



Modern-Day School Segregation

Addressing the Lasting Impacts of Racist Choices on Virginia's Education System

Executive Summary

Diverse learning environments are beneficial to all students, and especially students of color. The widespread benefits include higher academic achievement, increased likelihood of going to college, better workforce preparation, and an improved likelihood of students having the school resources that they need. Virginia students are increasingly racially diverse. More than half of Virginia students are students of color (22% Black, 17% Latinx, 7% Asian American/Pacific Islander, 6% multiple races).¹ But students have not been able to access the full array of benefits from this increasing diversity, because segregation in Virginia schools remains a significant challenge and is even getting worse by some measures.

Virginia's long history of passing both overt and covert racist policies has segregated schools and deprived communities of color of educational opportunities and resources. Black Virginians and other groups of color have fought for educational equity and sought to improve their lives through the creation of intellectually rigorous and accessible educational institutions. These efforts led to the creation of public education in Virginia. Yet more than a century of white-led racist policies, including student placement, housing discrimination, exclusionary employment practices, attacks on Black wealth building, school closures, privatization, limits on integration across school district boundaries, and white flight have entrenched racial segregation within Virginia schools.

By some measures, racial segregation has gotten worse in Virginia over the past 15 years. TCI analysis shows three alarming trends:

- Black and Latinx students are increasingly likely to attend schools that are almost entirely non-white and these schools have fewer resources and course offerings than schools with larger shares of white students.
- Black and Latinx students continue to attend schools with high levels of poverty compared to white students and the overall student body.
- School segregation has increased in many of Virginia's metro areas.

As history demonstrates, current-day schooling segregation continues to be crafted through a web of overt and covert racist policy choices. "Color-blind" solutions will not address the issues discussed in this report, but instead would ignore and reinforce the racism that exists within the education system. Intentional, anti-racist policy solutions like district rezoning, regional integration efforts, need-based funding, a racial-equity centered school rating system, and affordable housing considerations are strong options that, together, would begin to build a more equitable system of public education.



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Benefits for Students of Diverse Schools: Inside and Long After the Classroom

Students in Virginia are increasingly racially diverse. Today, students of color make up a majority (52%) of all students statewide — a 30% increase from the 2003-2004 school year. The number of Latinx students has almost tripled since then, and the number of Asian American students has almost doubled.² Increasing racial diversity has widespread benefits for all students and especially students of color, including higher academic achievement, increased likelihood of going to college, better workforce preparation, and an improved likelihood of school resource equity.³

Research has shown that parents of all backgrounds generally agree, at least in principle, that racial and economic integration is important and that they would prefer their children attend integrated schools.⁴ At the same time, in districts where parents have greater opportunities to choose schools (where integration is not the goal), schools appear to become more segregated, demonstrating that resistance to integration persists today. But there is a comprehensive body of research that makes it clear: diverse learning environments are beneficial to *all* students, demonstrating the most benefit to students from historically disadvantaged groups. As Dr. Genevieve Siegel-Hawley notes in *A Single Garment: Creating Intentionally Diverse Schools That Benefit All Children*, “students of all backgrounds benefit from well-designed diverse schools that guard against second-generation segregation within the building.”⁵ Diverse schools set the stage for better outcomes, in education and later in life, across the board.

Stronger academic outcomes

One of the many benefits of diverse schools is stronger academic outcomes for students from groups who have historically faced barriers. For students who are Black and whose families have low income, it is especially effective, with benefits including higher academic achievement and better health in adulthood. Studies have shown that Black and Latinx students from families who have low income have higher academic achievement across multiple subjects when enrolled in diverse schools. Whereas students who are white and whose families have high income perform well on tests regardless of how diverse their school is.

Greater interpersonal skills

Beyond these benefits, diverse schools better prepare all students for the workforce. Research has shown that when students learn about different life experiences first-hand, they become better critical thinkers, collaborators, and communicators — all essential skills for the workplace and a successful education. And both historically disadvantaged and advantaged students have a wealth of social and cultural resources to impart with peers. Exchange of these resources is necessary for meaningful relationship building, and critical for students who will eventually need to work and live with people who are different from them.

Diverse learning environments benefit all students and set the stage for better outcomes, in education and later in life, across the board.

At the same time, growing up in racially isolated schools can lead students to form stereotypes about other races, and further perpetuates racism within education and beyond. Research has shown that school integration is even more effective than living in a diverse neighborhood when it comes to reducing prejudice and forming cross-racial friendships.

More equitable resources: Course offerings, staffing, and funding

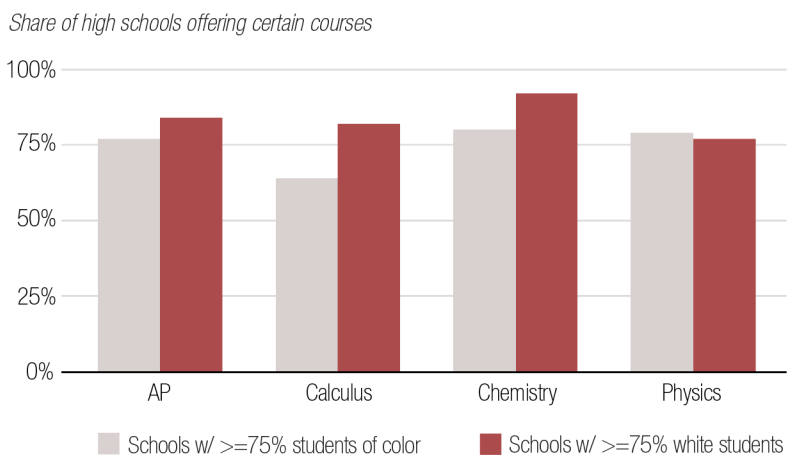
Perhaps most importantly, school integration would begin to provide resource equity to students who have been systematically denied resources. One example is that integration has been linked to more challenging course offerings in schools. According to a 2016 report from the Government Accountability Office, schools serving 75% or more students who are Black, Latinx, and from families with low incomes offer fewer math, science, and college preparatory classes.⁶

The same is true here in Virginia. Analysis using Office for Civil Rights data shows that high schools with 75% or more students of color are less likely to offer calculus and chemistry classes.⁷ And only three-quarters (77%) of those high schools offer at least one advanced placement (AP) course. In addition to being denied the chance at more challenging and engaging coursework, these students are denied the secondary benefits: being prepared for future life experiences like college and, in the case of advanced placement courses that earn college credits, financial resources.

Attracting and retaining strong teachers are also part of ensuring resource equity for students. Research has shown that teachers in segregated schools get paid the least, are subject to stringent accountability efforts that counterintuitively create difficult-to-work-in, stressful environments, and turn over frequently.⁸ The presence of teachers of color in diverse faculties is incredibly important for students of color, because it sends the message that leaders can look like and relate to them. Studies show it produces higher levels of academic achievement and increases student access to advanced programs. One particular study in North Carolina

Segregated Schools Means Fewer Opportunities for Students of Color

Students of color in Virginia are not given the opportunity to access challenging coursework or college preparatory classes at the rate white students are, leading to inequities in outcomes.



