

Understanding the Determinants of School District Secessions¹

Christopher Tyler Burks
Peter A. Jones

School district secession occurs when a community splits from an existing school district and creates a new district. While rare, secessions are increasing in number and relevance, and previous work has shown that secessions have contributed to the resegregation of American schools. We build on prior research by exploring how state policy and political, economic, and racial factors influence the likelihood of secession attempts. School districts with declining enrollments and a more racially segregated student body were more likely to experience a secession attempt; we also show that state policy can restrict secession attempts. Advocates for secession often use race-neutral arguments about attaining local control or correcting diseconomies of scale. Results, however, suggest that political and economic rationales are less predictive of secessions than racial segregation. We conclude that secessions exemplify institutional racism when the formation of new boundaries follows the lines of de facto segregation and thereby excludes people of color.

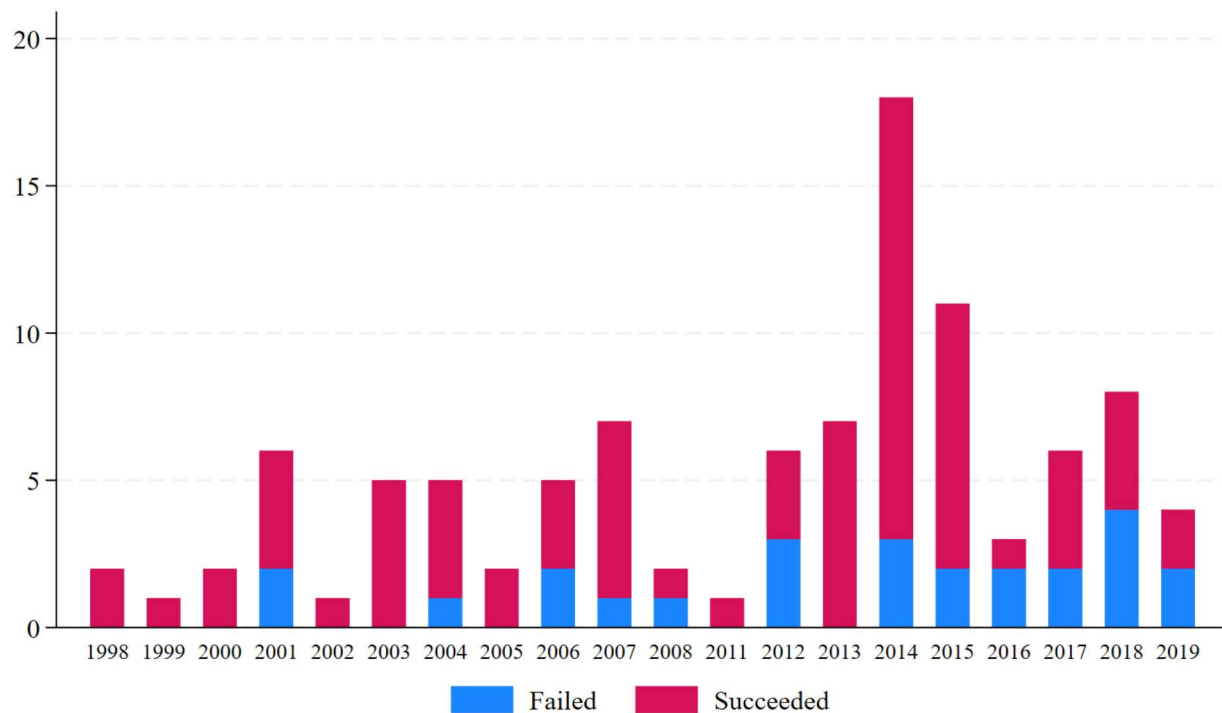
After a long period of consolidation, the administration of public education has been fragmented in recent decades with major implications for social equity. Early policy entrepreneurs in the common school movement like Horace Mann motivated states to deliver education as a public good, accessible to all, by touting its collective virtues of civic egalitarianism and economic productivity. Recent policy entrepreneurs in the school choice movement have been more focused on individual outcomes, demanding that parents have choices about public schooling. While private school enrollment grew at an unprecedented rate after *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (Clotfelter 1976; O'Brien 1999), and home schools have always been an option, the new policies of voucher programs and charter schools seek to increase consumer choice and market competition by making public districts compete with private organizations for scarce public funding.

In this study, we focus on another policy that is fragmenting public funding of education; namely, *school*

district secessions, whereby a new school district boundary is formed that takes its students and tax base away from the district left behind. In the case of secession, one community chooses to divorce itself from the consolidated public school district, effectively “privatizing” their education in a smaller and less diverse, albeit still public organization. Though school district secessions are rare, they are increasing in number and contributing to socioeconomic inequality (EdBuild 2019). Between 1998–2018, at least 131 communities in 26 states attempted to secede from their 88 unique encompassing school districts, and 73 of those communities succeeded (55.7%). Figure 1 displays the 96 secession attempts that have either failed or succeeded (ongoing and inactive attempts are not included).

Proponents of secession argue for it in the race-neutral language of local control and economic efficiency (Siegel-Hawley, Diem, and Frankenberg 2018), but critics see secession as exacerbating racial and economic inequality (Buendía and Humbert-Fisk 2015). Indeed,

1. We thank EdBuild for their excellent data collection on the emerging issue of school district secessions in the United States.

Figure 1. Secession Attempts over Time

secessions are prominent in the South where research has demonstrated their contribution to the resegregation of American schools that were once under court-ordered desegregation (Reardon et al. 2012; Richards 2020). Wilson calls this separatist movement “destructive localism” and suggests that such “secessions may principally be rooted in a desire for a separation rather than localism” (Wilson 2016, 146). Separatism drove the White flight from cities after the *Brown* ruling in 1954 (Kruse 2007), and suburbanization enabled affluent White families to effectively buy out of court-ordered desegregation.

Secessions can be a form of social closure whereby communities avoid integration and secure for themselves a privileged position by obstructing the access of others to resources and opportunities (Cooperstock 2023; Weber 1978). Moreover, secession is a tool of institutional racism when the formation of new school district boundaries discriminates against Black people and people of color who are left behind. In fact, news coverage of school district secession has framed the issue as a “new secessionist movement” (Eaton 2014) and another racist tactic in the history of segregation (Hannah-Jones 2017).

We contribute to the literature by formulating a model that predicts school district secessions in the

United States. Many rationales have been given for school district secession, so our model tests the relative influence of state policy, local political control, school district economics, and the racial demographics of students. We examine the relationship between these factors and school district secessions with a panel dataset of school districts from school years (SY) 1998 to 2018. This strategy extends Cooperstock’s (2023) findings with an analysis focused on schools and school districts, and it expands the literature by examining all attempts, regardless of whether they failed or were successful.

We reference Cooperstock’s (2023) study because it is the most recent and closely related research that has informed our investigation. Examining U.S. Census-designated places, she used social closure theory to explore which community characteristics were associated with school district secession attempts, focusing on two measures of social imbalance—racial and economic. She found that racial imbalance, but not economic imbalance, was significant in southern states, whereas economic imbalance, but not racial imbalance, was significant in non-southern states. Our results cohere with Cooperstock’s (2023) findings in that school districts with greater within-district racial segregation were more likely to experience a secession attempt.

