

# School Desegregation and Resegregation in Charlotte: A Historical and Present-Day Analysis

School desegregation has been a complex and challenging issue in the United States since the landmark Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, which declared racial segregation in public schools unconstitutional. While significant progress has been made in desegregating schools across the country, many cities, including Charlotte, North Carolina, continue to struggle with resegregation, the process by which schools become racially segregated once again.



## Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow: School Desegregation and Resegregation in Charlotte

by Stephen Samuel Smith

★★★★☆ 4.3 out of 5

Language : English

File size : 195 KB

Text-to-Speech : Enabled

Screen Reader : Supported

Enhanced typesetting : Enabled

Print length : 98 pages



This article provides a comprehensive overview of school desegregation and resegregation in Charlotte, exploring the historical context, current challenges, and ongoing efforts to address these issues. By understanding the complex factors that contribute to resegregation, we can work towards

creating more equitable and inclusive educational experiences for all students.

## **Historical Context of School Desegregation in Charlotte**

Charlotte, like many cities in the South, had a long history of racial segregation in its schools. Prior to *Brown v. Board of Education*, Black students in Charlotte were forced to attend separate and unequal schools from white students.

In 1969, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District (CMS) was formed through the merger of the city's white and Black school districts. This merger was part of a larger effort to desegregate schools in the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education*. However, the desegregation process in Charlotte was slow and often met with resistance from the white community.

In 1971, CMS was ordered by the federal court to implement a busing plan to achieve racial balance in its schools. This plan required some students to be transported across town to attend schools outside of their neighborhoods. The busing plan was controversial and faced significant opposition from white parents. Nonetheless, it remained in place for over two decades.

## **Resegregation in Charlotte**

In the late 1990s, the busing plan in Charlotte was gradually phased out. This led to a rapid increase in resegregation, as white families moved to the suburbs and Black families were increasingly concentrated in the city center.

Today, CMS is one of the most racially segregated school districts in the country. According to a 2021 report by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Opportunity Task Force, Black students in CMS are more likely to attend schools with high poverty rates, less experienced teachers, and fewer resources than white students.

## **Current Challenges to School Desegregation in Charlotte**

There are a number of factors that contribute to resegregation in Charlotte, including:

- **Residential segregation:** White families are more likely to live in the suburbs, while Black families are more likely to live in the city center. This residential segregation leads to racial segregation in schools, as students are assigned to schools based on their address.
- **School choice programs:** School choice programs, such as charter schools and magnet schools, can exacerbate segregation by allowing parents to choose schools outside of their neighborhood. This can lead to white families choosing schools with fewer Black students, and Black families choosing schools with more Black students.
- **Implicit bias:** Implicit bias, or unconscious stereotypes, can lead to Black students being treated differently than white students in schools. This can create a hostile environment for Black students and make them less likely to succeed academically.

## **Ongoing Efforts to Address School Resegregation in Charlotte**

Despite the challenges, there are a number of ongoing efforts to address school resegregation in Charlotte. These efforts include:

- **Affordable housing programs:** Affordable housing programs can help to reduce residential segregation by making it more possible for families of all races to live in the same neighborhoods.
- **School assignment policies:** School assignment policies can be used to promote racial balance in schools. For example, CMS has a "controlled choice" system that gives parents some choice in where their children attend school, but also takes into account factors such as race and socioeconomic status to ensure that schools are not racially segregated.
- **Teacher diversity initiatives:** Teacher diversity initiatives aim to increase the number of Black teachers in CMS. This is important because Black teachers are more likely to be culturally competent and to understand the needs of Black students.

School desegregation and resegregation are complex issues with a long history in Charlotte, North Carolina. While significant progress has been made in desegregating schools, resegregation remains a challenge. There are a number of factors that contribute to resegregation, including residential segregation, school choice programs, and implicit bias. However, there are also a number of ongoing efforts to address resegregation and to create more equitable and inclusive educational experiences for all students in Charlotte.

By understanding the complex factors that contribute to resegregation, we can work towards creating more equitable and inclusive educational experiences for all students. This means investing in affordable housing programs, implementing school assignment policies that promote racial balance, and increasing the number of Black teachers in our schools. By

working together, we can create a more just and equitable future for all students in Charlotte.



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