

Executive Summary

North Carolina has a storied history with school integration efforts spanning several decades. In response to the *Brown* decision, North Carolina's strategy of delayed integration was more subtle than the overt defiance of other Southern states. Numerous North Carolina school districts were early leaders in employing strategies to integrate schools at a very modest level. When the 1964 Civil Rights Act vastly expanded federal power, desegregation accelerated. In 1971, Charlotte-Mecklenburg gained national attention in the first Supreme Court decision mandating busing as a primary strategy to achieve school integration. By 2000, Wake County public schools became the first metropolitan school district to implement a class-based student assignment policy¹, shifting from a race-based student assignment plan. Yet despite initiating school diversification efforts for a generation, currently North Carolina has reverted back to neighborhood schools while concurrently adopting policies that deemphasize diversity. Today, the state's Latino enrollment, which has grown very rapidly in the post-civil rights era, adds another important dimension to the story. Since racial and economic segregation are strongly related to unequal opportunity, these changes likely have important educational consequences.

This report investigates trends in school segregation in North Carolina over the last two decades by examining measures of concentration, exposure, and evenness by both race and class. After exploring the overall enrollment patterns and segregation trends at the state level, this report turns to three major metropolitan areas within the state—Charlotte-Gastonia-Concord, Raleigh-Cary, and Greensboro-High Point—to analyze similar measures of segregation for each metropolitan area.

Major findings in the report include:

North Carolina

- North Carolina's public school enrollment has become increasingly diverse over the last two decades. In 2010, the state's enrollment was 53% white, 26% black, 13% Latino, 3% Asian, 1% American Indian, and 4% mixed, compared to 1989 when the enrollment was 67% white, 30% black, 1% Latino, 1% Asian, and 1% American Indian.
- The share of multiracial schools—those that have any three races representing 10% or more of the total school enrollment—increased by 1,284%, from 2.6% in 1989 to 36% in 2010.
- During the same time, the share of majority minority schools—those in which 50-100% of the student enrollment is comprised of minority students—almost doubled from 23.8% to 43.0%, and the share of intensely segregated schools—those in which 90-100% of the student enrollment is comprised of minority students—tripled from 3.5% to 10.2%.
- The share of black students attending minority segregated schools has steadily increased over the last 20 years, such that seven out of 10 of black students attended majority minority schools and two out of 10 of black students attended intensely segregated schools in 2010.

¹ Silberman, T. (2002). Wake County schools: A question of balance. *Divided we fail: Coming together through public school choice*, 141-63. New York: The Century Foundation.

- The share of Latino students attending minority segregated schools has also increased over the last two decades, such that six out of 10 of Latino students attended majority minority schools and one out of 10 of Latino students attended intensely segregated schools in 2010.
- In 2010, approximately half of all Latino, Asian, and black students attended multiracial schools whereas almost one-third of all white students attended such schools.
- The gap in exposure of the typical black student to white students versus the overall share of white student enrollment has grown larger during the last two decades such that in 2010, the typical black student attended a school with 34.7% white classmates even though the overall white share of enrollment in the state was 53.2%.
- The same general pattern is true for Latino students, though to a lesser extent. In 2010, the typical Latino student attended a school with 43.3% white classmates compared to the overall white share of enrollment at 53.2%.
- The typical white student is exposed to a larger share of other white students (65.8%) than the overall level of white enrollment in the state (53.2%); this gap has also grown larger over the last 20 years.
- In 2010, both the typical black student and the typical Latino student attended schools that had larger shares of low-income students (59.1%, 59.1%) than the overall share of low-income students in the state (50.2%) while the typical white student and the typical Asian student attended schools with smaller shares of low-income students (43.5%, 41.8%) than the overall share of low-income students in the state.