Cooperstock’s (2023) analysis also revealed that

state-level legal provisions were the strongest predictor of secession attempts. We expand on her measurement of state-level legal provisions, finding that state policies can have differentiated impacts on the likelihood of a secession attempt. Requiring socioeconomic impact assessments, for example, can impede secession attempts, but only four states have such a provision (California, Nebraska, Wisconsin, and Wyoming).

Finally, despite much rationalizing about local control and efficiency, we find inconsistent evidence that these political or economic factors influence the likelihood that a school district experienced a secession attempt. Taken together, our findings urge policymakers concerned about resegregation to reconsider permissive policies that make states complicit with institutional racism.

Literature Review

School district secessions are rare, but their impact on educational equity in schools and social equity in metropolitan regions is gaining attention. To contextualize secessions, this review includes the administrative history from school district consolidation to fragmentation, the state policies governing school district secession, and the socioeconomic effects of school district secession. Together, this institutional, legal, and sociological background frames our conceptual and predictive model for school district secessions.

The Consolidation, Desegregation, Fragmentation, and Resegregation of Public Education

Historically, school districts have been more likely to experience consolidation than fragmentation with nine out of every 10 public school districts being consolidated over the past century (Berry and West 2010; Tyack 1974). Still now, consolidation is the dominant trend outnumbering secessions more than five-to-one (Richards 2020). Consolidations were driven in the early 20th century by administrative progressivism that emphasized efficiency through economies of scale (Duncombe and Yinger 2007) and were later reinforced by court-ordered desegregation during the civil rights movement (Richards 2020).

Berry (2006) estimates that there were over 200,000 school districts before 1930, but now there are fewer than 14,000. This transformation was led by reformers like Ellwood Cubberley who argued that public education must be reorganized to overcome the problems

of both parochial rural schools and politicized urban schools. Reformers used the principles of scientific management to consolidate small and informal community arrangements into centralized and professionalized education bureaucracies with less patronage and more merit in their personnel management (Meyer, Scott, and Strang 1987).

During the civil rights era, consolidation of city and county school districts was reconceptualized as not merely a tool for improving efficiency through economies of scale but also an affirmative policy for racial integration and the equalization of school funding (Holmes 1973; Rushing 2017). In the Northeast and Midwest, school districts were smaller, having been fragmented along the lines of de facto segregation (Bischoff 2008; Richards and Stroub 2014). In the less populated South, the de jure segregation of Jim Crow required larger county districts to maintain a sufficient level of funding and students to administer segregated schools (Fischel 2009). The *Brown* ruling for desegregation invoked massive resistance among White people, making the consolidation and integration of city and county districts the epicenter of controversy in the struggle for racial equality (Wilson 2016).

Court-ordered desegregation had some success, as demonstrated in *Wright v. Council of Emporia* (1972). Black–White school segregation decreased the most in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Reardon and Owens 2014), and the county school districts of the South became the most integrated in the country by 1970 (Orfield and Frankenberg 2014). During this period, the courts prevented school district secessions with desegregation orders that required unitary status, which is an integrated and non-discriminatory school system (Moore 2002). However, the courts' ability to maintain desegregation was weakened in 1974 by the *Milliken v. Bradley* decision. Johnson and King (2019) refer to this shift in jurisprudence as the Milliken effect. The *Milliken* ruling marks the turning point in American history from the preeminent policy of school district consolidation to the increasing diffusion of policies for fragmentation such as school vouchers, charter schools, and school district secessions.

In the *Milliken* case, meaningful integration within the city limits of Detroit had become negligible due to White flight to the suburbs. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People sued the State of Michigan to force state action on the integration of

metropolitan Detroit. Recognizing the role that city and suburban borders play in maintaining segregation, Judge Stephen Roth proposed a bussing plan that transported students across district lines to achieve desegregation. The Supreme Court, however, overturned Roth's bussing plan in a 5–4 decision, arguing that district boundaries must be respected.

The *Milliken* case distinguished between de jure and de facto segregation, stating that segregation by law (de jure) is unconstitutional, but segregation in fact (de facto) is an aggregate result of individual decisions and therefore not a cause for governmental intervention through interdistrict desegregation. Having absolved the state of responsibility for White people's individual decisions to self-segregate, *Milliken* signaled the decline of federal oversight of secession cases (Holley-Walker 2010; Reardon et al. 2012).

As desegregation lost its court oversight and political impetus from the civil rights movement, secession attempts increased and became more likely to succeed (Reardon et al. 2012), though they still remain rare events. Yet state policies for secession vary widely, ranging from permissive criteria that are relatively easy to accomplish to stricter criteria that constrain secession attempts.

To date, only Cooperstock (2023) has explored the antecedents of a school district secession, using social closure theory to explore the community characteristics that were associated with school district secession attempts. She created two measures of social imbalance, racial and economic, that quantified the difference between the proportion of children who are White or not living in poverty in a U.S. Census-designated place (such as a city) and the proportion of children who are White or not living in poverty in the remainder of the school district. Descriptively, she found that the average place attempting a secession had a larger share of White and nonpoor children, whereas places that did not attempt a secession had social imbalances averaging closer to zero, indicating more commonality between places and their school districts.

Cooperstock (2023) estimated the likelihood a place within a school district attempted to secede and found that racial imbalance and economic imbalance, when measured independently, were statistically significant predictors in the full US sample. Further, in her baseline model that combines both racial and economic imbalance measures, she found that racial imbalance, but not

economic imbalance, was significant in southern states whereas economic imbalance, but not racial imbalance, was significant in non-southern states. However, in her final model, she found that social imbalance was less relevant once she included other place-level factors, the most important being the percent of the population 25 and older with a BA, BS, or other equivalent degree. Finally, the strongest predictor of a secession attempt in her final model was state-level legal provision.

State Policies Governing School District Secession

Twenty states have no law or state policy governing school district secession, and the other 30 have varying levels of permissiveness (EdBuild 2019; Reeves and Joo 2018; see Appendix A for a table of state policies). States without legislation or policy have had secession attempts (Oregon in 1998 and North Carolina in 2018), and some states have policies despite not having any school district secession attempts. We include a list of secession attempts by state in Appendix B.

We categorize the policies regulating school district secessions as either *approval mechanisms* or *impact assessment requirements*. With approval mechanisms, communities that want to secede must gain approval through a local referendum or from a state entity. Twenty-one states require action by voters from the community that wants to secede, whereas only four states require a vote of approval from the district that is being left behind. Another 21 states (not mutually exclusive) require approval by a state authority, one state requires action from the state legislature, and three states require a constitutional amendment.

Regarding impact assessment requirements, nine states require a fiscal impact assessment, and six states require a race/ethnicity and socioeconomic impact assessment. Within these broader categories, states may require an evaluation of the impact a secession would have on inequality, segregation, education quality, district efficiency, and funding. It is important to note, however, that while assessments might be required, the findings of these assessments only inform the approval process. That is, there is no mandated action if these assessments reveal negative impacts on the school district left behind.

