

SCHOOL SEGREGATION IN VIRGINIA

Why it matters, what it looks like, drivers and trends...and
what we should do



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OVERVIEW OF PRESENTATION

- Why school segregation matters
- Contemporary trends in Virginia school segregation
- Attitudes and politics surrounding school segregation
- What local leaders can do



BENEFITS OF SCHOOL INTEGRATION **FLOW TO ALL** **STUDENTS**

- **Academic**—heightened critical thinking skills, more creative problem solving, richer discussions (Bowman, 2010; Gurin, 2004; Lount & Phillips, 2007; Phillips and Loyd, 2006; Page, 2017; Phillips et al., 2009)
- **Social/Psychological**—more cross-racial friendships, less stereotyping, reductions in prejudice and bullying (Graham et al., 2013; Hallinan, 1998; Tropp & Pettigrew, 2006; Williams, 2018; Wood & Sonleitner, 1996)
- **Civic**—more engaged citizens who are better prepared for multiracial democratic society (Mickelson & Nkomo, 2012)
- **Long term**—perpetuation effects across life cycle (Wells & Crain, 1994)



HARMS OF SCHOOL SEGREGATION FLOW TO ALL STUDENTS

Charles Sumner, 1849, arguing in first legal action against school segregation

“When public schools are segregated they become schools of prejudice and uncharitableness...white children taught in them are **nursed in the sentiments of caste**...their characters are debased...they are **less fit for citizenship.**”

(h/t Elise Boddie, *The Struggle for Soul of Public Education*)

Segregation is how white supremacy has been enforced. – Cara McClellan, LDF, 2020

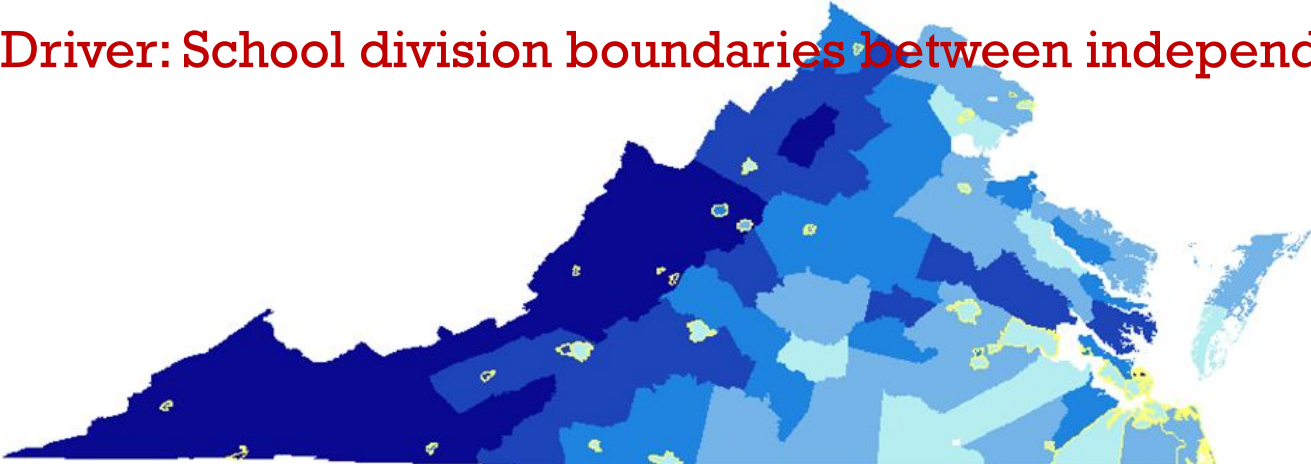
Contempt as a virus, "less flashy than hate," but far more harmful because "in the eyes of contempt, you don't even rise to the level of a hated object — that would involve a full recognition of your existence." Carriers of the virus of contempt **work hard "even now, in the bluest states of America to ensure their children do not go to school with the children of these people whose lives supposedly matter."** (Zadie Smith, *Intimations*)

Separate schools remain unequal schools along lines of funding, highly qualified teachers, challenging curricula and facilities. They struggle with relationship churn, exacerbated by **punitive accountability systems and a shredded social safety net** (see, e.g., Carter & Welner, 2013; Johnson, 2019; Simon & Johnson, 2015).

