

DISENCHANTMENT TO DISILLUSION:
STAKEHOLDER OPINIONS ON SCHOOL DESEGREGATION
IN GREENSBORO, NORTH CAROLINA

By

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ABSTRACT

Amid the current resegregation of the nation's schools this dissertation extends previous research regarding the impact, success, and failure of desegregation efforts following *Brown v. Board of Education*. This study broadly examines individual opinions on school desegregation over the last forty years. Thus, the current study presents the research question: What are stakeholder opinions on school desegregation in the post desegregation era? This study extends previous research by examining generational changes in individuals' experiences and perceptions of desegregation efforts in Greensboro, North Carolina between 1970 and 1990. Additionally, the study explores individuals' experiences in the 2000s during increasing resegregation. As an urban, Southern city with historical significance in the Civil Rights Movement, Greensboro represents an ideal setting for understanding changing experiences and opinions of school desegregation over a forty-year period. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed as generational cohorts thus examining group opinions and experiences of stakeholders through the collection of individual data. The findings of this study show that both black and white participants from all three generational cohorts reject a return to mandatory desegregation efforts including busing. Additionally, the results of this study indicate similar opinions concerning school quality from stakeholders in the earlier cohorts but a disconnect in perceptions and opinions of recent high school graduates. Thus, the findings of this study demonstrate the contradictory perceptions of school quality by black and white graduates of recent generations and calls for an examination of both school district policies related to school assignment, racial makeup and school finance and broader societal issues related to housing policies, economic and social equality initiatives.

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DEDICATION

To my daughter, Eleanor, not yet born.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

More than a decade into the twenty-first century our nation's public schools are now twenty-five years into continuous resegregation (McNeal, 2009; Orfield, 1996a). The desegregation of black students, which increased consistently, albeit briefly between 1968 and 1974, was followed by a slow reversal to resegregated schools during the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. Thus, in 2013 the nation's schools have receded to levels of segregation not seen in the previous three decades (Kozol, 2005; Ogletree, 2004). The resegregation of schools is due in large part to recent Supreme Court rulings not only lessening requirements to provide racially integrated schools but effectively limiting the ability of school districts to voluntarily create racial balance across schools (McNeal, 2009; Wells et al, 2009). Such rulings have significantly narrowed districts' options to racially balance schools and will likely have lasting implications for school districts and the kind of race-conscious policies that remain permissible.

Given the current school resegregation across the nation and the persistent controversy regarding the value and feasibility of desegregation efforts, changes in the public opinion of desegregation is a widely researched issue (Orfield, 1995). In a 1995 CNN and Gallup poll 87% of respondents reported that the 1954 decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* was the "right thing to do"; a marked increase from only 63% support in the early 1960s (CNN/Gallup, 1995). However, public survey data collected in a 1994 Gallup Poll shows a disconnect between high levels of widespread support for desegregated schools as well as integration within schools and the passionate support for neighborhood schools. Data indicated that 88% of white survey participants favored neighborhood schools while 64% of black respondents also reported support

for neighborhood schools (Orfield, 1995). Given the persistence of racially segregated housing patterns this data highlights the dissonance in public beliefs and values (Bankston & Caldas, 1996; Hochschild & Scovronick, 2004).

Since the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s the United States public has largely agreed that the existence of racial inequality in schools is a problem (Orfield, 1995). While people agree that such inequality is inherently an issue, the public has not always, if ever, agreed upon a solution to this problem, or even whether or not this problem can be solved. However, despite the disagreement about how to fix the problem the country actually tried to fix disparities in racial equity in schooling through desegregation following the ruling of *Brown v. Board*. By the 1990s the effort to end racial inequality in schools by way of desegregation and more specifically busing had withered out and faded away. In the last ten years, desegregation efforts of any kind have been largely nonexistent and our school districts have returned to racially identifiable neighborhood schools like those that existed in the 1960s prior to desegregation efforts (McNeal, 2009; Orfield 2001; Wells 2009).

The emergence of resegregated schools across the United States alongside a lack of effort on the part of school districts and courts to remedy the current racial inequity in education requires continued and future study. This is particularly true given the historically contradictory nature of public discourse concerning racial equity in schooling. During the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s it was societally acknowledged that the educational opportunities and experiences of black and white students were not equal. To that end, the nation sought to remedy this situation through the implementation of desegregation and integration. These were wildly unpopular and controversial even in the face of acknowledged inequity. Thus, the contradictory nature of public opinion continued for several decades.

Following the resegregation of schools, which has taken place consistently over the course of the last three decades the public conversation and opinion about racial equity in schooling, is significantly different than in previous decades. While inequity exists, and in many places, at an exacerbated level in comparison to years during which desegregation measures occurred (Bankston & Caldas, 1996; Kozol, 2005; Lee, 2002) public opinion largely indicates that the current inequality has gone unacknowledged by many and with little public conversation regarding a remedy or solution to the problem. In an effort to extend previous research the current study seeks to examine changes in public opinions and perceptions of racial equality in schools and school desegregation in a post desegregation era. Through semi-structured interviews with high school graduates of Greensboro, North Carolina this study examines individuals' perceptions of racial educational quality through the lens of desegregation and resegregation. The purpose of this study is to provide a narrative of changes in stakeholder opinions about desegregation efforts over the last forty years.

1.2 Research question and methodology overview

The current research project involves a qualitative study examining stakeholder opinions about desegregation and racial inequality in schooling by exploring multiple questions: To what extent is racial educational inequality occurring? How do individuals of different races perceive such educational inequality? Are policies designed to reverse racial educational inequality needed or not? To understand peoples' opinions concerning these questions it is necessary to address differing views across both racial and generational cohorts. Therefore, this study involves interviews with black and white individuals who graduated from high school in Greensboro, North Carolina during the early 1970s, late 1980s and 2000s. These generational

groups were chosen based upon the characteristics of the historical time period in relation to desegregation and resegregation in the public schools in this community. The 1970s were the years of the most aggressive desegregation effort while the 1980s saw the beginning of decline of desegregation efforts. Finally, the 2000s were a time period of no structured desegregation efforts and, in fact, an increase in racially segregated public schools. Therefore, the scope of this study broadly examines stakeholder opinions of school desegregation and racial educational equity over the last forty years. To that end, the current study answers the research question: What are the prevailing stakeholder opinions on school desegregation and racial educational equity in the post desegregation era?

While examining generational and racial differences in opinions and perceptions school desegregation and racial educational equity, this study is constrained to one geographic location to more reliably portray the influences of community and historical contexts on individuals' beliefs. The current study addresses the perceptions of participants who graduated from high school in Greensboro, North Carolina, simultaneously a unique and representative location as a Southern, major city. To that end, this study explores how individuals' opinions of racial educational quality differ across generational and racial cohorts.

1.3 Conceptual framework

This study explores the prevailing public views on racial inequality in schools and school desegregation in the post desegregation era because there is good evidence to suggest that schools are becoming more segregated at the same time that society continues to disengage from conversations about both the current inequity and the need for a remedy to such inequity (McNeal, 2009; Orfield 2001; Wells 2009). To that end there are three bodies of literature that

have helped to shape the scope of the current study. Scholarly work regarding public opinion on desegregation informs the historical framework largely by way of public opinion data polls and the work of Gary Orfield. Additionally, previous work examining the impact of segregation in schools shows that desegregation is not nearly as pervasive a topic in public discourse as was true prior to and during desegregation efforts of the 1960s and 1970s (Saatcioglu & Carl, 2011). This lack of public narrative and discourse surrounding the racial inequity in schools plays a critical role in understanding and interpreting the data found in the current study. Finally, the methodology is largely influenced by previous studies qualitative research studies focused on the individual experiences of desegregation's participants (Wells et al, 2009).