Effects of School District Secession

School district secession has political, social, and economic effects. Politically, school district secession creates a new jurisdiction for local control. This new political jurisdiction often reinforces the social self-sorting pro-

cesses of ethnoracial segregation and thereby exacerbates economic inequality. Many researchers have found that school district secession can lead to increased racial segregation in a metropolitan region (Bischoff 2008; Buendía and Fisk 2017; Cooperstock 2023; Frankenerg 2009; Frankenberg and Orfield 2012; Frankenberg and Taylor 2017; Richards 2020; Taylor, Frankenberg, and Siegel-Hawley 2019; Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, and Diem 2017; Wilson 2016) in addition to stratification by class (Ayscue and Orfield 2015; Buendía and Humbert-Fisk 2015; Cooperstock 2023; Saiger 2010).

This body of research suggests that secession is a form of social closure whereby one group excludes another while hoarding advantages for the in-group (Cooperstock 2023). The seceding district is typically more affluent, and secession reallocates their students and tax base, leaving fewer resources to serve the larger district left behind with its higher proportion of students from low-income and minority backgrounds (Burks 2018; Houck and Murray 2019; Weathers and Sosina 2022). Thus, secession can lead to a concentration of disadvantaged students in the remaining district, making it nearly impossible to provide equality of opportunity (Murray 2009). In these ways, school district secession exemplifies institutional racism by which racial groups receive unequal treatment in public education through the de jure formation of school district boundaries along the lines of de facto segregation.

Conceptual Model

Working within the parameters of state policy, proponents for school district secession make political, economic, and racial arguments for their cause. We next explain these arguments to justify their inclusion in the model and detail our hypotheses.

State Policy Factors: Procedures for Secession

State policy sets the parameters for how easy or how difficult it is to complete the procedure for secession. States can take a permissive stance toward secession with low procedural hurdles or a strict stance with higher procedural hurdles that restrict it (Reeves and Joo 2018). Alternatively, some states have no provision for secession. We expect that states with more approval mechanisms in place and more impact assessment requirements will be less likely to have secession attempts whereas states with fewer approval mechanisms and impact assessment

requirements will be more likely to have secession attempts.

H1a: School districts in states that have more approval mechanisms will be less likely to experience a secession.

H1b: School districts in states that require more impact assessments will be less likely to experience a secession.

Political Factors: Local Control

Advocates for secession echo the long-standing call for local control in public education (Kirst and Wirt 2009). Local control has a populist orientation that is embedded in the Jeffersonian ethos of freedom, democracy, and self-determination (Syed 1966). Further, local control is a prized possession because it is perceived to give a municipality an advantage in education quality and economic development (Buendía and Humbert-Fisk 2015). Local control is particularly consequential for the distribution and management of local taxes. On average, school districts receive about 10% of their funding from the federal government, 45% from the state, and the other 45% from local sources (Leachman, Masterson, and Figueroa 2017). Yet the local portion of education funding varies greatly by property values (Hoxby 1998).

To protect property values, residents self-segregate and fence off their resources with political boundaries (Ayscue and Orfield 2015; Lichter, Parisi, and Taquino 2015). In a prominent secession case in Gardendale, Alabama, the mayor made this argument to the press saying that secession is about “keeping our tax dollars here with our kids rather than sharing them with kids all over Jefferson County” (Brown 2016, 4). Indeed, suburban municipalities are incentivized to create their own independent school districts so they can market themselves as prosperous bedroom communities for commuters with school-aged children (DiMartino and Jessen 2018).

As a community contributes a larger share of its own-source (local) tax revenue to a school district, we expect that community to desire more control over how its taxes are spent on education. Conversely, if a community contributes a smaller share of its own-source (local) tax revenue to a school district, then we expect that they will benefit from pooling their resources with

Figure 2. School District Secession Flyer for Gardendale, Alabama

Which path will Gardendale choose?



Places that chose NOT to form and support their own school system:

- ✓ Adamsville/Forestdale
- ✓ Hueytown
- ✓ Pleasant Grove
- ✓ Center Point/Huffman

Communities that chose to form and support their own school system, and are listed as some of the best places to live in the country:

- ✓ Homewood
- ✓ Hoover
- ✓ Vestavia
- ✓ Trussville

On which list will you place Gardendale?

wealthier neighbors and not seek local control which could reduce their resources for education.

H2a: A school district with more communities or places will be more likely to experience a secession attempt.

H2b: A school district with higher per-pupil revenues and a greater share of those revenues from local sources will be more likely to experience a secession attempt.

Economic Factors: Diseconomies of Scale

In addition to the populist argument for local control, advocates for secession may also appeal to budget-conscious and technocratic policymakers with an economic

argument for efficiency. In the past, proponents of consolidation argued for efficiency through economies of scale (Benson and O'Halloran 1987). Proponents for consolidation found that fixed costs could be spread across more students, enabling centralized administration to increase efficiency savings (Hanson 1964). Yet school districts in major metropolitan areas now serve much larger populations. Thus, school district fragmentation may be a pragmatic response to population growth. Whereas consolidation was recommended to achieve economies of scale in the 20th century, school districts managing an urbanized county may now be so large as to experience diseconomies of scale in the 21st century (Howley, Johnson, and Petrie 2011; Streifel, Foldes, and Holman 1991).

The benefits of consolidation to operational and cap-

ital cost savings have been challenged (Duncombe and Yinger 2001). Further research has found null or negative outcomes from consolidation (Berry and West 2010; Gordon and Knight 2009). Other researchers have found that smaller districts are more efficient and deliver better outcomes (Walberg and Fowler 1987), especially in rural areas (Haller and Monk 1988; Verstegen 1990). Overall, there is mixed literature on the effect of school district size on the efficiency and effectiveness of education spending (Boser 2013). Advocates for secession may interpret this research as support for right-sizing school districts. Therefore, we expect that larger school districts will be more likely to experience a secession attempt.

H3a: School districts with larger enrollments will be more likely to experience a secession attempt.

H3b: School districts with growing enrollments will be more likely to experience a secession attempt.

Racial Factors: Resegregation

In public, proponents for secession focus on local control and may also reference efficiency, but in the backstage behavior of grassroots organizing, an additional social argument is being made that appeals to racial exclusivity. This racial rationale is illustrated in Figure 2 and documented by *Stout v. Jefferson County Board of Education* (2017). Secessions are increasing segregation and economic inequality, so might the desires for separation by race and class be drivers of secession as well? In fact, the courts have found racist motivations for some secessions. Consider the Gardendale flyer used to promote secession in a private Facebook group (Figure 2).

In this flyer, a White school girl ponders the question: “Which path will Gardendale choose?” The poster urges parents to make the right choice between two paths. The list of cities in each column adds a racist prejudice: Will Gardendale secede from Jefferson County Schools and create a mostly White school district? Or will Gardendale fail to support its own school district and become mostly Black like the others? Judge Haikal, overseeing Gardendale’s secession case, wrote regarding the flyer (*Stout v. Jefferson County Board of Education* 2017, 1178):

If pictures speak louder than words, then a flyer bearing a photograph of a white student that asks Gardendale voters if they would rather live in an

affluent white city or a formerly white city that is now well-integrated or predominantly black communicates an unambiguous message of inferiority. There is no way to sidestep the harm that such a message conveys.

Recognizing this racial motivation, we expect that school districts with a higher racial dissimilarity index (greater segregation between schools in the district) will be more likely to experience a secession attempt.

