

POLICY BRIEF

The Impact of Hyper-segregation on Urban Schools in North Carolina

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Introduction

Within the past decade, school segregation has been on the rise throughout North Carolina (Nordstrom, 2018). Many factors contribute to the segregations of schools, but a critical contributing factor is residential location (Nelson, Mickelson, & Smith, 2015). Similar to many other states throughout the US, school assignment in North Carolina is determined by where district lines are drawn (Nelson et al., 2015). Due to this, high poverty areas that naturally have a large population of low-income residents, send all, if not the majority, of their children to schools where the student body population is within the same economic status (Nordstrom, 2018).

Background

The desegregation and resegregation of schools have become a growing phenomenon (Fiel, 2013). In 1954, the Supreme Court overturned *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) “separate but equal” ruling by proving school segregation violated the 14th Amendment equal protection clause in *Brown v. Board of Education* (Bell, 2004). Through this ruling, all public schools within the nation were mandated to be fully integrated (Bell, 2004). Following the ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), schools in North Carolina were perceived to be resistant towards school integration (Nelson et al., 2015). Due to this, in 1971 the Supreme Court ruled in *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* that schools within Charlotte-Mecklenburg (CMS) must actively integrate public schools through mandatory busing, even if that entails

establishing a student quota system (Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education, n.d.).

While the enactment of *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* (1971) may not have been perfect, this ruling held schools within CMS accountable and essentially helped guarantee Black students’ access to suburban schools with better resources, even if they resided in low-income communities (Nordstrom, 2018). Unfortunately, in 2001 the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals overturned the ruling of mandatory busing in CMS (Smith, 2016). Since then, schools in CMS have become resegregated, and the effects of hypersegregation have further increased (Smith, 2016). According to Massey and Denton (1993), the term hypersegregation refers to the extreme level of racial segregation found within Black communities due to being economically forced to reside in particular neighborhoods creating all Black ghettos. Similar to other states, in North Carolina, many of the hypersegregated areas have the most low-performing schools which only furthers the academic achievement gap found amongst Black and White students (Nelson et al., 2015; Nordstrom, 2018).

Findings

Nordstrom (2018) did extensive research on the impact school integration has on public schools throughout North Carolina. Within her study, Nordstrom (2018) analyzed the impact racial isolation, economic isolation, school assignment (the drawing of district lines), county division of schools, and charter schools have on furthering segregation; to

overall conclude that unless proactive measures are taken, segregation in schools will only expand.

Racial and Economic Isolation

Table 1 constructed by Kris Nordstrom (2018) shows and compares the racial as well as economic isolation found within North Carolina between 2006-07 and 2016-17. From data provided in Table 1, the racial and economic isolation within North Carolina is undeniable. In 2006-07, 295 schools in North Carolina had a student population of more than 75 percent Black and also come from low-income families (Nordstrom 2018). When the 295 were reevaluated in 2016-17, there was an increase of 181 schools, making the new total school to be 476 schools who have a student population of more than 75 percent Black and also come from low-income families (Nordstrom, 2018). Likewise, from 2006-07 and 2016-17, traditional schools that were deemed isolated by race and income saw a 6 percent increase making it currently at 19 percent (Nordstrom, 2018). Lastly, between 2006-2017, 40 school districts in North Carolina have become more uneven in racial distribution (Nordstrom, 2018). For instance, if the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School district is to become equal in racial distribution, 55 percent of the students need to be re-assigned (Nordstrom, 2018).



Policy Implications

Through the ruling of *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* (1971) being overturned, the ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) can be perceived as though it is being indirectly reversed. One of the key factors that have allowed *Brown* to be viewed as a success is because it was federally mandated, essentially forcing states to follow it. While it can be argued the premise of *Brown* can still be found in urban schools, when *Brown* is appropriately implemented, many of the racial stigmas and inequities found in education will begin to get dismantled. As resegregation increases throughout North Carolina, specifically within CMS, student academic growth has declined, especially for Black students (Nordstrom, 2018). Likewise, research has found that racially segregated Black schools have higher disciplinary issues as well as less experienced teachers (Nazaryan, 2018). If states are given the ability to choose whether or not a focus should still be put upon integrating schools, hypersegregation will only

further increase, and educational equity will never be received (Smith, 2016).

Policy Recommendations

1. Recreate policies that require proper integration of student in public schools. These policies should be state mandated and regulated to ensure local principalities do not prevent said policies from being properly implemented. Furthermore, to ensure the State Board of Education does not become overwhelmed with the task, a special/separate committee should be created with members from the different school districts to serve on the board.
2. Reallocate resources to low-performing schools, so students who are unable to attend high-performing schools can still be afforded access to adequate material. The reallocation of resources should be done on the local level to ensure each district provides their students with the necessary resources needed. Although it will be up to local

entities to distribute reallocate said resources, the state should create the policy that mandates districts to use portions of their education budget funds for the reallocation of resources.

3. Create outlets in schools that prepare Black students for post-graduation opportunities to help decrease the possibility of them living in poverty or having low-income jobs. These outlets should be provided at the schools and can be done through having annual career fairs, college/vocational school recruiters in school visits, workshops teaching students create resumes, and how to fill-out FAFSA...etc. While these outlets are not uncommon to have in suburban schools, these services are often times not readily accessible to urban schools. Therefore, having these outlets readily and regularly available to schools with a large Black student populated school, could assist in breaking the poverty cycle.

References

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