In addition to the three bodies of related literature described above, this study is grounded in the work of Hochschild (1984), which describes complex relationship between class structures and societies belief in individual mobility. This theory relates specifically to desegregation and resegregation because schools, as institutions, often encourage a disconnect between myth and reality as it relates to the idea of equal opportunity in education. Finally, the theoretical framework grounding this study also includes literature related to social change, as desegregation functions as an effort of social change. Social change is the change in the institutional structure of a social system (Lockwood, 1964). Additionally, if there is a conflict of interest between the group or groups who hold and exercise power and authority over those in non-dominant groups the use of power to sustain institutions is likely (Lockwood, 1964). Ultimately, desegregation efforts including busing were intended to change the institutional structure of public schools. However, such efforts were unsuccessful in bringing about change to the social system of public schools and thus, social change did not occur.

The following review of literature is based on a conceptual framework encompassing changes in public sentiment concerning desegregation and racial equity in schooling over the last sixty years interwoven with the legal and political history of desegregation and resegregation in American public schools. This study focuses on the reemergence of segregation in schools in conjunction with the lack of public discourse concerning racial educational quality and declining public sentiment as to the necessity of negating the aforementioned rise of segregation and increasing racial inequality in education.

1.4 Significance of study

While prior literature has exhaustively and thoroughly examined the experiences of individuals who attended school during the height, albeit brief, of desegregation efforts very little research has explored how the opinions of such individuals are different than younger generations who did not experience active efforts against racial inequality in schools. The current research project extends previous research by comparing the public opinion of two groups: 1) participants having graduated from high school during the 1970s and 1980s, a time period during which the country was actively seeking to remedy existing racial educational inequality and 2) participants who graduated from high school during the 2000s, a drastically different time period characterized by no active measures or efforts to equalize the educational quality for students of different races. Through this methodology, the current study extends previous literature by examining the change in public opinion concerning school desegregation efforts and racial educational equity given the absence of any and all desegregation efforts. This is an important extension of previous research because little is known about the perceptions and opinions of recent high school graduates concerning the racial equality in schools.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

Despite the potentially controversial nature of school desegregation there is very little scholarly work regarding the nature of public opinion and how it has changed over time. The only national overview of this kind addresses change in public conversation on school desegregation since the early 1970s based upon data collected in Cleveland (Saatcioglu & Carl, 2011). The results of the study indicate that by the 1990s the public debate and conversation focused on school desegregation had dwindled and due to the withdrawal of staunch supporters from the conversation the public narrative on school desegregation became largely critical of such efforts. While this study includes a local focus on Cleveland, Ohio it includes a national overview of the desegregation narrative.

In 2009 Amy Stewart Wells et. al published a groundbreaking, large-scale study based on 550 interviews with individuals who graduated from desegregated high schools in 1980. The methodology of the study focused on one single cohort of graduates but included desegregated high schools from six cities nationwide. The results of this study indicate vast differences between the racial diversity of their schooling years and the racially segregated lives of their adulthoods. The study also provides support for previously research themes regarding school desegregation including classroom segregation within desegregated schools, the complex intersection of both race and class when it comes to educational achievement and the discussion of the successes and failures of school desegregation as a short lived effort that ended too soon to gauge its true impact.

Gary Orfield, the most notable scholar in the field, presented a speech in 2002 in which he provides a narrative of the historical evolution of school desegregation following the Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* (Orfield, 2002). Orfield argues that a plethora of misconceptions surround desegregation and consequently impact public perception and opinions about both past desegregation efforts and the possibility of future efforts. Orfield indicates that based on public opinion data most people support the idea of desegregated schools and support the ruling of *Brown* but also think that school officials should not actively try to change the racial make up of schools in an effort to create more racially diverse schools (Orfield, 2002). This speech and other works by the same author make up a bulk of the previous work regarding the successes and failures of desegregation and changes in public opinion over time.

Beyond the work of these scholars there is no systematic study of public opinion concerning school desegregation efforts, particularly from a historical standpoint of desegregation. Additionally, there are no previous scholarly studies comparing the opinions and perceptions of multiple generations concerning school desegregation. In the absence of a large systematic literature this chapter reviews available public opinion data to demonstrate the particular changes and diversity in opinions addressed in this study and examines how those patterns relate to the legal and political history of desegregation.

2.2 School desegregation: An unpopular but widely espoused public policy

Desegregation has never been a popular public policy. Despite its long and troubled history and significant effort for successful implementation, desegregation failed to be an overwhelmingly legitimate policy and stands in sharp contrast to other welfare policies including social security, welfare for the needy, mandatory schooling and assistance for the disabled

(Merelman, 2002). Ironically, despite its limited popularity public opinion polls have consistently shown an expressed preference for integrated schools all the while exhibiting steady resistance to its implementation (Orfield, 2002). The following discussion illustrates the steady yet contradictory themes of public sentiments concerning desegregation throughout the last six decades alongside the associated political and judicial history.

In the 1954 landmark case *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Supreme Court unanimously ruled that state-imposed segregated schools were “inherently unequal” and that such schools must be abolished, thus striking down the previous doctrine of “separate but equal.”¹ However, from the outset public support for the abolishment of legally segregated schools was certainly not unanimous. In a Gallup poll conducted only months after *Brown* 40% of respondents indicated that their preference was to keep schools segregated in the current manner while 33% wished the government would desegregate schools slowly over the course of several years and only 22% of respondents felt that the schools school be desegregated swiftly (Gallup, 1954). While desegregation implementation began slowly there were still significant outbursts of unrest, notably in Milford, Delaware, where violence accompanied early efforts to integrate. Even though the situation in Delaware was discouraging, many advocates of *Brown*, including then lawyer Thurgood Marshall, remained guardedly optimistic about the developments in the border states and predicted that by the 1955-1956 school year, 70% of school districts in the border states would have racially integrated classrooms (Patterson, 2001).

While *Brown* was initially applauded for its aggressive measures against segregated schools, the Court’s reluctance to provide a forceful position on the abolishment of segregation in schools played directly into the hands of opponents and desegregation progress proved difficult (Ogletree, 2004; Patterson, 2001). A second ruling, in 1955, known as *Brown II*

¹ *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537

required desegregation to be implemented with “all deliberate speed”, thereby easing the tension on districts to quickly and drastically implement desegregation policies and instead allowing districts to delay such efforts (Clotfelter, 2004; Ogltree, 2004; Orfield and Eaton, 1996). In the second half of the decade following *Brown*, opinion polls indicate that support for desegregation steadily decreased even as little or no actual integration occurred. In a 1956 Gallup survey 63% of respondents approved of the Court’s decision that “all children must be allowed to go to the same schools” (Gallup, 1956). This same question was presented in a Gallup poll the following year and only 57% of respondents approved of the Court’s decision (Gallup, 1957). Then, in 1959 the same question was again posed in a third Gallup poll with only 50% approval that “all children must be allowed to go to the same schools” (Gallup, 1959). Interestingly, in a different Gallup poll that same year 53% of respondents indicated that the decision of *Brown* had “caused a lot more trouble than it was worth”, while only 37% disagreed with that statement and 10% of respondents indicated they had no opinion on the matter (Gallup, 1959). From the very beginning, desegregation lacked support from large portions of the public.

While *Brown v. Board of Education* overturned *de jure* segregation in schooling in 1954 true momentum for desegregation efforts did not materialize overnight in large part because of the faltering resolve of *Brown II* in 1955 and the leniency it provided districts in regards to desegregation requirements (Patterson, 2001). In fact, between 1954 and 1968 little changed for schools and students in regards to racial educational equality (Ogletree, 2004; Orfield 2002). A few black students attended all white schools but for the vast majority of schools and communities the status quo remained. Most notably was the ensuing Little Rock Crisis following the enrollment of the Little Rock Nine, nine black students who attempted to attend Little Rock Central High School in 1957. The Little Rock Crisis was noteworthy because the

resistance on the part of the school, community and local government was extremely strong (Patterson, 2001). In August 1958 in *Cooper v. Aaron* the Supreme Court (under Chief Justice Warren) forced Little Rock to comply with *Brown*. This was the first occasion since *Brown II* that the Court had issued its own opinion concerning racial segregation in the schools. Struggles over desegregation in schools were not limited to Little Rock, Arkansas even though history has focused predominantly on that specific incident. Similar storied of resistance, both peaceful and violent, were occurring all over the South but did not always receive as much press (Patterson, 2001).