H4a: School districts with more racial diversity will be less likely to experience a secession attempt.

H4b: School districts with more within-district segregation will be more likely to experience a secession attempt.

Research Methodology

By focusing on characteristics of the school district, our empirical approach builds on Cooperstock (2023), who examined the influence of place-based characteristics on the likelihood of a secession attempt. Proponents of secessions often point to issues with the school district, claiming that the school district is too large to respond to local needs or provide education services efficiently, but recent evidence would also suggest that secessions are driven by the school district’s racial composition (Brennan 2018). Therefore, we built a panel dataset of school districts from SY 1998 to 2018 to test which characteristics of school districts are associated with the likelihood of a secession attempt.

Dependent Variable

We use data collected by EdBuild to measure our dependent variable, secession attempts. EdBuild is a nonprofit organization that focused on K–12 school finance reform, and they constructed a dataset of secession attempts with Common Core Data (CCD) from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). First, they isolated school districts with boundary changes from one year to another and then cross-referenced whether a new school district had opened after a boundary change, confirming with state officials if the new school district had resulted from a successful secession. To identify defeated (failed) secession attempts, EdBuild relied on state officials and news reports. We supplement EdBuild’s (2019) list of secession attempts

with that of Richards (2020), who followed a similar process and included “nearly identical lists of secessions for the overlapping time period” (Richards 2020, 11).

In total, EdBuild (2019) and Richards (2020) observed 131 secession attempts across 88 school districts in 26 states from 1998 to 2019. Our panel consists of school district-year observations, so our dependent variable is whether a school district had any secession attempt during a particular year. With this variable construction, our analytical sample includes 72 secession attempts across 59 school districts in 18 states. We drop secession attempts if they could not be joined to a specific school year, which happened if the attempt was still ongoing or inactive. We also consolidated multiple successful secession attempts for the same district in the same year.

One limitation of this data is that secession attempts which were at first unsuccessful but later successful were only recorded once, so we do not observe repeated attempts. In other words, a school district may have had multiple attempts in prior years, but our dataset only includes the final defeated or successful secession. In line with Richards (2020) and Cooperstock (2023), we treat attempts as discrete, which may not capture multiyear campaigns to secede. As well, the data are likely biased toward recording successful secession attempts since those were easier to observe with the presence of a new district. Nevertheless, EdBuild’s dataset is an important and novel tool for this analysis, and it has previously been employed by education researchers (Cooperstock 2023; Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, and Diem 2017; Hawley, Diem, and Frankenberg 2018; Houck and Murray 2019; Taylor, Frankenberg, and Siegel-Hawley 2019).

Explanatory Variables

For our explanatory variables, we focus on four main determinants of secession attempts—state policy, political and economic factors, and the racial makeup the school district. To measure state policy, we rely on previous work from EdBuild (2019) and Reeves and Joo (2018). They classified a series of state policies as either *approval mechanisms* or *impact assessment requirements* that a community had to meet before it could secede from a school district.

Regarding approval mechanisms, some states require action by voters in the school district left behind, and other states require approval from a state

education agency or the legislature (EdBuild 2019). For example, any city in Alabama that has more than 5,000 residents can form its own school district with a petition signed by 15% of eligible voters and a referendum. States may also require impact assessments to evaluate the impact of racial and socioeconomic factors, funding, and efficiency. From this data, we create two count variables that measure how many approval mechanisms and impact assessment requirements states had in place over the span of the panel. Districts in states with no legislation are assigned a zero. We include a table of state policies in Appendix A. Of note, available data do not reflect changes in legislation over the span of our panel, so we treat these variables as fixed in our analysis.

Local control is a common argument made in support of school district secession. We operationalize local control in two ways. First, we create a count variable of the number of places within a school district since each place has the potential to attempt secession. The U.S. Census Bureau (1994) defines place as a concentration of population and includes municipalities, cities, towns, and other legal entity labels such as village. In our conceptualization, places serve as a supply of communities that could secede from a school district.

The Missouri Census Data Center’s Master Area Block Level Equivalency database (MABLE Geocorr) connects nested place geographies—and their population—with their encompassing school district. We use Geocorr 2000 for SY 1998 to 2009 since it includes data from the 2000 Census, and we use Geocorr 2014 for SY 2010 to 2018 since it includes data from the 2010 Census. Our count variable measures the number of places within a school district boundary with a population of over 700 people. We chose 700 as our minimum population because the smallest empirical example of a school district secession in our data was Bingham, Maine, which attempted secession from RSU 32 in 2012 with a population of 709.

The second way we operationalize local control is with the total revenue per pupil and the proportion of school district revenues that were derived from local sources. A community’s incentive to seek local control increases with the proportion of funding the school district receives from local sources, so scholars have previously tied local control to school finance

(Jiménez-Castellanos, López, and Rivera 2019; Jones 1976; Shelly 2007; Vazquez et al. 2014; Wolf and Sands 2016). States vary in terms of how they finance K–12 education, so the reliance on local funding differs across districts and among states (Verstegen and Jordan 2009). However, because most state finance systems attempt to equalize local tax effort with additional state funding, communities with higher proportions of local funding stand to lose less state funding if they secede, relative to communities with a lower proportion of local funding.

For our measures of economic determinants, we include the average size of a school within a school district and the percent change in enrollment for the school district from one school year to the next. Since these are not tied to an output like test scores, they do not capture a school district's efficiency in providing public education but instead measure whether a school district has reached its perceived capacity. Given the evidence that smaller class sizes are associated with gains in student achievement (Bosworth 2014; Shin and Chung 2009), a school district may be more likely to experience a secession attempt if a community perceives its schools (or classrooms) as crowded and less effective.

Finally, we consider the racial makeup of school districts with three measures. First, using school-level enrollment data, disaggregated by race, we quantify the level of segregation in a school district with a dissimilarity index, previously employed by Frankenberg (2009) and Mann and Rogers (2021), among others (Allen and Vignoles 2007). The dissimilarity index is derived with the following equation:

$$\text{District} = \frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^n \left| \frac{X_i}{X_T} - \frac{Y_i}{Y_T} \right|$$

where X_i is the enrollment of one racial group in school i , and X_T is the enrollment of that racial group in school district T . Y_i is the enrollment of another racial group in school i , and Y_T is the enrollment of that racial group in school district T . For interpretation, a school district with a dissimilarity score of 0 would have no segregation in that all schools would have the same proportion of one racial group compared to another. A score of 1 would indicate that schools in district T enrolled only one racial group, so one school may contain all of one racial group and another school would contain all the

other racial group. For interpretation purposes, we rescaled our dissimilarity scores to range from 0 to 100.

As constructed, the dissimilarity index allows us to compare segregation patterns among only two racial groups, so we constructed three indices to compare segregation between Black and White students, Hispanic and White students, and non-White and White students, separately. We then estimate separate models with each index and include in those models the level and yearly change in the percentage of students within a school district who were Black, Hispanic, and non-White, respectively.