Note: Analysis excludes alternative ed. programs and detention centers

Source: TCI analysis of 2015-2016 Civil Rights Data Collection published by the Office of Civil Rights



found that, for Black boys from families with low income, having at least one Black teacher in grades 3 to 5 decreased the likelihood of dropping out of high school by 29%. For Black boys from households identified as “persistently low-income”, having one Black teacher decreased their chances of dropping out by 39%.

Lastly, school integration can begin to make funding more equitable. If students of all backgrounds go to school together, it would be harder to deny resources to any particular school.

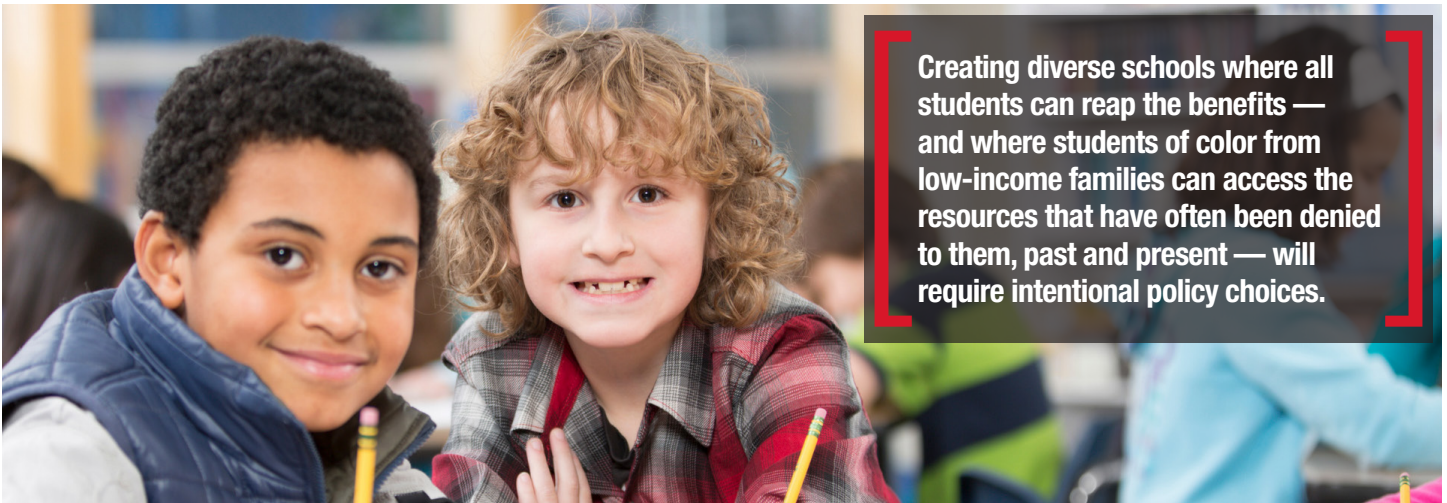
Historical instances, like that of West Charlotte High in North Carolina where a segregated Black school only got improved facilities after it desegregated and enrolled white students, have shown that some are only willing to address resource equity when the fates of white students are linked to students of color. In present day, schools with a high share of Black students and students of color still experience the consequences of chronic underfunding. Just this year, a middle school in central Virginia where over 75% of the student body are students of color gained

news coverage for the condition of the facilities. Overheated classrooms, walls in disrepair, and leaky roofs were just a few of the issues that led a teacher to describe the conditions as “inhumane.” Such instances are not unique. In southwest Virginia, Lee County students have been rerouted through hallways during heavy rain to avoid water leaking through the roof. And in Northern

Virginia, health department officials have warned that mold found in one school could cause respiratory issues in students with asthma.

While it is true that Virginia’s overall student body is increasingly diverse — over half of students in Virginia are students of color — analysis of school enrollment data has shown that a lot of

students do not get the opportunity to attend a diverse school. Creating diverse schools where all students can reap the benefits — and where students of color from low-income families can access the resources that have often been denied to them, past and present — will require intentional policy choices.



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More than a Century of White-Led Laws and Policies Segregated Virginia Schools

Despite the benefits of racially diverse learning environments for students, Virginia has a long history of passing both overt and covert racist state policies to segregate schools and deprive communities of color of educational opportunities and resources. Any policy, including laws, regulations, and processes, that creates or sustains racial inequity is a racist policy. Virginia’s history also includes Black families and students, and other groups of color, fighting for educational equity and seeking to improve their lives through the creation of intellectually rigorous and democratically robust educational institutions. Not just in Virginia but throughout the South, Black people have persistently challenged the racism entrenched within public education and other institutions.

As James Anderson notes in his seminal study, “The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935”, “...a central theme in the history of the education of Black Americans is the persistent struggle to fashion a system of formal education that prefigured their liberation from peasantry.”⁹ To understand our current moment, it is useful to revisit the complex and prolonged struggle for educational equity in the state of Virginia.

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Reconstruction Period (1865-1877) - Creation of free public schools in Virginia

Black leaders played a central role in the creation of free public school in the United States and Virginia. They regarded the acquisition of literacy and formal education as central to advancing their political and economic goals. This perspective was hardly unique among newly freedwomen and men. As scholar Heather Williams explains in the book *Self Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom*, “In the decade of the 1860s, freedpeople attended schools by the thousands. They rebuilt burned-out school houses, armed themselves to protect threatened teachers, and persisted in the effort to be literate, self-sufficient participants in the larger American society.”¹⁰

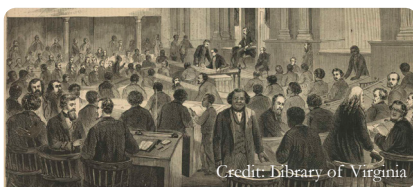
While the segregated state of current-day schooling can be traced back to slavery, racially segregated schools were not mandated by state law during the Reconstruction era following the Civil War.¹¹ In fact, the Reconstruction era saw the formation of the first free public schools in many southern states, and Black leaders in state legislatures played a central role in this change. In Virginia, 24 Black representatives in the General Assembly joined with white Republicans to amend the state constitution to establish a free statewide system of public education. Before this point, state-funded public schooling did

not exist. Schooling was reserved for wealthy, white families — Black children and poor white children went without.

Establishing a free statewide public education system contributed to this being a very progressive period in American history. But it would be inaccurate to suggest that it was positive for all. For some, education was not something that was *for* them, but done *to* them. Before and throughout the period, the federal government and Christian missionaries would task themselves with coercing and forcing American Indian families to send their children to faraway, off-reservation boarding schools in an attempt to erase American Indian culture.¹²

The profound achievements of the legislators of the time, while foundational to our present system of public education, would be short-lived. The expansion of rights won during Reconstruction — including birthright citizenship and the right (for men) to vote — was met with swift rejection by white Southerners, resulting in widespread voter suppression and violence against people who were formerly enslaved. It would culminate in the U.S. Supreme Court’s landmark decision in 1896, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, making the racial segregation of Black people constitutional.

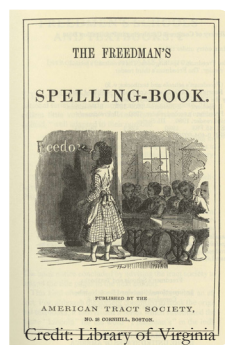
Black leadership during the Reconstruction Period would lead to free public education and a wide expansion of rights.