Interestingly, the lack of momentum for desegregation to take place quickly is mimicked in data from public opinion polls during the 1960s. In a 1961 Gallup poll 63% of respondents approve of the Supreme Court ruling that all children must be allowed to go to the same schools while only 32% disapproved (Gallup, 1961). However, in that same year 61% of respondents in a different Gallup poll indicated that they believed integration should be brought about gradually and 9% believed that integration should not take place at all while only 23% felt that integration should happen in the near future (Gallup, 1961). Thus, it is difficult to say whether public opinion impacted the pace at which communities urged districts to change policies or if the reverse was true: that because districts resisted rapid change public opinion followed suit. Either way, polling data from the 1960s indicates that public sentiment for integration by choice and slowly over time mimicked historical events.

While much of this discussion explores how group opinions regarding desegregation changed over time, it is also important to examine the way in which individuals' opinions regarding desegregation may or may not have changed over the course of a few years following *Brown v. Board*. A Survey Research Service Amalgam survey conducted in 1963 and again in

1968 sought to gauge whether or not people felt differently about integration than they had a few years earlier. Interestingly, in 1963 52% of respondents reported that they felt “about the same” while only 29% had become more favorable and 19% had become less favorable (Amalgam, 1963). While in 1968 only 25% of respondents indicated that their opinions had remained the same. This time 40% indicated that they no longer felt more favorable but 34% felt they had become less favorable (Amalgam, 1968). The results of this survey indicate that individual’ opinions toward desegregation remained relatively constant during the early part of the 1960s. As the Civil Rights Movement increased in momentum during the 1960s, desegregation became a priority in national discussion and had become more polarized thereby demonstrating increasing extremes in beliefs and opinions.

The judicial system remained supportive of the desegregation movement and strengthened its commitment to *Brown I* and *Brown II* by ruling in 1968 in *Green v. County School Board of New Kent County* that districts must actively dismantle segregated systems by “root and branch” citing that the neutrality of “freedom of choice” did not reverse segregation² (Ogletree, 2004; Patterson, 2001). Thus, school districts were required to develop a plan that could realistically create desegregated school districts. In essence, this ruling initially showed a transition from a doctrine of merely nondiscrimination to a doctrine of deliberate desegregation and meaningful integration (Rossell et al, 2004). In 1970, a Harris survey following *Green* asked respondents about their approval or disapproval of the recent ruling in *Green*, requiring integration without any further delay. The data from this survey indicates that while 48% of respondents agreed with the new push for action from the court 40% disapproved and 12% were unsure or had no opinion (Harris, 1970). Thus, while the nation experienced a new momentum for the desegregation of schools due to additional judicial requirements and an increase in

² *Green v. County Sch. Bd. of New Kent County*, 391 U.S. 430

societal support following the Civil Rights Movement the overall level of support for desegregation was still less than a majority. During the early part of 1965 President Johnson passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which was a centerpiece of his Great Society program. At the heart of this much-celebrated law, providing significant general federal aid to public schools was money for the provision of compensatory education to aid culturally disadvantaged children (Patterson, 2001).

In 1968 President Johnson appointed Thurgood Marshall to the Supreme Court, becoming the first black Supreme Court Justice. This appointment, as well as Johnson's creation of a political atmosphere that was sympathetic to desegregation efforts in a way previously unseen provided the landscape for the greatest effort of integration implementation of the last sixty years, which took place between 1968 and 1972 (Ogletree, 2004). While President Nixon was elected in 1968 the support for desegregation, both politically and judicially, took several years to trickle down and impact implementation in districts across the nation (Orfield, 2002). Thus, the effects of judicial support by way of *Green* and political support from the Johnson administration lingered long enough to allow and propel integration efforts for several years before the tides turned again (Patterson, 2001).

2.3 Late 1960s and 1970s: The rise of conservatism

For more than thirty years prior to the election of President Nixon a democrat held the presidential office for all but eight years. In 1968 President Nixon's election signaled a change in national political leanings. While Nixon was not a staunchly conservative Republican by many measures, his election was an important step for modern Republicanism. In four years President Nixon appointed five new, fairly conservative justices to the Supreme Court. This

change in the Court greatly impacted the balance of support for desegregation measures and it was clear by 1974 that the Court was no longer in support of overt desegregation efforts, including busing (Clotfelter, 2004; Graham, 2005). However, during the early part of his presidency, before the impact of the new justices truly took hold the Court ruled in 1971 in *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* striking down “racially neutral” student assignment plans producing segregation, thereby allowing desegregation efforts involving busing intended to combat residential segregation³.

Busing was extremely unpopular from the very beginning of substantial integration. Prior to the *Swann* ruling, in 1969 a poll conducted by Gallup and Newsweek indicated that only 1% of respondents supported the integration of schools by busing. Interestingly, results from this national representative sample poll clearly indicate that while people acknowledge that black students did not have quality schools integration by mandatory busing was not the answer. Instead 39% of respondents believed that the answer should lie in providing better schools for black students. 25% of respondents believed that black students should be allowed to attend other schools, as a remedy for the problem while an additional 25% felt that a move toward integration was the best solution (Gallup/Newsweek, 1969). But again, only 1% of participants felt that busing, as an integration measure was the best way to remedy the problem of black students attending poor schools. Thus, even before *Swann*, which allowed the use of busing as a measure of desegregating schools, busing was largely unpopular. Instead, at the tail end of the Civil Rights Movement there was more public support for creating quality black schools and allowing black students to attend white schools by choice than for moving toward integration, particularly integration that included busing. Thus, as Hochschild wrote in 1984, people were somewhat supportive of the philosophy and idea of desegregation and integration but did not

³ *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*, 402 U.S. 1

support the logistical efforts to achieve these goals (Hochschild, 1984). This finding is also supported by the work of Orfield noted previously in this chapter (Orfield, 2002).

As the Court ruling in *Green vs. County School Board of New Kent County* struck down neutral “freedom of choice” plans, the message was clear: not only was legalized *de facto* segregation unlawful but *de jure* segregation was also no longer allowed, thus requiring more intentional effort on the part of school districts to racially balance schools. However, the use of busing following *Swann* was extremely unpopular, even in the eyes of many who supported integration as an ideal were not supportive of busing as prescribed in *Green*. In a 1970 Harris survey 57% of respondents agreed that the segregation of schools by law was wrong while only 19% reported that such legal segregation of schools was right and 16% were unsure (Harris, 1970). However, in the same Harris survey 50% of respondents agreed “it is morally wrong to force desegregation on people who don’t want it” (Harris, 1970). Given the data from these two survey questions it is clear that in 1970 while the public largely agreed that legally requiring students to be educated in a racially segregated way, the public also did not agree with forcing the racial integration of schools. Thus, even before integration measures really began the public sentiment was not supportive of mandated desegregation but instead preferred integration by choice.

This clear opposition for forced integration and preference for choice is also evident in a different Harris survey conducted in 1970. This survey included the following statement: Up until now in the South, segregated schools have resulted from the states and school districts providing that white children must go to white schools and black children go to black schools. This is called segregation by law” (Harris, 1970). 57% percent of respondents reported that this statement was wrong while only 19% believed that such an arrangement was right and 16% were

unsure, that it depends. In the same survey 60% of participants felt that it was right that “In the North, segregated schools result from whites and blacks living in neighborhoods, which are all white or all black. Children go to schools in their home neighborhood. The result is called in fact segregation, even though there were no laws requiring segregated schools” (Harris, 1970). Therefore, a large majority of respondents agreed that de facto segregation in schools, as was happening in the North, due to racially separate neighborhoods was acceptable (Harris, 1970). This dichotomy, shown in the same survey, highlights a central theme to the public discourse surrounding desegregation: agreement that legal segregation is unacceptable but naturally occurring segregated schools is acceptable. This contrast between *de jure* and *de facto* segregation has had a continued presence in the societal debate of race in schools over the course of the last forty years.