Estimation Strategy

We examine the relationship between secession attempts and our explanatory variables by estimating the following model empirically as:

$$\text{Pr Att}_{it} = \alpha_1 \text{Policy}_i + \alpha_2 \text{Political}_{it} + \alpha_3 \text{Econ}_{it} + \alpha_4 \text{Race}_{it} + \alpha_5 \text{Locale}_{it} + \varepsilon_{it}$$

where the dependent variable, Att , is a binary variable with a value of 1 indicating school district i experienced a secession attempt in year t and 0 indicating it did not. **Policy**, **Political**, **Econ**, and **Race** are vectors that include explanatory variables described in the previous section. Of note, we transform per-pupil revenues to 2023 dollars using the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Consumer Price Index, and we include the NCES's locale classification, which is a "general geographic indicator that describes the type of area where a school is located" (Geverdt 2015). ε represents the error term.

We estimate Equation 1 using a logistic regression model with the Firth correction method and report the results as odds ratios (Firth 1993). We present three estimations of Equation 2 to compare the associations among secession attempts and a school district's student composition in terms of Black, Hispanic, and non-White students, respectively. Coefficients from this model reflect the likelihood school district i experienced a secession attempt, so coefficients less (or more) than one imply a school district was less (or more) likely to experience an attempt. Our operationalization of the state policy parameters raises endogeneity concerns, as state legislatures may respond to communities' desire to secede by setting requirements instead of communities navigating existing legislation in their attempt to secede. Thus, we caution that our coefficients represent associations between our explanatory variables in the likelihood of a secession attempt.

Student demographic data was first widely reported

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for School Districts with and without Secession Attempts

| | | No secession attempt (n = 266,176) | | | | Secession attempt (n = 1,099) | | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------|-------|--------|----------------------------------|---------|---------|--------|
| | | Mean | SD | Min | Max | Mean | SD | Min | Max |
| State Policy | Approval mechanisms | 1.6 | 1.4 | 0 | 4 | 2.4 | 0.9 | 0 | 3 |
| | Impact assessment requirements | 0.5 | 1.0 | 0 | 3 | 0.5 | 1.0 | 0 | 3 |
| Political | Places | 1.8 | 2.5 | 0 | 79 | 5.3 | 6.5 | 0 | 31 |
| | Total rev pp (\$s) | 18,126.7 | 6,993 | 5.5 | 59,962 | 17,620.3 | 5,950.4 | 8,675.4 | 52,936 |
| | Per of rev from local | 43.4 | 20.9 | 0 | 100 | 42.8 | 16.1 | 5.8 | 87.3 |
| Economic | Enrollment change (%) | -0.2 | 6.7 | -49.8 | 99 | -0.9 | 6.8 | -46.5 | 96.2 |
| | Student per school | 379.4 | 261.5 | 10 | 4,568 | 474.3 | 312.1 | 59 | 2,045 |
| Racial Make-up | Black students (%) | 7.0 | 15.7 | 0 | 100 | 9.4 | 18.1 | 0 | 83.2 |
| | Δ Black students (%) | 0.0 | 1.1 | -47.4 | 48.2 | 0.1 | 1.8 | -31.3 | 34.4 |
| | Hispanic students (%) | 11.6 | 19.2 | 0 | 100 | 11.2 | 22.2 | 0 | 90.1 |
| | Δ Hispanic students (%) | 0.4 | 1.8 | -47.3 | 49.5 | 0.3 | 1.6 | -28.9 | 32.2 |
| | Non-White students (%) | 25.2 | 27.2 | 0 | 100 | 27.6 | 31.8 | 0 | 100 |
| | Δ Non-White students (%) | 0.6 | 2.8 | -49.5 | 49.6 | 0.6 | 2.6 | -22.8 | 32.5 |
| | Dissimilarity index (Black-White) | 19.0 | 18.6 | 0 | 100 | 32.9 | 18.4 | 0 | 90.1 |
| | Dissimilarity index (Hispanic-White) | 16.4 | 16.0 | 0 | 100 | 29.2 | 17.1 | 0 | 97.7 |
| | Dissimilarity index (Non-White-White) | 12.6 | 12.8 | 0 | 100 | 25.1 | 17.2 | 0 | 74.4 |

Note: Revenues reported in 2023 dollars. Yearly changes in proportions of Black, Hispanic, and non-White students restricted to less than 50%. Descriptive statistics for full sample (secession attempts and no secession attempts) nearly identical to those for no secession attempt values.

**Yearly changes in proportions of Black, Hispanic, and non-White students restricted to less than 50%.

**Full sample (secession attempts and no secession attempts) descriptive statistics nearly identical to no secession attempt values.

by the NCES in SY 1998, so we dropped this SY to include the yearly change in the number of students and student demographics. Other school district data was not yet available for SY 2019, so our analytical sample comprises SY 1999 to 2018 with an unbalanced panel, as not every school district reported data for all years. Table 1 presents means and medians for our covariates, comparing school districts that ever experienced a secession attempt with those that never did.

Compared to those that never experienced a secession attempt, school districts that experienced an attempt were in states that had more approval mechanisms but the same number of impact assessment requirements, on average. There were more places in school districts that experienced an attempt relative to those that did not experience an attempt. School districts with a se-

cession attempt reported lower per-pupil revenues but the proportion of those revenues that came from local sources was similar to school districts without a secession attempt. Though school districts that experienced secession attempts had much larger schools, on average, they reported slightly larger decreases in enrollment. Finally, school districts that experienced a secession attempt had higher proportions of Black and non-White students but a lower proportion of Hispanic students. They were also much more segregated across all three dissimilarity indices. We should also note in Table 2 that, relative to school districts that did not experience a secession attempt, school districts that did were more likely to be in cities and towns where there is a density of people and less likely to be in suburbs and rural areas where the population is dispersed.

Table 2. Location of School Districts with and without Secession Attempts

| | No secession attempt (n = 266,176) | | Secession attempt (n = 1,099) | |
|---------------|---------------------------------------|-------|----------------------------------|-------|
| City | 36,689 | 13.78 | 283 | 25.75 |
| Suburb | 144,431 | 54.26 | 521 | 47.41 |
| Town | 40,299 | 15.14 | 209 | 19.02 |
| Rural | 44,757 | 16.81 | 86 | 7.83 |

Results

In Table 3, we present the results from the estimation of Equation 1 using a logistic regression. The covariates represent factors that are associated with a district's likelihood of experiencing a secession attempt, including state policy constraints and the political, economic, and racial characteristics of the school district. We include three estimations that vary only in the variables that represent the school district's student composition and racial segregation. Results for covariates were generally consistent across samples and are reported as log odds.

Across all our estimations, the total number of state requirements a community faced was positively related to the likelihood that a school district experienced a secession attempt, but the number of impact assessments was negatively related. These results provided support for Hypothesis 1b but not 1a, in which we posited that both approval mechanisms (H1a) and impact assessment requirements (H1b) would decrease the likelihood of a secession attempt.

We found evidence to support Hypothesis 2a, as the number of places was associated with a higher likelihood of a secession attempt, but we found no evidence for 2b. Neither total revenue per pupil nor the percentage of that revenue that came from local sources were statistically related to the likelihood of a secession attempt in any of our estimations. Our results provided mixed evidence to support Hypothesis 3. While the percent change in enrollment was statistically significant, it was negatively related to the likelihood of secession, which is the opposite of what we hypothesized. A one percent increase in enrollment was associated with approximately a 12% decrease in the likelihood of a secession attempt, on average, across our estimations. And while students per school were positively related to the likelihood of a secession attempt, the effect size was not practically relevant.