Charlotte-Gastonia-Concord Metropolitan Area

- From 1989 to 2010, metro Charlotte's white share of enrollment decreased by 28% such that in 2010, white students accounted for slightly less than half of the total enrollment (48%); the remainder of the enrollment was 31% black, 14% Latino, 3% Asian, and 4% mixed.
- Over the last two decades in both urban and suburban schools, the white share of enrollment has decreased while the Asian and Latino shares of enrollment have increased. Black students are the only racial group that has different enrollment trends in urban versus suburban schools with an increase in urban schools and a relatively stable representation in suburban schools.
- The percentage of multiracial schools has increased considerably over the last two decades, from 1.4% in 1989 to 36.4% of all schools in 2010.
- The share of majority minority schools has more than doubled from 22.3% to 51.6% and the share of intensely segregated schools increased substantially from 0.1% to 20.2%.
- The share of black students attending minority segregated schools has more than doubled over the last two decades, such that in 2010, three out of four black students in the Charlotte metro attended majority minority schools and one out of three black students attended intensely segregated schools.
- The share of Latino students attending minority segregated schools has also more than doubled, such that in 2010, two out of three Latino students attended a majority minority school and one out of four Latino students attended an intensely segregated school.
- In 2010, the majority of Latino (53.2%) students attended multiracial schools; for all other racial groups, between 30 and 40% of each group attended a multiracial school.

- In 2010, the typical black student was least exposed to white students and attended a school that was only 28.2% white; the gap in the typical black student's exposure to white students versus the white share of enrollment has grown larger over time. The typical Latino student's school was 32.7% white while the typical white student attended a school that was 65.1% white.
- The typical white student is exposed to a smaller share of low-income students (33.6%) than the metro's average (46.6%) while the typical black student (59.7%) and the typical Latino student (62.2%) are exposed to larger shares than the metro's average.
- The level of segregation in metro Charlotte has increased over the last two decades and is currently considered a moderate level of segregation; most of this segregation is due to segregation within school districts rather than between districts.
- In 1989, half of the metro's six enduring districts—those that were open in 1989, 1999, and 2010—were predominantly white (Union County, Gaston County, and Cabarrus County), two were diverse (CMS and Kannapolis City), and one was predominantly nonwhite (Anson County). By 2010, none were predominantly white, four were diverse (Union County, Gaston County, Cabarrus County, and Kannapolis City) and the other two were predominantly nonwhite (CMS and Anson County).

Raleigh-Cary Metropolitan Area

- From 1989 to 2010, the white share of enrollment decreased by 24%, from 69% to 53%, and the black share of enrollment decreased by 16%, from 28% to 23%; during the same time, both the Latino and Asian shares of enrollment increased, from 1% to 15% for Latinos and from 2% to 5% for Asians.
- In both urban and suburban schools, the white share of enrollment decreased but remained the largest share of enrollment. The Asian and Latino shares of enrollment increased in both urban and suburban schools. The black share of enrollment increased in urban schools but decreased in suburban schools.
- The share of multiracial schools in metro Raleigh has increased substantially over the last two decades, from 0.9% in 1989 to 69.4% of all schools in 2010.
- The share of majority minority schools quadrupled from 10.6% to 41.3% while the share of intensely segregated and apartheid schools remained very small at less than 3%. However, metro Raleigh has a smaller share of majority minority, intensely segregated, and apartheid schools than metro Charlotte and metro Greensboro.
- The share of black students attending minority segregated schools has more than quadrupled over the last two decades, such that in 2010, more than half of metro Raleigh's black students attended majority minority schools. However, only 4.5% of metro Raleigh's black students attended intensely segregated schools in 2010, a much smaller share than either metro Charlotte or metro Greensboro.
- The share of Latino students attending minority segregated schools has also increased substantially, such that in 2010, almost half of the metro's Latino students attended a majority minority school, but only 2% of Latino students attended intensely segregated schools.
- In 2010, between 65% and 82% of students in each racial group attended multiracial schools in metro Raleigh, which is an increase from two decades earlier; in fact, only one decade earlier, closer to 10-25% of each racial group attended such schools.

- In 2010, the typical black student was least exposed to white students and attended a school that was only 43.6% white; the gap in the typical black student's exposure to white students versus the white share of enrollment has grown larger over time. The typical Latino student's school was 47.2% white in 2010 while the typical white student attended a school that was 58.2% white.
- The typical white student is exposed to a smaller share of low-income students (30.8%) than the metro's average (34.7%) while the typical black student and the typical Latino student are exposed to larger shares (41.0%, 41.7%) than the metro's average.
- The level of segregation in metro Raleigh has increased over the last two decades and is currently considered a low level of segregation; most of this segregation is due to segregation within school districts rather than between districts.
- In 1989, all of the metro's three enduring districts—Johnston County, Franklin County, and Wake County—were diverse, and although all three have experienced decreases in the white share of enrollment over the last two decades, in 2010, all three remained diverse.