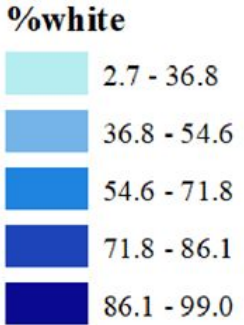


CITY SCHOOL SYSTEMS AND NEIGHBORING COUNTY SYSTEMS IS RELATED TO HIGHER SEGREGATION

Driver: School division boundaries between independent cities and neighboring divisions



City School Districts



Central Virginia
White student share of independent cities' enrollment: **17.5%**
White student share of neighboring divisions' enrollment: **54.6%**



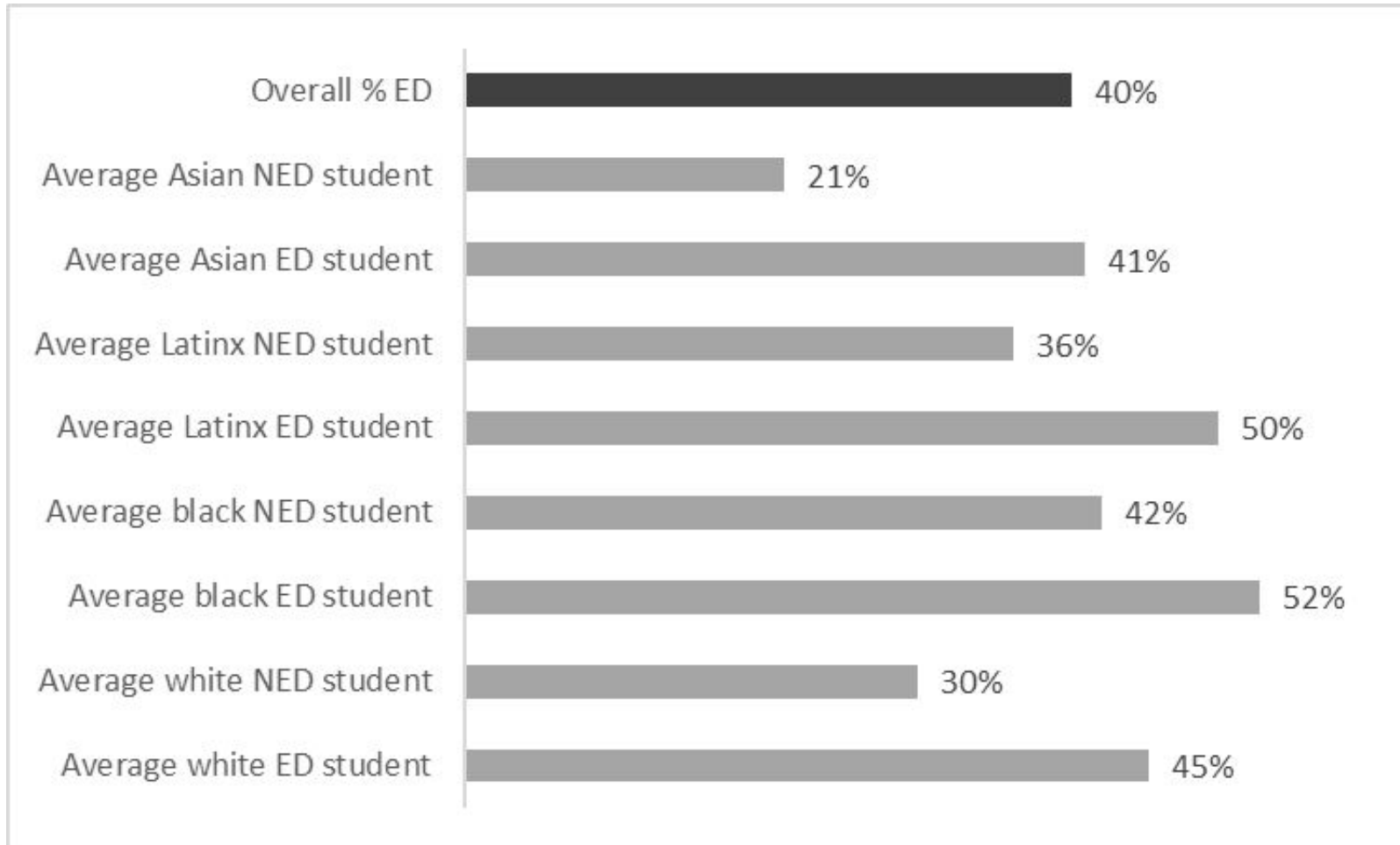
SEGREGATION BETWEEN SCHOOLS IN THE SAME SYSTEMS ACCOUNTS FOR HALF OR MORE OF ALL SCHOOL SEGREGATION IN VIRGINIA'S MAJOR METROS