Credit: Library of Virginia

In Virginia, 24 Black representatives in the General Assembly joined with white Republicans to amend the state constitution to establish a free statewide system of public education, to be fully introduced in all counties by 1876

1869



Credit: Library of Virginia

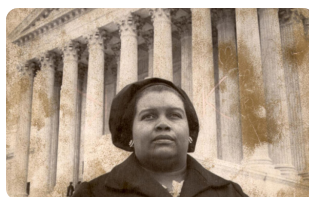
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— Heather Williams

1870-1877

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Fast Forward >>>



Credit: VPM News

Poll taxes and other methods of disenfranchisement lasted for decades. **Evelyn Butts**, a civil rights activist and politician from Norfolk, challenged the poll tax and took her case before the U.S. Supreme Court in **1963**. The case became part of *Harper v. Virginia State Board of Election*, which declared poll taxes unconstitutional in Virginia.

The backlash by white Southerners would culminate in the U.S. Supreme Court’s landmark decision in 1896, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, making the racial segregation of Black people constitutional.

Post-Plessy v. Ferguson (1896-1920) - Segregation and disenfranchisement

The Supreme Court ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* upheld the legality of racial segregation for all public accommodations under the guise of “separate but equal.” It gave way to legislation designed to disenfranchise Black voters, maintain fundamentally unequal systems of education, and confirmed the anti-Black racism that white people had made a part of national identity. All institutions and aspects of social life were separate, but hardly equal.

In Virginia, Black schools were at the mercy of white-controlled state funding mechanisms. At the 1901-1902 Virginia constitutional convention, which passed a series of amendments that effectively disenfranchised Black Virginians (e.g., the implementation of a poll tax, grandfather clause, and an understanding clause), delegates adopted a supposedly race-neutral policy that stipulated that state funds be distributed to cities and counties on the basis of total school population. To ensure the unequal distribution of resources along racial lines, local officials were granted control over the distribution of these funds.¹³ Needless to say, white schools received the vast majority of these funds, even in districts with large Black populations.

State legislators showed their commitment to undermining the quest for education for Black students at the convention. During deliberations, Richard McIlwaine, then-president of Hampden-Sydney College, dismissed the idea that Black

students should have access to education beyond the primary grade level. “We certainly do not need any high schools for our colored people in these counties,” he told delegates.

This attitude was widespread among white people and helps explain the enormous obstacles Black families faced in providing their children with a high school education. In fact, with limited options, many members of the Black middle-class had to send their children out of the state in order for them to attend high school. This placed an added economic burden on Black families.

This was the context in which Black students and families pushed for the creation of high schools for their children. In 1909, Armstrong, the first Black high school in Richmond, opened its doors. Five years later, in 1914, Booker T. Washington in Norfolk became the state’s first accredited high school for Black students. And 1926 marked the opening of Jefferson High School, the first Black high school in Charlottesville.

As one might imagine, these schools were severely under resourced. In fact, in some cities like Charlottesville, local leaders worked to make sure that schools for Black children would be architecturally inferior to schools for white children. In other words, white supremacy was built into the environment.

After Plessy v. Ferguson, institutions and aspects of social life remained separate, but hardly equal.

Credit: Roanoke Daily Times



Plessy v. Ferguson gave way to legislation designed to disenfranchise Black voters, maintain unequal systems of education, and confirmed anti-Black racism.

Credit: Richmond Family Magazine



In 1909, Armstrong, the first Black high school in Richmond, opened its doors.

1896

1901

1909

The Negro Educational and Industrial Assoc. of Virginia held a public meeting in Staunton to discuss issues that would be brought before the 1901-1902



Credit: Library of Virginia

Virginia constitutional convention, including public schooling, which lawmakers were attempting to deny Black students.

Despite choices by lawmakers to undermine the quest for education, Black students and families pushed for the creation of high schools for their children.

Exclusionary housing policy & urban renewal (1920-1954)

Another tool used to constrain Black opportunity was to enact discriminatory housing policies. The late 19th and early 20th centuries saw the uprising of racially restrictive housing covenants — agreements between buyers and sellers that they cannot sell or lease the home to a person of color. It prevented both ownership and occupancy by Black Americans, and shut them off from not only living in certain areas but from accruing equity from their property, erecting a barrier to building wealth.¹⁴ In 1911, Richmond, Virginia was the second city after Baltimore to pass housing ordinances designating neighborhoods by race. While housing policy and education policy may seem separate, these policies would come to mutually reinforce each other.

By the 1930s, housing in Richmond and across the state was thoroughly segregated. The Federal Housing Administration further entrenched segregation by securing a drop in interest rates, smaller down payments, and insured private mortgages for “low-risk” homeowners, while denying Black Americans access to such benefits.¹⁵

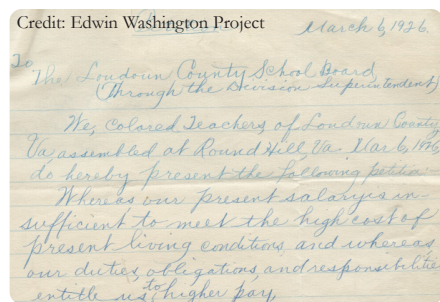
Lending organizations color-coded neighborhoods to designate whether it was safe to insure mortgages in certain locations, a process called “redlining.” Black neighborhoods were considered “high-risk” and colored red under the reasoning

that the presence of Black families would lead to decline in property values in white neighborhoods. This deprived them of investment, and private investors would cite neighborhood deterioration as a reason to deny loans for new housing or repairs. By severely limiting the movement of Black people, the ability to build wealth through homeownership was denied. These policies became inextricably linked to how the public education system operated, and it remains that way today, because what school someone goes to — and how well resourced it is — typically depends on the location of their neighborhood.¹⁶

Denying access to certain neighborhoods and housing resources is just part of excluding Black people through housing policy. It is also important to note the devastating impact that urban renewal has had in segregated neighborhoods. Throughout the state of Virginia, urban renewal displaced families, destroyed or compromised historic landscapes within Black neighborhoods, and augmented economic inequality across racial lines.

In Richmond, the city undertook what landscape architect K. Ian Grandison refers to as “punitive planning.” Immediately after the passage of the federal Housing Act of 1949, the city of Richmond and the Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority (RRHA) applied for a \$1.3 million federal grant for

Black students, families, and teachers were denied adequate resources for high-quality housing and education.

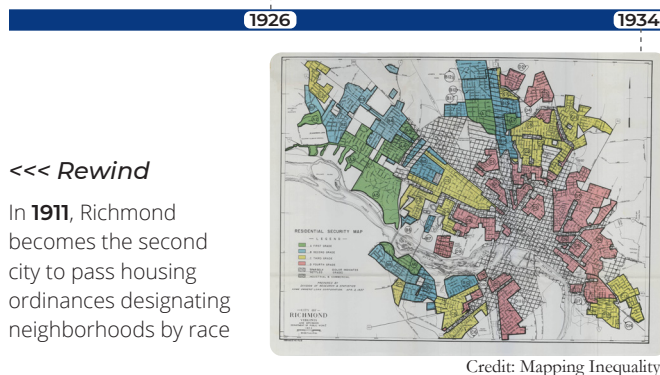


A group of Black teachers petition the Loudoun County School Board for a raise, noting their “present salary is insufficient to meet the high cost of present living conditions, and [their] duties, obligations, and responsibilities entitle us to higher pay.”