Finally, our results offered mixed evidence for Hypothesis 4a. The percentage of Black students in the school district was not related to the likelihood of a secession attempt; the percentage of Hispanic students was negatively related ($p < .1$), and the percentage of non-White students was negatively related ($p < .01$). Changes in these proportions for Black and non-White students, however, were statistically significant, suggesting that increases in the percentage of Black and non-White students were associated with higher likelihoods of secession attempts.

Our measures of segregation—dissimilarity indices—were statistically significant and positively related to the likelihood of a secession attempt in all estimations, lending support for Hypothesis 4b. As a school district's dissimilarity scores for Black, Hispanic, and non-White students increased by one, the likelihood of secession was 3.8%, 3.5%, and 5.1% higher for each of our student demographic groups, respectively. Finally, the likelihood of a secession attempt was not statistically different for a school district located in a city when compared to school districts in the other location categories.

Discussion

While rare, attempts by communities to secede from their city or county school district have increased over the last two decades. Communities that want to create their own school district often make political and economic arguments for doing so, either that they want local control or that splitting up the school district would improve economic efficiency by correcting diseconomies of scale. Despite these arguments, secession attempts have been blocked because of apparent racist motivations (e.g., *Stout v. Jefferson County Board of Education* 2017) or the potential for increased school segregation (which contradicts the unitary status requirement for school districts that are still under court-ordered desegregation). When successful, the average school district secession contributes to the resegregation of public schools and can exacerbate existing funding inequalities (Frankenberg 2009; Houk and Murray 2019).

Results from our main estimates suggest that state policies such as requiring impact assessments can serve as impediments to school district secessions. One measure of local control—the number of places within a school district that may conceivably secede—was sta-

Table 3. Logistic Regression Results from Estimation of Equation 1

| | Black | Hispanic | Non-White |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Approval mechanisms | 1.812*** (0.189) | 1.889*** (0.197) | 1.883*** (0.198) |
| Impact assessment requirements | 0.616*** (0.091) | 0.668*** (0.101) | 0.640*** (0.096) |
| Places | 1.064*** (0.010) | 1.081*** (0.010) | 1.077*** (0.010) |
| Rev pp (100s \$) | 0.999 (0.002) | 0.999 (0.002) | 1.000 (0.002) |
| Rev from local sources (%) | 1.006 (0.006) | 1.004 (0.006) | 1.003 (0.006) |
| Enrollment change (%) | 0.875*** (0.009) | 0.874*** (0.009) | 0.879*** (0.010) |
| Student per school | 1.001*** (0.000) | 1.001*** (0.000) | 1.001*** (0.000) |
| Proportion of Black, Hispanic, or Non-White students (%) | 1.002 (0.006) | 0.986* (0.008) | 0.986*** (0.005) |
| Δ in proportion of Black, Hispanic, or Non-White students (%) | 1.085* (0.047) | 1.018 (0.062) | 1.090*** (0.022) |
| Dissimilarity index | 1.038*** (0.005) | 1.035*** (0.006) | 1.051*** (0.006) |
| Compared to City | | | |
| Rural | 0.722 (0.251) | 0.640 (0.212) | 0.630 (0.226) |
| Suburb | 0.858 (0.313) | 0.784 (0.283) | 0.839 (0.308) |
| Town | 0.450* (0.217) | 0.455* (0.217) | 0.530 (0.257) |
| Constant | <0.001*** (<0.001) | <0.001*** (<0.001) | <0.001*** (<0.001) |
| Observations | 267,275 | 267,270 | 266,746 |

Estimates reported as log-odds ratios; revenues reported in 2023 dollars; standard errors in parentheses; ***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.1.

tistically relevant but the other variables pertaining to local control of finances were not. Regarding economic efficiency, another argument made by communities, the size of the school was negatively related to the likelihood of secession. This relationship was the opposite of what we posited, as communities often want to secede

when school district enrollments have increased beyond perceived capacity instead of when they are declining.

Finally, though school districts with higher proportions of Hispanic and non-White students were less likely to experience a secession attempt, school districts with increasing proportions of Black and non-White

students were more likely to experience secession attempts. We also found that within-district segregation was positively related to the likelihood of a secession attempt. Taken together, these results indicate that race is a social determinant of school district secessions, which is concerning given previous work showing that secessions exacerbated segregation within and across school districts (Houck and Murray 2019).

Despite these findings, researchers may inquire if school district secessions are driven by pure economic self-interest, as Fischel's (2001) homevoter hypothesis might suggest. Fischel (2001) argued that homeowners are now the most influential voting bloc in local politics and that their political behavior is best explained as an effort to protect and enhance the value of their largest capital asset, their house. The quality of a school district greatly impacts the value of residential property that is zoned for that district, so homevoters are incentivized to pay attention to the quality of schools, regardless of their parental status.

We recognize the validity of this analysis, and we agree that one can accurately describe school district secession behavior as economic self-interest, but this explanation is not sufficient on its own. The economic value of both the neighborhood and the school district is impacted by the legacy and ongoing history of racism in the housing market (Tegeler and Hilton 2017). Racism assigns different values to groups of people, and those values show up in the marketplace of economic exchange (Perry 2020). Therefore, homevoters are incentivized by the real estate market and the system of school district funding to choose more segregated school districts in White-majority communities (Holme 2002). Their economic self-interest has been shaped by institutional racism—what Rothstein (2017) calls the color of law. We would not describe school district secessions as driven by pure economic self-interest because the two social forces of race and economy have been interlocked in racial capitalism (Pierce 2017; Serrano 2023).

Considered together, our results indicate a need for a more nuanced policy response. Secessions appear to be more likely in school districts with declining enrollments where the non-White student population is more segregated. With few impediments, a small, privileged portion of a community can orchestrate a school district secession to the detriment of the broader public. Requiring fiscal and socioeconomic impact assessments could prevent unnecessary and destructive secessions.

This approach may be more feasible for state executives to implement, and at the very least, would provide voters with more information when considering secession.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

These results should be viewed with the following limitations in mind. First, we are studying rare events that may defy statistical predictions with limited data, so our empirical results should be viewed as associations. To that end, our point estimates may overstate the practical relevance of how a unit change in one of our explanatory variables impacts the likelihood of secession. Second, treating secession attempts as discrete can be problematic, as some attempts may last multiple years, or they might start, stop, and resume years later. Following previous scholarship (Cooperstock 2023; Richards 2020), we rely on EdBuild's dataset as an important and novel tool for this analysis, but future research should consider alternative methods for identifying and defining successful and unsuccessful secession attempts.

Another limitation involves how we operationalized state policy variables. Available data only indicated if the policy was present in a state but not *when* the policy was enacted or changed; thus, we could not employ panel estimation techniques like including school district fixed effects. And while we improve upon Cooperstock's (2023) measure of approval mechanisms and impact assessment requirements by using a count variable, our approach does not differentiate among these requirements in terms of the work required to meet them. In other words, a constitutional amendment is a higher bar to meet than action from the state legislature. Related to this limitation, our operationalization of approval mechanisms and impact assessment requirements likely caused those empirical estimates to suffer from endogeneity. We noted this in our research methodology, but we must reiterate that states may have responded to community desires to secede with legislation instead of that legislation influencing whether and how those communities attempted to secede.