TIDEWATER (50%)
CENTRAL VIRGINIA (56%)
NORTHERN VIRGINIA (63%)

Driver: Student assignment policies, including **school attendance boundaries** and school choice



HOW STUDENT RACE/ETHNICITY AND SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS INFLUENCES EXPOSURE TO SCHOOL POVERTY IN VIRGINIA



Source: VDOE, 2018



A recent Stanford study, based on roughly **100 million test scores** in **over 300 metro areas**, found that disparate white and Black student exposure to school poverty is highly correlated with persistent racial achievement gaps.

In other words, **racially unequal concentrations of poverty in schools are a central explanation for the racial achievement gap** (reardon, 2016).



ATTITUDES TOWARD SCHOOL INTEGRATION

(PDK, 2017; GALLUP, 2019)

70% of parents of all races prefer a racially diverse school, all else equal

Between **51** and **55%** say diverse schools produce better learning environments

75% plus parents of all races support magnet schools; **81%** of Black respondents and **58%** of Whites support more “low income housing in the suburbs and higher income areas”

Exposed to desegregation, political support grows.

- **89%** of Louisville-Jefferson County families wanted to continue pursuing school diversity plan in 2011 (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2011)



NOT-SO-NEW BUT PRESSING CHALLENGE FOR SCHOOL INTEGRATION

- Conservatives increasingly coalescing around the full privatization of public education
 - Strategy centered on eroding confidence in public schools
- Historical roots in resistance to *Brown vs. Board of Education* despite framing choice as a civil right
 - Segregation academies
 - State-funded vouchers to private individuals
- Preliminary data show considerable white, affluent exit from traditional public schools into private schools during the pandemic, along with increased demand for online education across multiple groups
- Private schools remain disproportionately white and affluent; segregation academies more so



Science of Tipping Points and Successful Social Movements

3.5%

Of population actively participating in nonviolent civil action (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2012)



WHAT CITIZEN LEADERS CAN DO TO COMBAT SCHOOL SEGREGATION

- Know and share our full history
- Foster positive conversations about diverse schools & neighborhoods and the value of integration
- Identify and support pro-integration candidates during election cycles
- Monitor decisions about school closures, openings, choice and rezoning for impact on segregation/integration
- Advocate for inclusionary housing set asides in highly sought-after school zones
- Support inclusionary housing policies and regional strategies to promote integration



FURTHER READING

TCI report, “Modern Day School Segregation”

<https://www.thecommonwealthinstitute.org/2020/11/12/modern-day-school-segregation-addressing-the-lasting-impacts-of-racist-choices-on-virginias-education-system/>

VCU/Penn State Report, “Segregation by Boundary Line in Virginia” (more to follow)

[https://cecr.ed.psu.edu/sites/default/files/School Segregation by Boundary Line in Virginia Nov 2020 Final v2.pdf](https://cecr.ed.psu.edu/sites/default/files/School%20Segregation%20by%20Boundary%20Line%20in%20Virginia%20Nov%202020%20Final%20v2.pdf)

Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*

Heather McGhee, *The Sum of Us*



FURTHER WATCHING/LISTENING

- Nice White Parents (Serial Productions/NYT)
- The Promise (NPR Nashville)
- The Problem We All Live With (This American Life)
- [Segregation by Design](#) (based on Richard Rothstein's book, The Color of Law)
- [Struggling for the Soul of Public Education](#)