It is also interesting to note that the characteristically slow pace of desegregation efforts described by many historians as the downfall to successful implementation was actually perceived by much of the public as taking place too quickly, rather than too slowly (Ogletree, 2004; Patterson, 2001). Thus, even though historians continue to analyze the missteps of desegregation implementation with the belief that measures should have been implemented much quicker following the ruling of *Brown v. Board*, Gallup poll data from 1970 indicates that public sentiment actually felt that desegregation was taking place too quickly. Specifically, 48% of respondents felt that racial integration was happening too quickly and 17% of respondents believed the speed of integration efforts were just right while only 17% wanted integration to happen faster and 14% reported no opinion on the matter (Gallup, 1970). While historians blame the slow pace of implementation, in part, for the failure of desegregation; however, based on

public sentiment of the time, desegregation efforts were likely to be even less successful and met with more resistance had the timeline been pushed faster.

President Nixon was re-elected in 1972, followed by the Watergate break in 1973, leading to his exit from office in 1974. Following the end of the Vietnam War the country's good will toward improving race relations greatly declined due to negativity of "others". Additionally, Vietnam and the Watergate investigation both dominated public attention and impacted the public's perception of the nation. By the mid 1970s court rulings began to reflect a faltering commitment to *Brown* due to Nixon's appointment of five new Supreme Court justices, which essentially led to the end of the Court and federal government's effort to achieve equal educational opportunity. (McNeal, 2009; Orfield, 2001). Thus, while many states and school districts across the country were only beginning to create busing and student assignment plans that would create racially balanced schools; support from the Court had already drastically decreased. After a loss of momentum for equal rights following the Civil rights Movement and the swift reversal of judicial support for desegregation efforts many people quickly deemed desegregation a failure (Ogletree, 2004). To that end, in 1974 judicial support for desegregation efforts waned, beginning the return to resegregated schools⁴ (Clotfelter, 2004) with the ruling in *Milliken*, which abolished the use of inter-district desegregation plans as a means to desegregate racially isolated city schools, thereby providing little or no recourse for districts seeking to combat the effects of residential segregation (Patterson, 2001).

The mid 1970s were a time of desegregation efforts in many areas while the Court had already begun to retract judicial support. During this time public opinion continued to be markedly contradictory in terms of principle and action. In 1975 56% of respondents in a Harris survey indicated that they favored the desegregation of public schools as a matter of principle.

⁴ *Milliken v. Bradley*, 418 U.S. 717

But even with this show of support 35% indicated that they did not agree with the desegregation of schools ideologically and 9% reported that were unsure on the matter. Thus, while there was relative support for the principle of desegregation, that students of races should attend school together, public sentiment was overwhelmingly against the use of busing to create desegregated schools (Harris, 1975). That same year, in 1975, 74% of respondents in a Roper Report poll indicated that they oppose busing to achieve racial integration in schools and only 12% supported busing efforts while 10% and 4% reported mixed feelings and uncertainty, respectively (Roper, 1975). The data from these two polls, collected in the same year, demonstrate the contradictory nature of public sentiment regarding desegregation and busing. While people somewhat support the idea of desegregation in schools, though not an overwhelming amount of support, there was very little support for busing as a means to bring about racially integrated schools. In essence, the public acknowledged that there was a problem: schools should be integrated, but disagreed on the solution: busing is not the answer to the problem.

This contradiction in public sentiment is even further demonstrated by peoples' desire to see integrated schools, which was reported in Harris surveys in 1976 and 1977. In these two identical surveys 73% and 75% indicated that they would like to the desegregation of schools happen, respectively. While 18% followed by 17% indicated that they would not like to see the desegregation of schools take place and 9% and 8% were unsure (Harris, 1976 & Harris, 1977). That same year 70% of respondents in a CBS News/New York Times Poll indicated that they disagreed with the statement that "Racial integration of the schools should be achieved even if it requires busing" while only 23% agreed with the statement (CBS News, 1977). This data shows that public sentiment was largely supportive of the idea of desegregation in schools but again,

public support for the measures and efforts necessary to bring about this change was lacking. Interestingly, data related to the public's opinion on the benefit of racially integrated schools indicates that there was not a widespread belief that such schools were particularly beneficial in regards to the education most students receive. In a 1978 CBS News Poll only 23% of respondents indicated that racial integration in school had a good effect while 25% indicated that such integration had a bad effect. Additionally, 33% believed it had no effect and 12% and 7% indicated that they had no opinion or that they were unsure (CBS News, 1978).

Due to the decreased judicial support for desegregation, as the 1970s drew to a close most districts across the nation had already begun to reverse short-lived busing efforts that had been in place during the early 1970s (Clotfelter, 2004; Orfield, 2002). For many American citizens this was a welcomed change or at the very least an uncontested return to previous practice given that many believed that integration has either a negative effect or no effect on the quality of education that most children receive (Orfield, 1996). In a 1978 poll only 23% of respondents indicated that they felt integration had a positive or good effect on the education received by most children while 25% and 33% respectively, believed that such school experience had a negative impact or no impact. Additionally, 7% indicated that they were unsure and 12% reported no opinion (CBS, 1978). Given the lack of public belief in the positive impact of integration the swift reversal of such efforts is not surprising. While in some districts small scale busing plans remained in effect into the 1980s in many districts the retreat away from intentional desegregation was quite swift. Even though policies intended to racially balance or equalize schools existed under limited conditions through the decade by the 1980s desegregation efforts in districts across the nation were ending and quietly disappearing from the public narrative.

2.4 The 1980s: Continued conservatism and its impact on desegregation

Beginning with Reagan's election in 1980 the rise of neo-conservatism was both fast and furious (McGirr, 2001). During his presidency Reagan cut taxes and government regulations, attacked social programs, expanded military and continued to place pressure and focus on communism in developing nations (Ayers et al, 2009). The economy dipped after Reagan's election but it increased dramatically in 1983 before the 1984 election fueling the support for Reagan's re-election. During his time in office President Reagan appointed several conservative judges to the Supreme Court and openly supported the "New Right" or "New Christian Right" and corresponding evangelical ideas (McGirr, 2001). To that end, the 1980s were characterized by disparate social conditions and a focus on social issues with a dropping or stagnant economy (Ayers et al, 2009). While the Cold War had dwindled significantly, the national political narrative continued to further public concern of the presence and threat of other countries.

During the early 1980s public support for desegregation efforts in the form of busing remained extremely low. In a 1980 poll only 18% of respondents approved of forced busing to achieve racial integration while 75% disapproved (LA Times, 1980). Multiple polls during the early 1980s provide similar evidence of low levels of support for busing nation-wide. Interestingly, in 1981 58% of respondents in a joint CBS and New York Times poll reported that no busing was taking place in their community at that time. 8% reported busing plans having been in place for less than three years and 23% indicated busing plans in their community had been in place for more than three years (CBS/New York Times, 1981). Thus, while most communities were not experiencing busing efforts very few communities had implemented busing efforts in recent years. Even with minimal instances of busing actually taking place the public perception toward busing remained highly negative. Moreover, 1982 poll data indicate

that 22% of respondents felt that racial integration was “going too fast” while 54% believe that the pace of racial integration was “about right” and 18% reported that such integration was happening “too slow” (ABC News/Washington Post, 1982). While integration efforts had radically dwindled in number and intensity many citizens believed that these efforts were still happening too fast or were right in line with the optimal pace, even though in actuality integration efforts had largely ended.

The educational narrative of the mid and late 1980s was greatly impacted by the 1983 report *A Nation at Risk* by increasing anxiety and fear about the mediocrity of the public schools in the United States. Much of the rhetoric surrounding the report was wildly overblown but had a large impact felt nation wide (Graham, 2005). While the 1960s and 1970s had focused on providing access to education for all children, the 1980s marked the beginning of a new period for public education, one focused on academic achievement. By the late 1980s the belief that desegregation measures were critical to the quality of public education had dramatically waned but by no means demonstrated consistency in public sentiment. An ABC News and Washington Post poll conducted twice during 1986 demonstrated this lack of consistency. The first set of data indicate that 55% of respondents favor busing both black and white students as a last resort for school integration while 36% oppose busing in such instances. Only 40% of respondents in the second data set favored busing as a last resort for school integration while 56% of respondents opposed busing (ABC/Washington Post, 1986). The contradictory nature of these two data sets collected by the same poll during the same year illustrates the lack of consistency in public sentiment concerning busing as a supported measure for creating integrated school. However, in neither poll was the support for busing much greater than a 51% majority.