Future research could address these limitations, especially in how approval mechanisms and impact assessments are considered. Researchers may also leverage our estimation strategy to study the impact of school district secession on a variety of education outcomes at the student, teacher, school, district, state, and regional levels of analysis. Further research can also test our hypotheses and develop more nuanced measures for politi-

cal, economic, and racial determinants of school district secession. For example, income inequality may be a determining factor in fostering secession efforts, but measures of income inequality are not readily available for school districts for the span of our panel, an opportunity for future research. More importantly, further research needs to be done on how states are responding to school district secession attempts, including when and why state policies, procedures, approval mechanisms, and impact assessment requirements were put in place.

Conclusion

In this article, we explored the determinants of school district secessions, testing whether observable political, economic, and racial characteristics of school districts were related to the likelihood they would experience a secession attempt. We also considered whether state policy influenced the likelihood of secession attempts. Overall, our results suggest that state policy can constrain communities from attempting to secede from their encompassing school district, though we suggest additional inquiries into the varying impact of the approval mechanisms and requirements for impact assessments. Not surprisingly, school districts with more communities, measured with the number of U.S. Census-designated places, were more likely to experience a secession attempt, but in contrast with our expectations and claims by communities that want to secede, we also found that school districts with declining enrollments were more likely to experience a secession attempt.

Our results also reveal a concerning association between the changing racial diversity within a school district, as well as the level of racial segregation. School districts that were becoming more racially diverse, as well as those with a more racially segregated student body, were more likely to experience a secession attempt. Given these results and the history of racism and court-ordered desegregation, we recommend that state policymakers reevaluate their requirements for school district secession. Communities who wish to secede and create their own school district should bear the burden of proof that this fragmentation of the public education system will not contribute to resegregation along racial and class lines. Such racial and socioeconomic impact assessments could be conducted or overseen by an independent agency or state-level entity that is less partial than the communities involved.

Importantly, because public education is a collective good, all communities in a school district that are affected by a proposed secession should have a democratic say in that policy decision. Currently, only four states require a majority vote from the district that is being left behind to approve of the secession; these states are Arizona, Connecticut, Texas, and Vermont. States should also be able to rely on the federal courts and departments of education in federal and state governments to provide state administrators with legal counsel and technical guidance for how to identify and prevent discriminatory effects of school district secession.

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Christopher Tyler Burks (he/him) (burks@urbananalysis.org) is a visiting assistant professor in the Department of Political Science at Samford University and a PhD candidate in the Department of Public Administration and Policy at American University. He studies urban policy and regional governance, and his scholarship appears in *Journal of Public Affairs Education*.

Peter A. Jones PhD (he/him) (PeterJones@uab.edu) is an associate professor in the Department of Political Science and Public Administration at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. He researches topics in public budgeting and finance, focusing on local and special district governments. His research has appeared in *Policy Studies Journal*, among others.

Appendix A. State Policies for School District Secession

| | <i>Approval mechanisms</i> | | | | | <i>Impact assessment requirements</i> | | |
|----|----------------------------|--|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------|------------|
| | Action by voters | Action by voters in district left behind | Approval by state authority | Action from state legislature | Constitutional amendment | Racial/ socio-economic factors | Effect on funding | Efficiency |
| AL | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| AK | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| AZ | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| AR | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| CA | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| CO | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| CT | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| DC | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| FL | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| GA | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| HI | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| ID | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| IL | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| IN | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| IA | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| KS | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| KY | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| LA | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| ME | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| MD | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| MA | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| MI | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| MN | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| MS | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| MO | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| MT | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| NE | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| NV | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| NH | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| NJ | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| NM | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| NY | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| NC | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| ND | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| OH | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| OK | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| OR | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| PA | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| RI | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| SC | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| SD | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| TN | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| TX | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| UT | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| VT | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| VA | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| WA | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| WV | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| WI | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| WY | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |

Appendix B. Record of Secession Attempts via Edbuild (2019) and Richards (2020)

| State | Secession status | Seceding district | Left behind district |
|--------------|-------------------------|---|---|
| Alabama | Seceded (1998) | Madison City | Madison County School District |
| Alabama | Seceded (2003) | Leeds City | Jefferson County School District |
| Alabama | Seceded (2004) | Boaz City | Marshall County School District |
| Alabama | Seceded (2005) | Trussville City | Jefferson County School District |
| Alabama | Defeated | Daphne | Baldwin County School District |
| Alabama | Seceded (2007) | Saraland City | Mobile County Public Schools |
| Alabama | Seceded (2011) | Chickasaw City | Mobile County Public Schools |
| Alabama | Seceded (2012) | Satsuma City | Mobile County Public Schools |
| Alabama | Seceded (2012) | Alabaster City | Shelby County School District |
| Alabama | Defeated | Orange Beach | Baldwin County School District |
| Alabama | Seceded (2014) | Pelham City | Shelby County School District |
| Alabama | Seceded (2015) | Pike Road | Montgomery County Schools |
| Alabama | Seceded (2019) | Gulf Shores | Baldwin County School District |
| Alabama | Defeated | Gardendale | Jefferson County |
| Alabama | Inactive | Fairhope | Baldwin County School District |
| Alabama | Ongoing | Atmore | Escambia County |
| Arkansas | Seceded (2014) | Jacksonville/North Pulaski School District | Pulaski County Special School District |
| California | Seceded (1998) | Golden Valley Unified | Madera Unified |
| California | Defeated (2001) | Carson | LA Unified School District |
| California | Defeated (2001) | San Fernando Valley | LA Unified School District |
| California | Defeated (2008) | Camarillo | Oxnard Union HSD |
| California | Seceded (2014) | Wiseburn | Centinela Valley High School District |
| California | Defeated (2015) | Bullard, Edison, Roosevelt, and Fresno High | Fresno Unified |
| California | Defeated (2017) | Huron | Coalinga-Huron Unified School District |
| California | Inactive | San Clemente | Capistrano Unified School District |
| California | Ongoing | Northgate | Mt. Diablo Unified School District |
| California | Ongoing | Malibu Unified School District | Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District |
| Colorado | Seceded (2001) | Idalia RJ-3 School District | East Yuma |
| Colorado | Seceded (2001) | Wray RD-2 School District | East Yuma |
| Colorado | Seceded (2001) | Liberty J-4 School District | West Yuma |
| Colorado | Seceded (2001) | Yuma 1 School District | West Yuma |
| Georgia | Inactive | Dunwoody | Dekalb County Schools |
| Idaho | Seceded (2000) | Troy School District | Whitepine School District |
| Idaho | Seceded (2007) | Mountain View School District | Grangeville Joint School District 241 |
| Idaho | Seceded (2007) | Salmon River Joint School Dist | Grangeville Joint School District 241 |
| Indiana | Defeated | East Madison School Corp. | Anderson Community School Corp. |
| Indiana | Ongoing | Silver Creek | West Clark |
| Iowa | Ongoing | West Scott | Davenport School District |
| Iowa | Inactive | North Liberty | Iowa City Community School District |