Moton High School's English 9 class.

Student Barbara Rose Johns organized her classmates at Moton High School in Prince Edward County and led a walk out in protest of the conditions — overcrowded, under-resourced, and segregated



The Federal Housing Administration was created, designed to increase access to housing for white home buyers and segregate neighborhoods. The FHA refused to insure mortgages in primarily Black neighborhoods in a process known as “redlining”. Maps were color coded to designate where it was “safe” to insure mortgages.

Fast Forward >>>



Student and activist **Barbara Rose Johns** went to live with an uncle in Alabama to finish her schooling

Credit: Moton Museum via The New York Times

slum clearance¹⁷ and an additional \$33,000 to survey prospective land for public housing units. As the civil rights movement gathered steam, officials began the process of relocating Black residents with low incomes from tenements to public housing units. The RRHA demolished hundreds of homes and displaced several thousand of the city's citizens.¹⁸

And in the name of modernization, the state authorized the construction of I-95 in 1958. The I-95/I-64 interchange cut through two of the largest and most historically rich neighborhoods in the city — Jackson Ward and Navy Hill. As explained by K. Ian Grandison in the book *Race and*

Real Estate, “The freeway was used as a racial weapon to put African Americans, and their dreams for inclusive citizenship, back in their proper place. Either obliterated by the freeway, or pressed up against it, through the glaring disrespect for their homes and institutions, African Americans were being told in the most flagrant way imaginable that, despite hopeful new interpretations of civil rights law, they still did not belong on the right side of tracks.”¹⁹ In the end, the bulldozer revolution compromised historically Black institutions, worsened the city's acute housing shortage, and continued residential segregation, cyclically fueling education segregation.

Student organizing and legal challenges were key to giving Black students access to education, though resources continued to be denied to them.



Credit: Library of Virginia

The Moton walkout gained the attention of the NAACP and attorneys Spotswood Robinson and Oliver Hill, who took on their case and filed suit, becoming one of the cases consolidated into *Brown v. Board*.

In 1953, Robinson and Hill defended parents who refused to send their children to a segregated school 20 miles away



Credit: Richmond Times-Dispatch

The creation of I-95/I-64 cut through two of the largest and most historically rich neighborhoods in the city of Richmond — Jackson Ward and Navy Hill — an example of how “urban renewal” displaces families and destroys historic landscapes in Black communities.

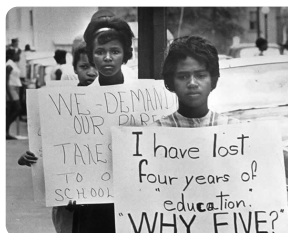
1953 1954

1957

1963 1964

Landmark decision ***Brown v. Board*** overturns *Plessy v. Ferguson* and theoretically makes school segregation illegal.

Credit: Virginia Commonwealth University Library



Throughout 1958 and 1959, many schools systems closed rather than integrate. Many white students attended segregated, private schools. Some Black students were forced to miss all or part of 5 years of their education.

Farmville student protests the closure of Prince Edward County Schools in 1963

The U.S. Supreme Court case ***Griffin v. County School Board of Prince Edward County*** outlaws the use of public dollars to fund private schools and schools reopen on an integrated basis

Brown v. Board of Education (1954-1974) - Public school closures, privatization, and token integration

Virginia became a battleground for the fight against school segregation when Barbara Rose Johns organized the student body of Moton High School in Prince Edward County and led a walkout in protest of the conditions — overcrowded, under-resourced, and segregated. Moton High School had 450 students, though originally only meant to accommodate about 180. Despite the inadequate conditions of the school, county and school leadership refused to appropriate the funds needed for a building addition. The walkout led by Barbara Rose Johns gained the attention of the NAACP and eventually two Howard University-trained attorneys, Spotswood Robinson and Oliver

Hill, who took on their case and filed the suit. The lawsuit became one of five cases consolidated into *Brown v. the Board of Education*.

In 1954, in the landmark decision *Brown v. Board*, the court declared that “...in the field of public education the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place,” overturning *Plessy v. Ferguson* and theoretically making school segregation illegal. The following year, *Brown II* was issued, ordering schools to desegregate and directing districts to proceed with “all deliberate speed.” *Brown II* did not specify a deadline for

schools or an outline for what exactly they should do, however, opening a pathway for massive resistance to desegregation to fully unfold in Virginia.

At the time, U.S. Senator Harry F. Byrd's political organization dominated political life in Virginia through a network of political and courthouse connections, known as the Byrd machine. Senator Byrd, along with 100 other congressmen, signed the "Southern Manifesto," declaring their opposition to integration. The group of laws and political strategy that would follow became known as "massive resistance." Pupil placement boards were created to assign specific students to specific schools.²⁰ Tuition grants, or vouchers, were given to any white student that found themselves in an integrated school, in order to attend private schools or a public school in a nearby locality. And the creation of private academies, also known as segregation academies, was yet another tactic to circumvent the legal orders to desegregate. This lasted until the late 1970s when, similar to *Brown v. Board*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that private schools could not discriminate on the basis of race.²¹ Many of these academies still exist as private schools in Virginia and struggle with increasing the diversity of their student bodies.^{22 23}

The final blow of massive resistance was an amendment to the Virginia constitution during a special General Assembly session that cut off state funds and closed any school that attempted to integrate. In 1958, several schools in Warren County, Charlottesville, and Norfolk were attempting to integrate and were closed. But the Virginia Supreme Court overturned the school closing law, and a federal court issued a verdict against the law citing the 14th amendment. Schools that were closed reopened.

In 1959, instead of following desegregation orders, Prince Edward County — the county where Barbara Rose Johns organized Moton High school just years before — decided to close all of their schools entirely. The Prince Edward Foundation was created to provide private schools for white

students, supported by state tuition vouchers and county tax credits. Nothing was done on the state level to educate Black students, although some were able to receive education from their families, communities, or groups like the Society of Friends. Some Black students were forced to miss all or part of 5 years of their education, until the U.S. Supreme Court case *Griffin v. County School Board of Prince Edward County* outlawed the use of public dollars to fund private schools and schools reopened on an integrated basis.²⁴

While this marked the end of massive resistance in theory, Virginia would enter a period of token integration where schools were open but still segregated as much as possible. Residential segregation took hold as a method to keep Black students in segregated schools and neighborhoods. Black schools intentionally fed into Black middle schools and Black high schools. At the same time, "white flight" (the sudden movement of white people out of areas becoming more diverse) to private schools and white suburbs continued, making it impossible to achieve integration in some school districts without extensive busing programs.²⁵

Continued redlining and blockbusting lasted through the 1960s in order to shut out Black residents and concentrate them in areas of poverty. (Blockbusting, by real estate agents and developers, was the practice of leveraging anti-Black racism to convince white families to sell their homes at a low price then profiting from overpricing those homes to Black families who had little to no opportunity to own a home otherwise.) When legal barriers to redlining emerged as a result of the Fair Housing Act, many residential areas that were previously denied to Black families were no longer affordable for them. This, along with other tactics, continued neighborhood and school segregation. In 1970, public school enrollment in Richmond was predominantly non-white, even though the city population was around half white and half Black.²⁶ Redlining, blockbusting, white flight and violence shut out Black residents from opportunity and maintained segregation in Virginia's schools.