Previous research has examined the paradox between the public's support of integrated schools as an ideal but a lack of agreement and support concerning how to create such integrated schools (Orfield, 2002; Wells, 2009). While such support for integrated schools existed it was not widespread or unanimous by any means. In fact, in 1981 a poll conducted by Gallup and Newsweek showed that half of respondents believed that desegregation via busing had actually caused more difficulties for black children than it was worth where as only 40% indicated that integration had helped black students (Gallup/Newsweek, 1981). Looking back on the desegregation efforts of the early and mid 1970s many people did not believe the schools improved as a result of such efforts. In fact, many black Americans did not believe that their children benefitted from attending school with whites (Wells et al, 2009). Furthermore, many believed that the disruption desegregation efforts caused in schools and communities negatively impacted their quality because of the considerable disruption needed and that such disruption outweighed the benefits (Graham, 2005). 1988 Gallup poll indicates that only 55% of respondents believed that school integration improved the quality of education received by black students and only 35% of respondents felt that integration improved the quality of education received by white students. Conversely, 29% of respondents believed that integration had not improved educational quality for blacks and 47% felt likewise for the white educational quality (Gallup, 1988). Not only was there a lack of robust support for desegregation in regards to its positive impact for both black and white students many actually believed that integration did not positively influence education for students of either race in any meaningful way.

Largely, the late 1980s were characterized by public dissatisfaction with the academic quality of the nation's public schools (Hochschild & Scovronick, 2004). To that end, the focal point of public education discussion became one of academic achievement rather than equal

educational opportunity, specifically racial equity and access in schooling (Hochschild & Scovronick, 2004). Following the 1960s and the Civil Rights Movement during which time the nation experienced significant momentum for equality and liberal progress, the 1980s were a time of shifting tides toward political and economic conservatism. With this shift, the public voice and narrative concerning desegregation changed from one of support to one of indifference and then objection, particularly in regards to methods such as busing (Saatcioglu & Carl, 2011).

2.5 The 1990s: A moderately liberal decade with an economic focus

While previous decades prior to the 1980s demonstrated a significant national focus on desegregation and race relations more broadly, the 1990s proved to be a time of changing priorities for the United States. At the end of George H. W. Bush's presidency, the nation found itself embroiled in the First Iraq War from August 1990-1991. Following the end of Bush's term Bill Clinton, a moderate democrat, was elected. Instead of focusing on schools, Clinton instead pushed for legislation like "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (the tacit acceptance of homosexuals in the military provided they did not disclose their sexuality) and the North American Free Trade Agreement, which eliminated trade and investment barriers between North American countries. Moreover, Clinton's infamous scandal with his then intern, Monica Lewinsky, led to his impeachment by the House of Representatives, followed by an acquittal from the Senate, and general disapproval by the voting public. While the Clinton administration concentrated on revising welfare laws the nation prospered economically. Thus, the national narrative, which focused on economic issues largely ignored integration as a public conversation. This is best exemplified by data collected in the 1994 poll conducted by NBC News and the Wall Street Journal. When asked about the most important goal for blacks: greater racial integration,

increased economic opportunity or stronger black institutions only 15% of respondents chose greater integration while 61% indicated that increased economic opportunity should be the priority. 14% of respondents felt that creating stronger black institutions should be the most important goal (NBC/Wall Street Journal, 1994).

While the reversal toward the resegregation of schools began in 1974 with *Milliken* other court cases further relaxed the requirements regarding the racial makeup of schools, thus enabling the resegregation trend. The 1991 Court ruling in *Board of Education of Oklahoma v. Dowell* required that districts be deemed “unitary” by taking steps to abolish segregated schools⁵. The term “unitary” when applied to a district under the *Dowell* ruling denoted that the district had “repaired the damage caused by generations of segregation and overt discrimination” through intentions and efforts without evaluating outcomes (Orfield, 1996). The next year “unitary status” was redefined in the Court’s ruling in *Freeman v. Pitts* thus allowing districts to receive unitary status based on its “commitment to, rather than its actual success” in desegregation schools⁶ (Ogletree 2004; Patterson 2001). This change, while seemingly insignificant meant that districts could be in compliance with previous requirements regarding the racial makeup of schools merely by intent, not by action or success.

Dowell and *Freeman* were pivotal in providing leeway to school districts regarding the racial make up of schools, thus relaxing requirements and enabling the resegregation of schools (Clotfelter, 2004; Orfield, 2001). Additionally, throughout the 1990s federal courts across the country followed the Supreme Court and supported the end of existing desegregation orders further increasing resegregation (Ogletree, 2004). Following *Freeman*, the Court’s 1995 ruling in *Missouri v. Jenkins* required courts to return to state and local control, often restoring

⁵ *Board of Education of Oklahoma v. Dowell*, 498 U.S. 237

⁶ *Freeman v. Pitts*, 503 U.S. 467

segregated neighborhood schools. The shift to local control from national judicial requirement sent a clear message of district autonomy and provided districts with the opportunity to return to neighborhood schools segregated by race (Rossell et al, 2002).

Without a political focus or judicial commitment to racial integration the resegregation of schools and districts across the nation swiftly took hold during the 1990s (Orfield, 2002; Patterson, 2001). This political and judicial preference for resegregated neighborhood schools mirrors public sentiment, which also indicates an overwhelming support for neighborhood schools even if such schools reflect the racially segregated nature of the neighborhoods in which it is located (Orfield, 2002; Wells et al, 2009). In 1994 86% of respondents in a large poll conducted by Gallup, CNN and USA Today indicated that letting students go to the local neighborhood school in their community is better, even if it means that most of the students would be of the same race while only 11% of respondents preferred transferring students to other schools to create more integration, even if it mean that some students would have to travel out of their communities to go to school (Gallup/CNN/USA Today, 1994). This poll, with identical wording, was conducted again in July of 1999 with similar results. 82% of respondents indicated a preference for allowing students to go to local schools while only 15% believed transferring students for integration purposes requiring travel out of neighborhood community to be the better choice (Gallup/CNN/USA Today, 1999).

While public sentiment and opinions from the 1990s indicate a lack of support for busing, polls conducted during this time also show a lack of conviction that integrated schooling in the best way to positively impact minority students. In the same large poll conducted in April of 1994 that was cited above, 42% of respondents believed that the best way to help minority students was to increase funding and other resources for minority schools while only 36% of

respondents reported that efforts to integrate schools was the best way to help minority students. Interestingly, 11% of respondents felt that neither option was the best choice (Gallup/CNN/USA Today, 1994). Thus, a lack of agreement about the benefit of integration for black and minority students abounds in public sentiment data of the 1990s. However, this large data set also questioned individuals' belief about the results of integration. 64% of respondents indicated that they believed that integration had improved relations between blacks and whites while only 28% believed that integration had actually worked against progress in race relations. Therefore, it appears that while many believed that integration had actually been beneficial to the broader societal relationship between black and white populations this belief did not manifest itself in a more specific commitment to continued integration efforts. This dichotomy between perceived successes more broadly and perceived successes in schools alongside an overwhelming support for neighborhood schools that are likely to be racially segregated demonstrates the contradictory nature of public sentiments surrounding integration during the 1990s, not unlike previous and later decades.

As with the 1980s, in the 1990s the public discourse concerning public schools typically focused on academic achievement, rather than educational opportunity and racial equity. In a 1998 survey participants were asked whether or not achieving more diversity and integration in schools or raising academic standards and achievement should be the bigger priority for schools. In this poll an overwhelming majority of respondents (87%), indicated that raising academic standards and achievement should be the biggest priority while only 6% believed that achieving more diversity and integration should be the priority. Additionally, 82% of black respondents also indicated that raising academic standards and achievement should be the bigger priority for public schools over achieving more diversity and integration, which was indicated by only 8% of

black respondents (Time To Move On, 1998). Thus, as the decade drew to a close a continued focus on academic standards and achievement with little or no discussion of racial equity in schooling persisted alongside the continued and swift return to racially segregated neighborhood schools.

