

Example Social Science IDEA Grant Project Proposal

1. Project Proposal (800-word limit)

Present a plan for a project that you will pursue over the summer. Your proposal should describe the problem to be investigated, the hypothesis to be tested, the idea/initiative to be developed/evaluated, or the creative endeavor to be undertaken and include a timeline. Describe how you chose your supervising professor and how you expect to work with him/her (and community partner organization, if applicable). If you are doing a project in partnership with a community organization, the proposal should also outline the community organization's need and how your project will address this need, as well as the organization's willingness to have you execute the project.

The question I am looking to investigate this summer is whether increased school choice has also increased the amount of racial and economic segregation in schools, particularly in Florida. Our state is a leader in the school choice movement, and was the first state in the nation to pass state-wide school choice legislation in 1999. Many current law makers believe that increasing school choice is the best way to encourage public schools to improve. However, there is a large body of research that suggests that increased school choice oftentimes has the unintended consequence of increasing racial and economic segregation in schools.

My primary hypothesis is that Florida schools are more racially segregated now than they were before school choice legislation was enacted in the state of Florida. To figure this out, I will analyze data from the National Center for Education Statistics, and the US Census.

First, I will break down current data for each type of school (public, private, charter, magnet) in each district to see what percentages of each racial group are represented in each school. I will compare this to US census bureau data on the county to see which schools have populations that are over or under representative of the district. Then, I will figure out what percentage of each type of school in each district is racially unbalanced compared to the district averages for school aged children. After doing this for each district, I will figure out what percentages of each types of school are presently racially

unbalanced across the entire state. Then, I will repeat the entire process for a year before school choice legislation was enacted, probably 1998.

My secondary hypothesis is that Florida schools are more economically segregated now than they were before school choice legislation was enacted in Florida. In order to figure this out, I will compare the percentages of students receiving free or reduced cost lunch in a school to the poverty level in the district it is located in. A school that has a population that has a significantly larger or smaller percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch than the poverty level in the district will be considered economically segregated. I will figure out what percent of each type of school in each district is economically segregated, and then I will also expand those figures to the entire state of Florida.

Finally, I will repeat the entire process for a year before school choice legislation was enacted. With both of these hypotheses, my goals are to see which percentages of charter, magnet, private, and traditional public schools are segregated in each district, as well as across Florida currently, and before school choice legislation was enacted. This will enable me to see which types of schools tend to be most segregated, and whether schools have become more or less segregated since school choice legislation was enacted. This is an important consideration that needs to be made when deciding whether to further increase school choice options. Currently, the data that has been collected suggests that school choice has increased the levels of segregation in schools, but there is little information about the state of Florida in particular. I am seeking to fill this gap in the research, in order to be able to further the information on school choice in this state.

I chose my supervising professor, Dr. Carol Weissert, on the recommendations of another professor in the political science department. She is a well renowned faculty member in my department, as well as the director of the LeRoy Collins Institute for Public Policy. She has extensive experience in researching public policy, and I will be able to get advice

from her on ways to improve my research. The institute that Dr. Weissert directs is currently thinking about adopting school choice as a topic of research, so my particular research is of great interest to her.

In my current timeline, I plan to spend the first two weeks going through the literature in this area in order to draw inspiration to improve my research methods. I will then use the statistical program Stata to break down racial and socioeconomic data on a district by district level with the methodology outlined earlier. First with a current year, and then from a year before school choice legislation was enacted. I will then use Stata to attempt to falsify my hypothesis. When I have analyzed all of the appropriate data, I will create a poster presentation outlining my findings.