Modern-day segregation (1970-today) - District boundaries, white flight, and racially segregated schools

Legal challenges brought by the NAACP against the continued racial segregation in schools helped implement busing policies in some cities such as Charlotte, North Carolina. Busing, a policy where students are bused to schools outside of their neighborhood, was one of the tools used to try to overcome residential segregation and more fully integrate schools. Cities in Virginia also implemented busing, such as Norfolk, Arlington, and Richmond. This policy, in Virginia and in other states, was

met with virulent opposition from white parents and became politically volatile for those running for office to support.²⁷

The U.S. Supreme Court upheld and recognized busing as one of many ways to desegregate schools in the 1971 case *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*. Due to segregated housing patterns and the concentration of Black families near the center of towns, it was not possible to desegregate

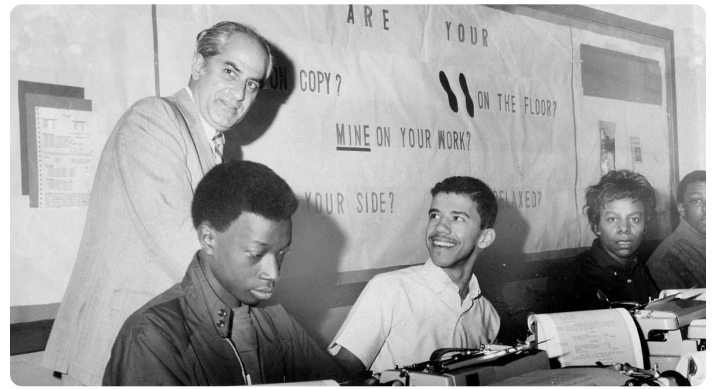
by simply redrawing school zones. In redrawing the school system's attendance zones, the Court authorized the use of bus transportation and the pairing of non-contiguous school districts to accomplish its goals.

Yet later, the U.S. Supreme Court impeded busing efforts in *Milliken v. Bradley* where they overturned a multi-district integration ruling in Detroit with the surrounding counties. The ruling decided that school districts were not obligated to desegregate unless it was proven that school district lines were drawn with racist intent. This limited inter-district busing, allowing school district lines to serve as barriers to integration. As author James Ryan describes it in his book *Five Miles Away, A World Apart: One City, Two Schools, and the Story of Educational Opportunity in Modern America*, the ruling “made it virtually impossible to include suburban schools in the effort.”

The *Milliken v. Bradley* ruling essentially sent the message to white families that their children would not have to attend integrated schools once they lived in the suburbs, making it impossible to achieve integration in many school districts without extensive busing programs. The ruling spurred further white flight and was compounded by the historic racist lending practices that nudged white people into white neighborhoods. And once in those neighborhoods, tools like exclusionary zoning (a barrier to new construction of high-density, affordable, and/or mixed-income housing in areas zoned for single-family homes) and refusal to build public housing only continued to concentrate Black families in segregated areas.

Amidst these events, Virginia was in the process of ratifying a new constitution that would establish Standards of Quality for public schools in 1971.²⁸ These standards set the funding requirements needed to meet minimum standards for the first time. Unfortunately, as Dr. Jim Ryan explains, “the fundamental flaw in Virginia’s system, however, is the foundation amount. By all accounts, it is unrealistically low.” As a result, Virginia has relied on voluntary contributions from local governments to fund essential education services and, to this day, continues to be one of the states most reliant on local funding to finance public K-12 education.²⁹

In Virginia, a locality that experiences decades of exclusionary housing practices resulting in lower property values, exclusionary employment practices, racist violence against Black people and families, and mass incarceration, would in turn witness the systematic underfunding of education in their communities.



U.S. District Judge of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia Robert R. Merhige, a proponent of cross-district busing, visiting students at Peabody High School in Petersburg as he checked on the status of integration efforts. He presided over *Bradley v. School Board* and was known for his desegregation rulings. Credit: Richmond Times-Dispatch

This problem is exacerbated by the fact that Virginia’s state education financing did not account for providing resources for students living in poverty and continues to underfund these services. It was not until 1991, when the Commission on Educational Opportunities for All Virginians found the basic funding for students in poverty to be inadequate and recommended additional state resources, that the state created a small supplemental funding program, called the At-Risk Add-On.³⁰ This program has grown only modestly since its creation, until the 2020 legislative session when the program was set to be doubled. Despite initially being suspended due to economic uncertainty from the COVID-19 pandemic, the state legislature restored these funds for the 2021-2022 school year preserving an important win for school finance equity.

These racist policies persist today and contribute to modern-day education segregation because kids generally have to go to their neighborhood schools. Public housing continues to come under assault. In Norfolk, the city is moving forward with plans to demolish portions of public housing in the St. Paul’s Area despite vocal protests from the people living there. This plan, branded as “revitalization,” will displace Black residents while profiting developers who are taking advantage of tax incentives called “Opportunity Zones” included in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act signed by President Trump. And earlier this year, a proposal before the Virginia General Assembly would have helped to make affordable housing easier to build and access in Virginia, by allowing duplexes in areas zoned only for single-family homes. In turn, families would have had greater opportunity to choose where to live and where to go to school. The proposal was strongly opposed and left in committee.³¹

For more timeline highlights, go to bit.ly/VaSchoolSegregation

Segregation Today

There is a perception that school segregation lives in history books and black and white photos — a past event that was resolved following *Brown v. Board*. Yet by some measures, racial segregation has gotten worse in Virginia over the past 15 years. Looking at the most recent school enrollment data available (2018-2019) and the most recent data available from the Office for Civil Rights (2015-2016), there are a few alarming trends for Black and Latinx students in Virginia schools. First, both Black and Latinx students are increasingly likely to attend schools that are almost entirely students of color and these schools have fewer resources and course offerings than schools with larger shares of white students. Second, Black and Latinx students continue to attend schools with high levels of poverty compared to white students and the overall student body. Third, school segregation remains a challenge and, by some measures, is increasing in many of Virginia's metropolitan statistical areas.

Black and Latinx students are increasingly likely to attend a school where almost all of their classmates are students of color. About 1 in 6 Black students (17%) in Virginia attended a school where at least 90% of their classmates were students of color in 2018-2019, compared to about 1 in 8 (13%) back in 2003-2004. The increase was even more dramatic for Latinx students during that same time period. The share of Latinx students attending a school with 90% or more students of color more than doubled, growing from 4% in 2003-2004 to 11% in 2018-2019.³²

Analysis has also shown that these schools offer fewer advanced coursework opportunities and college preparatory courses. According to the most recent data available, schools in Virginia with 25% or less white students are less likely to offer challenging classes, like calculus and chemistry, than schools with larger shares of white students. For example, 80% of schools with predominantly (75% or more) students of color offered chemistry as a course option, while 92% of schools with predominantly white students offered chemistry. As a result, Black and Latinx students are not able to enroll in these classes at the rate white students can. Similarly, highly segregated schools are less likely to offer advanced placement (AP) classes. About three quarters (77%) of schools with the highest shares of students of color offer at least one AP class, while 84% of schools with the highest shares of white students offer at least one AP class.³³

Analysis has shown that schools that are predominantly students of color offer fewer advanced coursework opportunities and college preparatory courses. A combination of factors, including low levels of funding and inadequate levels of support staff, such as school counselors, likely contribute to the issue.