2.6 The 2000s: The standards movement, conservatism, privatization and resegregation

During the 2000s the United States experienced a time of increased political, economic and social conservatism. Following Clinton's impeachment and 9/11 Americans again became less trusting of both domestic politicians and "threats" from abroad. As the Iraq and Afghanistan wars waged on the economy dipped in the early 2000s, bounced back and then plummeted in 2008. Nationwide the schools became more racially segregated due to racially isolated housing patterns (Orfield, 2005; Wells et al, 2009). Additionally, the charter school movement alongside increasing enrollment in private schools indicates a shift toward the privatization of education. Finally, the "standards movement" and standardized testing largely summarizes the narrative of public education during the 2000s. Schooling in the United States at the beginning of the twenty first century focused on increasing the academic achievement of all students through the use of standardized test scores (Hochschild & Scovronick, 2004).

By the early 2000s more than half of all white students attended schools where 80% of students were white, demonstrating high levels of racial segregation (Ogletree, 2004). Furthermore, while only 15% of segregated white schools are in areas of concentrated poverty, over 85% of segregated black schools are located in such areas (Ogletree, 2004). Given the strong correlation between race and poverty these statistics further quantify the resegregation trend. As demonstrated by polling data in the 1990s public sentiment in the 2000s also strongly

supported the existence of local neighborhood schools even if such schools were racially segregated due to housing patterns. In 2004 78% of participants in an Associated Press poll reported that they believed it is better to let students do to the local school in their community, even if it means that most of the students would be of the same race, rather than policies that transfer students to other schools to create more integration, even if it would require some students to travel out of their communities for school. Only 19% of respondents preferred the transferring of students for integration purposes (Associate Press/Public Affairs, 2004). Similarly, in 2007 59% of participants in a Pew poll reported support for local community schools even if that mean that most students were of the same race while only 29% of participants supported having students to racially mixed schools even if many of the students did not live nearby (Pew, 2007).

It is clear that during the 2000s public support for neighborhood schools continued to gather momentum even while data indicates a public belief that integrated schools improve the quality of education for black students. In a 2004 poll 72% of respondents reported that integration had improved the quality of education received for black students while only 25% disagreed with that belief. However, only 50% of respondents believed that integration had improved the quality of education received by white students and 45% of participants disagreed that it had improved education quality for whites (Associated Press, 2004). Thus, while public opinion data is split on the benefit for whites the majority of people agree on the benefit for black students. This benefit for blacks however, has not been viewed as critical enough, in the eyes of the public, to foster a substantial support for integration efforts. In fact, in 2000 only 6% of poll participants felt integration was the best way to achieve racial equality among different racial groups in the United States while 59% believed that the best way was through “equal

opportunity” and 26% supported a focus on “equal results” (NBS/Wall Street Journal, 2000). While it is unclear what objectives such as “equal opportunity” and “equal results” would include it is clear from the data that public support for integration as a way to achieve racial equality among different racial groups in the United States remained extremely low. This is particularly interesting considering that in a Gallup Poll intended to gather information about the which institutions in society could do the best job of improving race relations in the country the highest ranked institution was the public schools indicated by 28% of respondents. 23% of respondents reported belief that religious organizations would do the best job of improving race relations while federal, state and local government were chosen by 14%, 9% and 13% respectively. Again, the data demonstrates the contradictory nature between the belief that public schools are the institution most likely to be able to achieve racial equality among different racial groups throughout the country but integration in public schools should not be a focus in policy or action and instead racially identifiable local community schools should prevail.

In 2007 the Court ruled against the use of voluntary race conscious student assignment plans in *Parents Involved*, further accelerating the current resegregation trend in the United States. Prior to *Parents Involved* districts were permitted to voluntarily use race as an assignment criteria in an effort to maintain racially balanced schools as a remedy for pervasive residential segregation. In a poll conducted that same year 71% of respondents supported the ruling that public schools may not consider an individual’s race when assigning students to specific schools while 24% disagreed with the ruling (Quinnipiac, 2007). In the wake of *Parents Involved* the inability of districts to use race conscious student assignment plans will likely exacerbate the resegregation of schools (Wells et al, 2009). The impact of the current

resegregation trend along side the lack of public discourse concerning the growing racial inequality in public schools proves paramount in the interpreting the results of this study.

2.7 Conclusion: The fall of Brown, the rise of resegregation and public perception

The above description of the historical and political evolution of school desegregation provides a foundation for understanding previous scholarly work by notable authors. While such studies are few in numbers they create the basis for future study including expanded methodologies to examine the changes in individuals' opinions on the successes and failures of desegregation. In short, the existence of desegregation in the public schools was considerably brief and to many, seen as unsuccessful. Public support for desegregation efforts was largely absent and often contradictory in nature mimicking the judicial and political shifts of the last six decades. The shift in opinion of the Supreme Court concerning the value of racial integration in schools is clear from judicial rulings and governmental focuses throughout the last sixty years. These cases have greatly influenced the successes, failures, and continued controversy of desegregation. From the delay of action following *Brown* to decisions of the 1990s encouraging the dismantling of desegregation efforts it is clear that the pace of desegregation slowed since the mid 1970s beginning with *Milliken*, which largely freed white suburban districts from any legal obligation to participate in metropolitan desegregation efforts (Ogletree, 2004). The rulings in *Milliken* and *Parents Involved* alongside the nation's failure to address housing segregation have created a national landscape conducive to the swift resegregation of schools.

The resegregation of schools across the United States alongside a lack of effort on the part of school districts and courts to remedy the current racial inequity in education calls for continued study (Saatcioglu & Carl, 2011). This is particularly true given the historically

contradictory nature of public discourse concerning racial equity in schooling (Orfield, 2002). During the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s it was societally acknowledged that the educational opportunities and experiences of black and white students were not equal. To that end, the nation sought to remedy this situation through the implementation of desegregation and integration. These were wildly unpopular and controversial even in the face of acknowledged inequity. Thus, the contradictory nature of public opinion continued for several decades.

Following the resegregation of schools, which has taken place consistently over the course of the last three decades, the public conversation and opinion about racial equity in schooling, is significantly different than in previous decades. While racially segregated schools exists, sometimes at a heightened level in comparison to the years prior desegregation measures occurred, public opinion indicates that such patterns have largely gone unacknowledged by many with no public discourse regarding solution to this persistent problem. The current research project involves a qualitative field study with the purpose of examining stakeholder opinions on desegregation and racial equity in schools by exploring several questions. To what extent is racial educational inequality occurring? How do individuals of different races perceive such educational inequality? Are policies designed to reverse racial educational inequality needed or not? Therefore, the scope of this study broadly examines racial educational equity over the last forty years by presenting the research question: What are the prevailing stakeholder opinions on school desegregation and racial educational equity in a post desegregation era?

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research question and study design

This study examines public views on school desegregation and racial issues in the post desegregation era. While examining generational and racial differences in peoples' opinions and perceptions of desegregation, this study is constrained to one geographic location to more reliably portray the influences of community and historical contexts on individuals' beliefs. This study addresses the perceptions of participants having graduated from high school in Greensboro, North Carolina, simultaneously a unique and representative location as a Southern, major city. The research question is explored through a basic qualitative study design including semi-structured interviews compared across generational and racial cohorts. This chapter includes descriptions of the location context, sampling process, data collection and analysis processes as well as an examination of study limitations.