Greensboro-High Point Metropolitan Area

- From 1989 to 2010, metro Greensboro's white share of enrollment decreased from 70% to slightly less than half of the total enrollment (49.6%); the remainder of the enrollment was 31.0% black, 10.4% Latino, 4.0% Asian, and 3.7% mixed.
- Over the last two decades in both urban and suburban schools, the white share of enrollment has decreased while the black, Latino, and Asian shares of enrollment have increased.
- The percentage of multiracial schools has increased considerably over the last two decades, from 1.4% in 1989 to 30.6% of all schools in 2010.
- The share of majority minority schools more than doubled from 20.4% to 52.5%, and the share of intensely segregated schools increased substantially from 0.7% to 15.8%, levels that are similar to metro Charlotte but higher than metro Raleigh.
- The share of black students attending minority segregated schools has doubled over the last two decades, such that in 2010, eight out of 10 black students in the Greensboro metro attended majority minority schools, slightly more than metro Charlotte, and one out of four black students attended intensely segregated schools, slightly less than metro Charlotte; these levels are higher than metro Raleigh.
- The share of Latino students attending minority segregated schools has more than tripled, such that in 2010, over 50% of the metro's Latino students attended a majority minority school and 15% of Latino students attended an intensely segregated school.
- In 2010, 20-50% of each racial group attended multiracial schools.
- In 2010, the typical black student was least exposed to white students and attended a school that was only 31.4% white; the gap in the typical black student's exposure to white students versus the white share of enrollment has grown larger over time. The typical Latino student's school was 43.7% white in 2010, while the typical white student attended a school that was 63.6% white.
- The typical white student is exposed to a smaller share of low-income students (44.4%) than the metro's average (52.8%) while the typical black student (61.8%) and the typical Latino student (63.9%) are exposed to larger shares than the metro's average.

- The level of segregation in metro Greensboro increased from 1989 to 1999 but then decreased from 1999 to 2010; it is currently considered a moderate level of segregation. Most of this segregation is due to segregation within school districts rather than between districts.
- In 1989, all four of the metro's enduring districts—Guilford County, Randolph County, Rockingham County, and Asheboro City—were predominantly white; by 2010, none was predominantly white, three were diverse (Randolph County, Rockingham County, and Asheboro City) and one was predominantly nonwhite (Guilford County).

Overall, these findings demonstrate that shifts in student assignment plans and strategies for achieving diverse schools (or lack of strategies for doing so) correspond to increases in segregation levels across the state and in its major metropolitan areas. These trends toward increasing segregation by race and class have a variety of negative effects on students of all races as well as the communities in which they live. Ultimately, they will also impact the future of the Tar Heel state. Decades of social science research indicate that segregated schools are strongly related to many forms of unequal educational opportunity and outcomes. Minority segregated schools have fewer experienced and less qualified teachers, high levels of teacher turnover, less stable enrollments, inadequate facilities and learning materials, and high dropout rates. Conversely, desegregated schools are linked to profound benefits for all students. Desegregated learning environments are related to improved academic achievement for minority students with no corresponding detrimental impact for white students, improved critical thinking skills, loftier educational and career expectations, reduction in students' willingness to accept stereotypes, heightened ability to communicate and make friends across racial lines, and high levels of civic and communal responsibility.

This report provides multiple recommendations for those who are seeking to address the return to segregation in North Carolina's schools:

- Because more segregation occurs within districts than between districts, state-level policies should be developed to provide a framework for developing and supporting intra-district programs with a diversity focus.
- School districts should develop student assignment policies that consider race among other factors in creating diverse schools.
- Magnet schools and transfer programs within district borders should be used to promote more racially integrated schools.
- Charter school enrollments should promote diversity and officials should consider pursuing litigation against charter schools that are receiving public funds but are intentionally segregated, serving only one racial or ethnic group, or refusing service to English language learners.
- The majority of school districts in North Carolina are city-suburban consolidated models, but for those districts which are not, district officials should consider merging to form countywide districts.
- Fair housing agencies and state and local housing officials need to regularly audit discrimination in housing markets and bring prosecutions for violations.

North Carolina, a state that has long prided itself on its educational success, no longer lays claim to successfully desegregated schooling. The state is becoming increasingly diverse

and multiracial; however, schools across the state are becoming less diverse and students are becoming more racially isolated. It is imperative that state and local leaders, parents, and educators refuse to accept the resegregation of the state's public schools and instead take steps to once again become leaders in desegregation.