A combination of factors, including low levels of funding and inadequate levels of support staff, such as school counselors, likely contribute to the issue. But advanced coursework and AP classes need to be offered to a broad range of students. When they are not, it constrains the ability of students to receive the same level of education than others. It also constrains their ability to be competitive in the college application process. And not having access to AP classes has financial consequences. Students who take and pass AP exams with qualifying scores often are given credit towards their college degree and/or are allowed to skip courses, saving them both time and money. But most of all, schools should be

sending the message that they expect all students to succeed in diverse and challenging classes — not just some.

Black and Latinx students continue to attend schools with higher levels of student poverty compared to white students and the overall student body, and the trend has grown over time. The average Black student attends a school where half of the students are economically disadvantaged and the average Latinx student attends a school where almost half (46%) are economically disadvantaged. The average white student attends a school where just over one-third (36%) of students are economically disadvantaged.³⁴

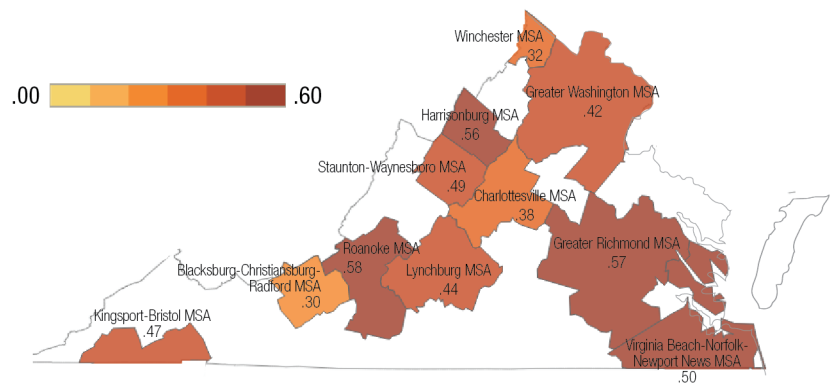
Schools with high levels of poverty face challenges like resource scarcity, inadequately paid staff, and worsening school facilities. It is the state's Black and Latinx students who most feel the impacts of this, as they are deprived of a high-quality education and experience the worst outcomes, such as lower test scores and higher dropout rates.

School segregation has increased over time in many of Virginia's metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs). Exclusionary housing policy and white flight are ongoing barriers to diverse neighborhoods and schools. Using a measure of segregation between two groups, called a dissimilarity index, we compare the racial demographics of individual schools to the larger public school population for the metropolitan area. Metro areas with the highest levels of Black-white segregation include Roanoke, Richmond, Harrisonburg, and Hampton Roads, and the level of segregation has increased in all of those metro areas except for Richmond, where it decreased slightly, over the past 15 years.³⁵

In Roanoke — the metro area in Virginia with the highest Black-white segregation — Black students make up 19% of all public school students in the metro area. A high measure of integration would be indicated if Black students made up roughly 19% of enrollment in all public schools throughout the metro area. Yet Black students are largely attending schools within Roanoke City, not the surrounding counties or neighboring Salem City. Black students make up 49% of the students in William Fleming High School in Roanoke City compared to only 5% of students in William Byrd High in the surrounding Roanoke County. In fact, only one of Roanoke County's 26 schools (Northside Middle) has a share of Black students equal to or greater than 19%. Similarly, in the other localities in the metro area (Botetourt County, Franklin County, and Salem City), only three of their combined 35 schools have a share of Black students equal to or greater than the metro-wide share of 19% for Black students. Whereas in Roanoke City, 22 of their 24 schools exceed that percentage for Black students.

Black-White School Segregation is High in Many Virginia Metropolitan Statistical Areas

Many schools throughout Virginia do not reflect the racial demographics of the larger public school population for the metropolitan area. The higher the "dissimilarity index" score, the more segregated schools in the metro area are considered to be.



Source: TCI analysis of Virginia school enrollment (fall membership) data, Virginia Department of Education, 2003-04, 2018-19 and Labor Market Areas, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics



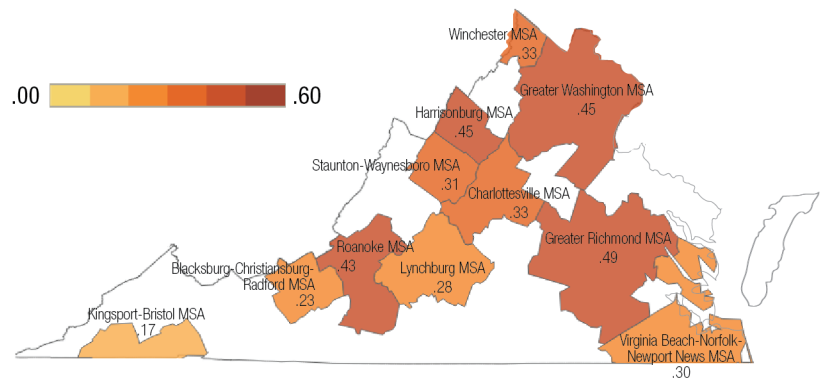
There are similar examples in the other metro areas with high Black-white segregation. For example, in Richmond City, 97% of students in Fairfield Court Elementary, 96% of students in MLK Middle School, and 95% of students in Armstrong High School are Black. This is quite different than Chesterfield County schools, where only 1% of students in Bettie Weaver Elementary, 8% in Midlothian Middle School, and 10% in Midlothian High School are Black.

While the focus thus far has been on Black-white school segregation and the lasting impact of racist policies on Virginia's Black students and families, it is also important to note and proactively address the increasing segregation of Latinx students in Virginia schools. The Latinx-white dissimilarity indices show similarly high levels of segregation. Richmond, Harrisonburg, and the Greater Washington metro areas have the largest Latinx-white segregation. While the dissimilarity index has declined for Harrisonburg and Greater Washington since 2004, it has grown in the Richmond metro area — today, the Richmond metro region has the highest rates of Latinx-white segregation out of all Virginia metro regions.

Virginia's growing racial and ethnic diversity has been at least partially driven by an increase of Latinx people in the state, as well as an increase in Latinx student enrollment. Between the 2003-04 and 2018-19 school years, Virginia saw a 185% increase in the overall Latinx student population. Within just the Richmond metro region, the share of Latinx students grew by 390% over the same time period. Yet this growth has often been concentrated in specific divisions or schools within divisions rather than throughout the whole metro region. In contrast to patterns for Black students in the region, a majority of

Latinx-White School Segregation is Becoming an Issue Throughout Virginia

Many schools throughout Virginia do not reflect the racial demographics of the larger public school population for the metropolitan area. The higher the "dissimilarity index" score, the more segregated schools in the metro area are considered to be.