3.2 Location context

As the third largest city in North Carolina with a total population of just under 300,000, Greensboro is a typical Southern metropolitan area with history as a textile center and known for the influence of the religious Bible belt. The state of North Carolina, while a typical Southern state in many ways was quite atypical due to its progressive outlook in regards to industrial development, education and race relations (Chafe, 1981). Greensboro is described as a college center, hosting six institutions of higher education and one of the largest public school systems in the state. Greensboro itself is a historically significant location in the Civil Rights Movement

due to the nonviolent sit-ins that took place in downtown Greensboro during 1960 (Chafe, 1981). While in 1954 Greensboro became the first Southern city to publicly announce that it would adhere to the Supreme Court's ruling in *Brown v. Board* the long path to the actual desegregation of its schools ended in 1971 when Greensboro became one of the last five cities in the state of North Carolina to fully integrate its schools. While mirroring the historical and political evolution of desegregation in other Southern cities, Greensboro provides a unique location of analysis for the proposed study.

The racial demographics for Greensboro indicate a steady incline in the number of minority citizens alongside a decline in the white population over the last fifty years. In 1960 with a total population of 119,574 only 20% of the population was black whereas in 2012 41% of the total population of 269, 666 were black. Politically, while North Carolina is known to be a fairly conservative block of the South, Guilford County tends to be a more liberal voting county than the majority of the state alongside other metropolitan areas such as Wake County and Mecklenburg County, home to Raleigh and Charlotte, respectively. Suburban sprawl has increased the population of areas lying just outside of city limits including Summerfield, Oak Ridge, High Point, Jamestown, Brown Summit, Pleasant Garden, and McLeansville. Including these bedroom communities the total population of Guilford County was reported close to 495,000 in 2012.

Currently the public schools in Greensboro, North Carolina are part of the Guilford County Schools system, which includes all public schools in Greensboro, High Point and surrounding areas within county lines. The merger to create this larger system took place in 1993. Prior to this time all three school districts within the county operated separately. Thus, individuals in this study who attended school prior to the merger refer to the school system as the

“Greensboro Public Schools” even though such a district no longer exists. During the 1970s and 1980s, prior to the merger, there were only four high schools in Greensboro, North Carolina while there were several others in the outlying county areas and High Point, a small neighboring community. The four Greensboro high schools were Grimsley High School, Page High School, Smith High School and Dudley High School. Prior to desegregation Dudley served as the black high school for Greensboro while the other three were white high schools. The racial demographic statistics for each school, as well as for the Greensboro Public Schools and the Guilford County Schools prior to and after the merger is located in Appendix B and Appendix C.

3.3 Sampling and participants

This study employed purposeful sampling based on specific criteria for possible participants. Participants must have attended or graduated from a public high school in Greensboro, North Carolina in the 1970s, 1980s and 2000s. More specifically, participants of the 1970s cohort must have graduated between 1973 and 1976. The Greensboro Public Schools first initiated a busing plan and comprehensive school desegregation in the fall of 1972. Thus, the graduating class of 1973 was the first cohort to experience widespread desegregation. The second study cohort are those individuals who graduated from high school between 1986 and 1989 during the end of desegregation efforts in the Greensboro public schools but prior to the 1992 merger of the city and county school districts and the following resegregation trends of the 1990s and 2000s.

A sample size of twenty-seven participants, twelve black and fifteen white are evenly distributed across three decades or generational cohorts. Thus, five white participants and four black participants in each generational cohort provide a racial and generational balance ideal for

the collection of valid, reliable and generalizable results. While the researcher had hoped to interview one additional black participant in each of the three generational cohorts due to time constraints this was not possible. Snowball sampling has been minimized to increase the variety of participants across different geographical and social parts of the community. Instead, participants were targeted for the uniqueness of their community involvement, be it through neighborhood location, civic organizations, religious organizations or employer.

To that end, the researcher contacted leaders from community organizations including Rotary International, Lions Club, and Kiwanis International, as well as religious organizations spanning multiple communities within Greensboro. Additionally, the researcher contacted school administrators for assistance in contacting recent graduates and possible participants of the 2000s generational cohort. When contacting these organizational leaders the researcher sought recommendations of organization members or other known individuals who fit the required criteria and who would be willing to participate in a research study. The researcher provided contacts with information about the confidentiality of all interviews. However, to protect the nature of the study and to limit a possible skew of results due to self-selection bias the study was advertised and explained as an examination of the impact of high school experiences on adult life, rather than a study with a specific focus on racial educational quality including desegregation, resegregation and race in schools. In doing so it is hoped that self-selection bias has been minimized.

As organization leaders provided names of possible participants these individuals were contacted directly by phone or email to solicit interest and verbal consent to participate. If the individuals were interested in participating they received a brief description of the study as well as a copy of the consent form by either post or email. Again, the brief description explained the

purpose of the study to explore the impact of individual's high school experiences on their adult lives. In this way the research design intends to limit participants from self-selecting based on a desire or aversion to discussing desegregation and race relations for personal reasons. The large majority of individuals contacted agreed to participate. Three individuals declined participation after hearing about the study. While the researcher did not push the possible participants for reasons as to why they would not participate but each of the individuals were black males who graduated in the early 1970s. While the researcher did not receive any other refusals to participate there were approximately twenty individuals contacted who failed to respond in any way, thus it is hard to know whether or why they were hesitant to participate. The researcher also hoped to interview three individuals for whom scheduling was an issue and thus the interviews never took place. Of these individuals two were black and one was white. In total 30 individuals agreed to participate but only 27 interviews took place.

Once individuals agreed to participate in the study interviews were scheduled either over the phone during initial contact or through email following initial contact. Participants completed consent forms prior to the start of the interview. All interviews took place in November, December, January and February during in-person meetings. On average interviews last just over one hour with the longest interview last an hour and twenty eight minutes while the shortest interview lasted fifty two minutes.

3.4 Cohorts and participants

Figure 1 below shows all twenty-seven participants by racial and generational cohorts with other demographic information. The researcher worked to balance the number of male and female participants throughout all cohorts. For the 1970s and 1980s cohorts participants were

not chosen based on high school attended while for individuals of the 2000s cohort this was an important attribute for consideration. For individuals of the two earlier cohorts it did not matter which school participants attended as desegregation efforts impacted the racial make up and experience of all schools. However, as a critical exploration of this study it was important to speak with black and white individuals who recently graduated from racially saturated schools. Thus, individuals from the 2000s cohort were chosen based on the school they attended. The racial make up of these schools can be found in Appendix C. While not intentional the participants of all generational and racial cohorts are more highly educated than the statistical populations for each cohort. However, the researcher feels that this does not detract from the findings described in chapter four. Participants' professions demonstrate a wide variety of career and educational focuses.

Many of the 1970s cohort participants have children who recently graduated from high school, many from high schools in Guilford County schools. Likewise, several, though not all of the individuals in the 1980s cohorts have school age children now, again largely in the public schools. Finally, all of the recent graduates in the 2000s cohorts had or were enrolled in higher education of some kind and only two participants in this cohort had young children of their own. The two individuals from the 2000s cohort who have children were two women, one white and one black who graduated from the Guilford County schools in the early 2000s. The children of each of these women are not yet school age and thus, the mothers have not yet been faced with the task of choosing a schooling option for their child. As discussed in chapter five it is possible that the lack of children for the participants of the 2000s cohorts impacts their perception of racial equity in schooling differently than the previous two cohorts in which all participants have over time considered the quality of public schools in light of choosing a school for their children.