| State | Secession status | Seceding district | Left behind district |
|-----------|------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| Louisiana | Seceded (2003) | City Of Baker School District | East Baton Rouge Parish School District |
| Louisiana | Seceded (2003) | Zachary Community School District | East Baton Rouge Parish School District |
| Louisiana | Seceded (2007) | Central Community School District | East Baton Rouge Parish School District |
| Louisiana | Ongoing | St. George | East Baton Rouge Parish School District |
| Maine | Seceded (2003) | Lake View | SAD 41 |
| Maine | Seceded (2004) | West Forks Plantation | SAD 13 |
| Maine | Seceded (2004) | Seboeis Plantation | SAD 31 |
| Maine | Seceded (2005) | Lowell | SAD 31 |
| Maine | Seceded (2006) | Cutler Public Schools | SAD 77 Cutler |
| Maine | Seceded (2006) | Machiasport Public Schools | SAD 77 Cutler |
| Maine | Seceded (2006) | Whiting Public Schools | SAD 77 Cutler |
| Maine | Seceded (2007) | Chebeague Island Public Schools | RSU 51/MSAD 51 |
| Maine | Seceded (2012) | Portage Lake | RSU 32 |
| Maine | Seceded (2013) | Cherryfield Public Schools | RSU 37/MSAD 37 |
| Maine | Seceded (2013) | Eustis Public Schools | RSU 58/MSAD 58 |
| Maine | Seceded (2013) | Brighton Plantation | RSU 59 |
| Maine | Seceded (2013) | Athens Public Schools | RSU 59/MSAD 59 |
| Maine | Seceded (2013) | Glenburn Public Schools | RSU 26 |
| Maine | Seceded (2013) | Veazie Public Schools | RSU 26 |
| Maine | Seceded (2013) | RSU 22 | RSU 20 |
| Maine | Seceded (2014) | Hancock School Department | RSU 88/MSAD 24 |
| Maine | Seceded (2014) | Wiscasset School Department | RSU 12 |
| Maine | Seceded (2014) | Dayton School Department | RSU 23 |
| Maine | Seceded (2014) | Saco School Department | RSU 23 |
| Maine | Defeated (2014) | Freeport | RSU 5 |
| Maine | Seceded (2014) | Ellsworth School Department | RSU 24 |
| Maine | Seceded (2014) | Lamoine School Department | RSU 24 |
| Maine | Seceded (2015) | Winterville Plantation | MSAD 27 |
| Maine | Seceded (2015) | Andover | RSU 44 |
| Maine | Seceded (2015) | West Bath | RSU 1 |
| Maine | Defeated (2015) | Kennebunkport | RSU 21 |
| Maine | Seceded (2015) | Saint George | RSU 13 |
| Maine | Defeated (2015) | Rockland | RSU 13 |
| Maine | Seceded (2015) | Northport | RSU 20 |
| Maine | Seceded (2015) | RSU 71 | RSU 20 |
| Maine | Seceded (2016) | Cary Plantation | SAD 70 |
| Maine | Defeated (2016) | Arundel | RSU 21 |
| Maine | Seceded (2017) | Burlington | RSU 31 |
| Maine | Seceded (2017) | RSU 56 | RSU 10 |
| Maine | Seceded (2017) | Byron | RSU10 |
| Maine | Seceded (2018) | Eagle Lake | MSAD 27 |

| State | Secession status | Seceding district | Left behind district |
|----------------|------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| Maine | Seceded (2018) | Sebago | SAD 61 |
| Maine | Defeated (2018) | Chelsea | RSU 12 |
| Maine | Seceded (2018) | Moro Plantation | RSU 50 |
| Maine | Seceded (2018) | RSU 89 | RSU 50 |
| Maine | Defeated (2019) | Cambridge | RSU 80 |
| Maine | Seceded (2019) | Limestone | RSU 39 |
| Maine | Ongoing | Raymond | RSU 14 |
| Massachusetts | Seceded (2002) | Pembroke | Silver Lake |
| Massachusetts | Defeated | Upton | Mendon-Upton Regional |
| Massachusetts | Seceded (2015) | Worthington School District | Gateway Regional School District |
| Massachusetts | Defeated (2018) | East Brookfield | Spencer-East Brookfield Regional School District |
| Montana | Ongoing | Lockwood | Billings School District |
| Montana | Ongoing | East Helena | Helena School District |
| New Hampshire | Defeated | Sandown | Timberlane Regional School District |
| New Jersey | Seceded (2017) | Loch Arbour | Ocean Township School District |
| New Jersey | Ongoing | Woodcliff Lake | Pascack Valley Regional High School District |
| New Mexico | Defeated | Kirtland | Central Consolidated School District |
| New Mexico | Inactive | <i>Undefined</i> | Albuquerque Public Schools |
| New York | Inactive | Olive | Onteora |
| North Carolina | Defeated | <i>Multiple areas</i> | Wake County School District/Charlotte-Mecklenberg School District |
| North Carolina | Ongoing | Cornelius | Charlotte-Mecklenberg |
| North Carolina | Ongoing | Huntersville | Charlotte-Mecklenberg |
| North Carolina | Ongoing | Mint Hill | Charlotte-Mecklenberg |
| North Carolina | Ongoing | Matthews | Charlotte-Mecklenberg |
| Ohio | Seceded (2000) | Monroe Local School District | Middletown City School District |
| Ohio | Seceded (2004) | Manchester Local | Adams County School District |
| Oregon | Seceded (1998) | Knappa 4 | Clatskanie 6J |
| Oregon | Inactive | Canyonville | South Umpqua School District 19 |
| South Dakota | Seceded (2003) | Tea Area School District 41-5 | Lennox School District |
| Tennessee | Seceded (2014) | Arlington | Shelby County Schools |
| Tennessee | Seceded (2014) | Bartlett | Shelby County Schools |
| Tennessee | Seceded (2014) | Collierville | Shelby County Schools |
| Tennessee | Seceded (2014) | Germantown | Shelby County Schools |
| Tennessee | Seceded (2014) | Lakeland | Shelby County Schools |
| Tennessee | Seceded (2014) | Millington | Shelby County Schools |
| Tennessee | Defeated | Brentwood | Williamson County Schools |
| Tennessee | Defeated | Signal Mountain | Hamilton County |
| Tennessee | Inactive | Red Bank | Hamilton County |
| Texas | Ongoing | East Austin | Austin Independent School District |
| Texas | Inactive | Whiterock | Dallas Independent School District |

| State | Secession status | Seceding district | Left behind district |
|------------|------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Utah | Defeated | Lehi | Alpine School District |
| Utah | Defeated | Orem and Pleasant Grove | Alpine School District |
| Utah | Defeated | East Granite | Granite School District |
| Utah | Seceded (2008) | Canyons District | Jordan School District |
| Utah | Defeated | South Jordan City | Jordan School District |
| Vermont | Inactive | Townshend | Leland and Gray Union HS District |
| Washington | Inactive | Noth/South | Seattle Public Schools |
| Wisconsin | Seceded (2007) | Gresham School District | Shawano-Gresham School District |
| Wisconsin | Ongoing | Darien | Delavan-Darien |
| Wisconsin | Ongoing | Caledonia | Racine Unified School District |