Source: TCI analysis of Virginia school enrollment (fall membership) data, Virginia Department of Education, 2003-04, 2018-19 and Labor Market Areas, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics



Latinx students are attending schools within “outer” counties — Chesterfield County and Henrico County.

For example, Bensley Elementary in Chesterfield County has the second highest share (71%) of Latinx students in the region. This is a significantly higher share than some schools in neighboring Hanover County — only 3% of students at Battlefield Park Elementary in Hanover County are Latinx, and even fewer Latinx students attend Beaverdam Elementary. Only three of Hanover County's 23 schools — roughly 13% — have a share of Latinx students equal to or greater than the overall share of Latinx students in the metro region (13%). In contrast, 30 of 62 Chesterfield County schools — nearly half — have a share of Latinx students equal to or greater than the share of the whole metro area.

The segregation is not limited to across school division boundaries. There are also noticeable differences *within*

school divisions. For example, Latinx students attending Cardinal Elementary (previously named E.S.H. Greene Elementary) in Richmond City make up 89% of the student population — the highest share of Latinx students in any school in the Richmond metro region. In contrast, less than 1% of Woodville Elementary's student body is Latinx, just miles away. Looking within Chesterfield County, Latinx students make up only 2% of the student body at Bettie Weaver Elementary. In fact, only 7% of the student body are students of color. This is in stark contrast to a school like Falling Creek Elementary, where about half of students are Latinx, or Bensley Elementary, where almost three-fourths of students are Latinx.

Virginia is a diverse state, and its schools should look like its broader communities. This segregation not only severely limits the resources, opportunities, and outcomes of students who are Black and Latinx, but also limits the ability of students generally to be prepared

Methodological note: The dissimilarity indices compare the Black, Latinx, and white student enrollment to their respective enrollment in all public schools in the metropolitan statistical area for the school years 2003-2004 and 2018-2019 (using the 2015 definitions from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' LAUS program).³⁶

for living in a multiracial society. Further, it reinforces the structure of racism in the country. There are several key policy choices that could begin to address segregation in Virginia's education system and shape it into one that works for all students and families. Intentional policy choices constrained resources for Black students and families and prevented access to high-quality education. It will take intentional, targeted policy decisions to attempt to rectify past choices and create a system of education in Virginia that works for all.

Intentional, Equity-Focused Policy Solutions

As history demonstrates, current-day schooling segregation continues to be crafted through a web of overt and covert racist policy choices that undermine the education of students of color. Policymakers should understand that “color-blind” solutions will not address the issues discussed in this report, but instead would ignore the lived experiences of Black students and reinforce racism. Rather, policymakers need to advance anti-racist policies, which actively seek to dismantle the racism entrenched within education and other public institutions and reduce racial inequity.

Intentional, equity-focused policy solutions like district rezoning, regional integration efforts, need-based funding, a racial-equity centered school rating system, and affordable housing considerations are strong options that would begin to build a system of public education that works for all. In September of 2020, the Governor's Commission to Examine Racial Inequity in Virginia Law proposed and approved recommendations for the governor and General Assembly to enact many of these policies and would bring the commonwealth one step closer to meaningful change in education.

“Color-blind” solutions will not address the issues discussed in this report, but instead would ignore the lived experiences of Black students and reinforce racism.

Local and regional integration strategies

A primary method used to make progress toward school desegregation is to change how a student's school assignment is determined. Typically, a student would be assigned to a school close in proximity and that the neighborhood they live in is “zoned” for. However, having established the persisting legacy of housing and education segregation in the state, it becomes clear that this method results in segregated and often under-resourced schools.

One way to approach this issue is through intra-district zoning policies that maintain socioeconomic and racial equity

as its guiding principle alongside specific diversity goals. School divisions would make the decision to redraw school zones, based on socioeconomic status and/or the racial and economic makeup of their schools and/or neighborhoods, to create better integrated schools. For example, the Richmond City School Board recently approved school rezoning in order to increase student diversity at certain schools (among other objectives), although the Board approved a less comprehensive version of the original proposal.

Another district-wide strategy is called managed choice. In an equity-focused

choice system, *all* families would be required to submit a set of school preferences, and their student's assigned school would be based on a variety of determined goals that can include diversity and proximity, among others. Research has shown that this is an effective method of integration and around 50 school districts nationwide currently use a managed choice system, such as Louisville-Jefferson County, Kentucky, and Berkeley, California.³⁷ It is important to note that this strategy can and should be implemented in tandem with regional policies, because many districts themselves are highly segregated and would not be able to achieve

widespread racial integration within their boundaries.

In Virginia, regional education policies are critical. As noted previously, in many metro areas in the commonwealth, the racial demographics of public school students varies significantly across locality lines. For example, Roanoke City is 43% Black compared to Roanoke County, which is 7% Black. Similarly, Richmond City is 63% Black, compared to Chesterfield County, which is 25% Black.

Comprehensive regional programs often include magnet schools, which are schools of choice that can help draw families across traditional attendance boundaries, attempting to break up housing segregation patterns and districts that cannot be integrated on their own. In Virginia, CodeRVA — a regional magnet high school in Richmond City — is a good example of how they can be effective when diversity and equity goals guide school admissions and school policies generally. The school uses a weighted lottery system that helps create a student body that reflects the diversity of eligible localities. Alongside

the weighted lottery, strong outreach and guaranteed, free transportation are *absolutely* necessary features of the school in order to create a diverse learning environment.

These features differ somewhat from other schools of choice in Virginia, whether specialty magnet schools or Governor's Schools, which can have competitive, merit-based admissions processes. These schools have the ability to draw students across district boundaries, but without specific diversity goals, have resulted in less than diverse student bodies. One notable example is Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology in Fairfax County, where only 2% of students were considered economically disadvantaged during the 2018-2019 school year (based on having received free and reduced price lunch).³⁸ And of students admitted for the Class of 2024, only 1.7% are Black, despite Black students making up 13% of students overall in the Greater Washington metro region (Virginia localities only).

In response, the governor has included language in the state budget approved

by the General Assembly which requires Governor's Schools begin setting and reporting diversity goals, to at least consider an admissions process that promotes access for students who have historically faced barriers, testing all students in eligible localities for giftedness (instead of relying on teacher identification), broader outreach efforts, and reporting of student race and socioeconomic status data. Past legislation to set specific socioeconomic diversity goals for certain Governor's Schools has been proposed and rejected in the legislature.

While the governor's budget language certainly is a first step, magnet schools must go further than considerations to be truly accessible to all kinds of students. They must have explicit diversity goals, a more equitable admissions process, strong outreach, and free transportation. In fact, all of the above policies are just first steps toward creating meaningful and lasting diverse, high-quality schools. Implementation should also include extensive outreach, transparency, accountability, and — last, but not least — fair funding.

Fair funding

Every student should have access to an adequately resourced school, no matter their zip code. Supplemental funding based on student need, in combination with the above mentioned policies, is an essential piece of the puzzle for Virginia. State budget cuts due to the Great Recession hit high-poverty communities the hardest, and lawmakers have yet to fully restore that funding. This has resulted in an over reliance on localities to make up the deficit, creating an upside-down system where students who need more resources are getting less — less is spent per student in our

highest-poverty communities than in our wealthiest ones.

