in California that could fill their entire freshman classes with nothing but Asians" echoes their concerns.

As a last resort, liberal school boards, courts and administrators will typically take it unto themselves to implement policies to introduce more 'diversity' into their student bodies. In the San Francisco public schools, this took form through the recently terminated 1983 [Consent Decree](#) which set a school enrollment limit of 45 percent for any single racial or ethnic group. Chinese—American parents charged that the racial caps were aimed primarily at limiting their children's access to the city's most prestigious schools. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the University of California imposed an affirmative—action—based quota system, which temporarily maintained the white plurality at its most prestigious campuses.

But these policies never worked as intended. Over the course of two decades, the San Francisco public schools became almost completely segregated and Asians students began to dominate the flagship UC campuses in Berkeley and Los Angeles. In both cases, the use of quotas was not enough to convince white students to stick around. Eventually, the courts ruled against the explicit use of quotas, and California voters outlawed the

use of Affirmative Action through the voter-initiated Proposition 209.

Quotas aside, the lessons of blue-state California should be clear to anyone with more than a passing interest in school choice and segregation. Stated bluntly, white liberals will object strenuously to school choice and racial segregation as long as their children are in the majority and among the top performers in school. However, when their children are fewer in number and relegated to the lower tiers of academic performance, they will happily embrace school choice and voluntarily segregate the public schools by moving to whiter school districts or sending their children to private schools.

If these demographic trends continue, the most likely fate of suburban schools in California and other blue-states with large concentrations of Asians such as New York, New Jersey and Maryland, is the emergence of a new 'separate but equal' system of education mirroring the defacto segregation of schools in America's largest cities.

It is time for Asian-American parents to reject this new 'separate but equal' system of public education imposed upon them by white liberals in blue-state America. Our best hope for a truly color-blind society is not quotas or reverse-discrimination, but to allow all parents the opportunity to provide the best education for their children by offering them options such as tuition vouchers, charter schools, school choice and merit-based teacher pay. Does it any surprise anyone that white liberals are against all of these educational initiatives?

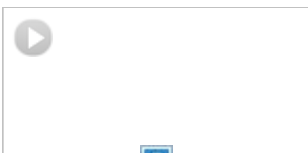
James Chen blogs at [Where Have You Gone, Joe DiMaggio?](#)

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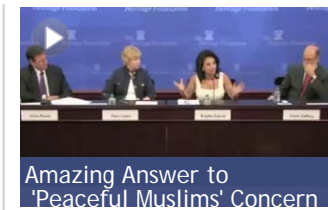
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