Yet the inequity goes back further than the Great Recession. Virginia's primary aid formula, called the Standards of Quality, allocates 86% of state aid to local school divisions but does not factor in a student's socioeconomic status. Each student is not the same. They have different strengths, interests, habits, and challenges. When it comes to allocating resources to schools, it is important to look beyond just enrollment, and factor in student demographics and the services they need to be successful.

When it comes to allocating resources to schools, it is important to look beyond just enrollment.

In 2019, the Virginia Board of Education put forward revisions to Virginia's funding formula. Among the revisions, the Board proposed the creation of an Equity Fund that would finally take into account a student's socioeconomic status when allocating aid to local divisions in our primary funding formula — something that

24 other states successfully do.³⁹ The Board also proposed needed increases in staffing for students who are learning English. Unfortunately, the governor

and General Assembly have not followed the Board's proposal to create an Equity Fund. However, the legislature restored proposed funding increases

to need-based aid for the 2021-2022 school year, an important win for school finance equity.

School quality measures

Racist perceptions of certain neighborhoods, schools, and school districts last to present day. But the fact is that diversity is a positive thing for students and families. An updated school accreditation system could begin to shift the narrative about what a quality school looks like.

School accreditation systems often take into account measures such as test scores and chronic absenteeism to determine the quality of a school. Virginia uses a mix of school quality indicators, including test scores, levels of absenteeism, "achievement gaps" between student groups, and dropout rates. While these measures can be useful for understanding where a school

has room for growth and for crafting targeted interventions, schools and the experience of students in them are much more nuanced.

Research has shown that diversity is important for the growth of all students, from resource equity to personal growth and relationship building. Since diversity is necessary for a quality education and adequate workforce preparation, it should be part of the accreditation process. This has potential for incentivizing localities in the state to work toward making their schools look like their broader communities.

School ratings outside of district-published school quality report cards,

Interpersonal forms of discrimination underscore the importance of shifting the narrative on how under-resourced schools are characterized

like those on Zillow, also impact the way people see schools and influence their home buying decisions. Solutions to this practice are limited, because they inhabit a legal grey area.⁴⁰ These more interpersonal forms of discrimination underscore the importance of shifting the narrative on how under-resourced schools are currently characterized: by deficiencies, rather than strengths.

Affordable housing

Where a family lives makes all the difference for access to a wide range of services including education, health care, and transportation, and can affect a child's well-being in the long term. Because housing segregation and education segregation mutually reinforce each other, desegregation policies should work to sever the link between the two.

One policy that is intended to help disrupt that relationship is utilization of housing vouchers, a federal renting assistance program that helps people with very low income access housing. People who receive vouchers should be able to live in whatever area they see fit, therefore breaking up racially segregated neighborhoods and areas of concentrated poverty. In practice,

voucher users have tended to locate in low-income areas due to a lack of affordable housing stock and voucher discrimination, among other reasons.⁴¹

Fortunately, earlier this year, lawmakers passed a bill that makes voucher discrimination illegal in Virginia for large landlords. Now that many landlords cannot discriminate based on source of income, the ability to use vouchers may become more evenly distributed across the state, enabling more people to access neighborhoods and schools with more opportunities. However, policymakers should work to remove the exemption for landlords who own four or fewer units, so that families have a wider array of housing options.

Expanding homeownership opportunities and affordability also has the potential to promote residential integration while enabling families with low income and families of color who have historically been denied homeownership the ability to accrue wealth.^{42 43} And the need is urgent: these barriers have resulted in Black families being less likely than white families to own their homes, and that gap is greater today than it was before the passage of the 1968 Fair Housing Act. Primary obstacles to homeownership tend to be difficulties in meeting down payments, the dual credit market that exists for Black and white homebuyers which is determined by access to credit, and more explicitly, discriminatory practices in mortgage lending. To address these

challenges, Virginia should increase investments in first-time homebuyer assistance programs provided by state and local housing agencies as well as proactively enforce nondiscrimination rules.

To curb discrimination in renting and mortgage lending practices, Virginia has the option to put in legal safeguards. The U.S. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development recently rescinded the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing rule (AFFH), which implemented the 1968 anti-

discrimination housing law through requiring jurisdictions receiving federal housing funds to assess levels of housing discrimination and make a plan to address them. Fortunately, Virginia has the ability to enact a similar law. For example, California recently passed their own AFFH rule.

Virginia can also enact an array of inclusionary zoning laws to increase affordable housing in high-cost areas. In fact, Fairfax County was the first in the nation to adopt an inclusionary zoning

program.⁴⁴ Lastly, the state should continue to make increased investments in the Housing Trust Fund, eviction diversion programs, and affordable housing development, especially considering the economic circumstances resulting from the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, causing housing arrangements to be unstable for many people. Given that many students will have to continue virtual learning into the 2020-21 school year, a secure place in which they can do that is absolutely essential.

Virginia's History Illuminates a Path Forward

Today, in Northern Virginia, an all-volunteer team of Loudoun County residents, historians, and high school students take on the job of unearthing records of Black schools in the area nearly lost to time. Their research and documentation pushes back against the narrative that the existence of segregated, Black schools lives far back in history, that they were nothing but dilapidated buildings. Vanessa Siddle Walker, an Emory University professor and leading expert on segregated education, said it best: "If there are no records, then the history of success — of agency, petitions, all of that — it cannot exist in the American imagination or memory. If there are no records, then you can wipe away children's history. A people's history."

The purpose of this report is not meant to inspire feelings of despair as a result of how policy historically has shaped public education. Instead, it is meant to incite urgency. Virginia's schools have become more segregated and inequities persist, yes, but a deeper and clearer understanding of the roots of these inequities — and a recognition of success despite those inequities — illuminates a way forward.

School integration is still in its infancy. This means that we are simply in another chapter of the fight against segregation today. The political strategy for equalizing educational opportunities and outcomes in a lasting, meaningful way cannot rely on "color-blind" education policy. It also cannot rely solely on school finance, although it is a large piece of the puzzle and attention should be maintained on the issue. Ensuring integrated, diverse schools for all Virginia students deserves to once again become part of that strategy, in combination with the variety of important reforms called upon by education advocates across the state.

Skeptics — even those sympathetic to the problem of segregation — may argue that addressing this issue is overwhelming or impossible. It is true, at least in the current moment, that the courts have limited willingness to enact significant educational reforms and have ruled in ways that limit the tools available to stakeholders. And it is true that the state legislature has demonstrated a reluctance to codify basic provisions that would begin to shift opportunity in education. But it is also true that the triumphs

A deeper and clearer understanding of the roots of these inequities — and a recognition of success despite those inequities — illuminates a way forward.

fundamental to public education as we know it — victories driven by the leadership of Black communities — may have been thought of as impossible once, when the odds were likely worse.

Students live the legacy of both blatant and covert racist policy choices today. Policymakers, community leaders, and families will need to be both persistent and strategic to counter that legacy. There will be no single solution. It is going to take a system of intentional, actionable, and anti-racist policies to make high-quality education a reality for more than some.

It is going to take a system of intentional, actionable, and anti-racist policies to make high-quality education a reality for more than some.

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