Figure 1: Study Participants

Pseudonym	Number	Gender	Graduation Year	High School	Current Location	Education Level	Profession
1970s – Black Sarah Alfred Frank Michael	4	Female Male Male Male	1973 1973 1973 1975	Dudley Dudley Smith Grimsley	Greensboro Greensboro Greensboro Greensboro	Bachelor's Master's Bachelor's Bachelor's	Retired Newspaper editor Not currently working Not currently working
1970s – White Shelley Kelly Betsy David Jason	5	Female Female Female Male Male	1973 1973 1974 1974 1975	Ragsdale Dudley Grimsley Grimsley Dudley	Greensboro Raleigh Greensboro Greensboro Greensboro	Bachelor's Bachelor's Master's HS Diploma Master's	Non-profit Nurse practitioner School principal Retired Small business owner
1980s – Black Braxton Ryann Keane Kennan	4	Male Female Male Male	1986 1986 1987 1989	Smith Ragsdale Smith Smith	Greensboro Greensboro Greensboro Greensboro	HS Diploma Bachelor's Bachelor's Bachelor's	Minister – community organization Public school admin. assistant Firefighter Firefighter
1980s – White Tavin Sadie Alice Thomas Steven	5	Male Female Female Male Male	1986 1987 1987 1989 1989	Western Grimsley Grimsley Grimsley Page	Greensboro Greensboro Greensboro Greensboro Charlotte	Bachelor's Master's Doctorate Master's Master's	IT specialist Master's student – education Optometrist University study abroad coordinator Banker
2000s – Black Yvonne Diana Alexis Jonathan	4	Female Female Female Male	2002 2006 2008 2009	Dudley Smith Smith Dudley	Vandalia (NC) Chapel Hill California Raleigh	Bachelor's Master's Master's Undergrad.	Firefighter Social worker Psychologist Student - engineering
2000s – White Callie Lindsay George Tyler Jordan	5	Female Female Male Male Male	2002 2003 2006 2006 2008	Northwest Western Northwest Northwest Western	Greensboro Greensboro Greensboro Raleigh Greensboro	Bachelor's Bachelor's Comm. College Bachelor's Master's	Stay at home mom Marketing Student Communications Graduate student - music

3.5 Data collection

To address the research question this study includes the collection of data through semi-structured interviews with study participants. Interviews were conducted in Greensboro, North Carolina in neutral environments for the comfort of the individual. Meeting locations included meeting spaces at the public library or the personal homes or offices of participants, when appropriate. Interview questions fall into four broad categories: 1) childhood experience, 2) high school experience, 3) post high school experiences and 4) current experiences. Questions in the first category relate to participants' childhood experiences and upbringing including questions concerning their parents' job and employment, what neighborhood or community they grew up in as well as what elementary school and junior high or middle school they attended. The purpose of these questions was to gather information about the class and economic status of the family as well as whether or not they attended schools with racial diversity. Questions specific to participants' high school experiences allowed individuals to describe the activities in which they participated, the friendships they shared, the educational benefits of their schooling as well as their opinions about race relations within the school and broader community. Additionally, for participants of the 1970s and 1980s cohorts questions about the value of desegregation and busing pointedly ask individuals about their perception of the impact of such efforts. Questions concerning participants post high school lives explored the decisions individuals made concerning higher education, job and career paths, family and children as well as the decisions related to remaining in or leaving the Greensboro area.

The researcher consistently began interviews with questions about the participants' high school experience in an effort to establish a comfortable interview setting for the participant. The research then jumped back, chronologically, to discuss their childhood and experience in

elementary school and junior high or middle school. Then questions returned to the participants' high school experience but this time with more specific questions. Next, the interview questions pushed participants to talk about their post-high school life and finally ended with broad opinion questions about the quality of public schools and the status of race relations, racial equality and racial issues both locally and nationally. While this structure was consistent throughout all interviews the researcher worked to be flexible in allowing participants to stray away from a specific question if it was directly related to a different forthcoming topic.

Broadly, interview questions explored peoples' experiences in high school during desegregation or resegregation as well as their experiences beyond high school while also addressing their beliefs about the impact of desegregation efforts and the role of race in schools more broadly. Participants' were questioned about their high school experiences as well as their adult lives in an effort to uncover how their high school experiences may have influenced life choices following high school graduation. Additionally, questions surrounding their memory of race relations both inside and outside of school were intended to uncover individuals' opinions of their high school experiences. Keeping in mind that it is only possible to create a narrative of understanding from the experiences of participants by examining their adult lives and current beliefs the study included questions about participants' opinions about school choice for their children (if any) in hopes of exploring participants' beliefs about the value of desegregation measures and conversely the impact of resegregation.

While the dominant data collection method for this study included qualitative interviews with thirty graduates of the Greensboro Public Schools and the Guilford County Schools (post merger) this study also required the collection of quantitative district enrollment data and racial ratio data of schools and districts over a forty-year period. The collection of this quantitative

data was necessary to provide a larger context in which to place the findings of the interview data, which were the critical focus of the study. The researcher gained access to these records in two ways: 1) local newspaper archives and 2) school district records. School district officials were able to provide enrollment and student demographic data for the district and individual schools from 1998 to 2012. In order to find similar data for the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s the research examined newspaper archives for the two daily newspapers in Greensboro: *The Greensboro Daily News* and the *Greensboro Record*. In the 1990s these publications merged into *The Greensboro News and Record*. Archives of both newspapers yielded articles publishing quantitative data about schools within both the county and city school districts. Additionally, many articles broadly described the policies in place during different time periods of school choice, mandated busing, school pairing, magnet schools and neighborhood schools. Finally, the data collection process also included research into the history of school district policies regarding desegregation, integration and resegregation within the Greensboro Public Schools and the Guilford County Schools, which functioned separately until the merger in 1992. The researcher contacted the school district to obtain access to records from school board meetings and policies implemented during the time periods of the study.

3.6 Data analysis

All interviews were audio recorded and partially transcribed as part of the data analysis process. During the transcription process all participants were provided with pseudonyms to protect confidentiality. Throughout the transcription process interview data were thoroughly reviewed to identify categorical themes of responses from individuals showing trends by racial and generational cohorts. Specifically, data from the 1970s and 1980s were compared for

differences in opinions and experiences as political support and public opinion of desegregation decreased throughout these two decades. Data from participants of the 2000s were compared to those from the 1970s and 1980s for differences in perceptions of race relations and the value of integrated schools. Data were not only analyzed and compared along generational lines but also racial lines within the same generational cohort. In this way data was examined in a six-way matrix, by racial differences in three generational cohorts. Congruence in responses of participants in the same generational cohort or racial group indicates high levels of trustworthiness in the study design and results. Triangulation of responses by all participants leads to a high level of trustworthiness in this study. Support from and of prior literature demonstrates the reliability and validity. Additionally, the articulation of bias due to the role of the researcher, as is common in qualitative research, limits its impact on study results.

3.7 Limitations

The present study is limited to the experiences of a small number of individuals in the Greensboro Public Schools (then Guilford County Schools) who attended high school during the 1970s, 1980s and 2000s. However, as a major Southern city the experiences of participants are similar in many ways to those of high school students from other urban centers in the South and thus generalizable to other locations. Additionally, the generational comparison of individuals' experiences is generalizable to the chronological changes in experiences and opinions of desegregation participants across the country. Finally, as previously noted, because the participants of the 2000s largely (with the exception of two women, one white and one black) do not have children of their own and thus have not been faced with the task of choosing schools for children, their perceptions of school quality in Guilford County may have been less impacted by

contexts outside of their own high school experiences than is perhaps true for the two earlier cohorts. Perceptions of participants from the 1970s and 1980s cohorts are undoubtedly impacted not only by their own high school experiences but also the passing of time since high school graduation, as well as the consideration and thought process required of them in choosing schooling options for their children during their time since high school. Therefore, while the life experiences of the participants in the 1970s and 1980s and the impact these experiences have had on their perceptions, though similar to one another, are drastically different to the experiences and perhaps perceptions of the 2000s cohorts, which are based solely on their own high school experience.

Due to the fallibility of information derived solely from individuals' memories the results of this study are subject to the retrospective reconstruction of participants' experiences and beliefs. While it was not possible to obtain "objective" answers from participants since the impact of the historical contexts through which they lived bear heavily on the way they remembered past experiences and the beliefs that accompany those experiences this by no means diminishes the unique importance of their responses. Thus, such recall bias is unavoidable yet does not deteriorate the validity and importance of the findings. However, future research should extend the use of study designs of generational cohort comparison to other geographical regions outside of the South to examine differences in students' experiences and opinions over time.

3.8 Role of the researcher

As a white female I grew up in Greensboro, North Carolina and attended one of the few relatively diverse high schools, graduating in 2002. I began teaching at an inner city magnet school in Raleigh, North Carolina where I became convinced of the student benefit of attending a

racially diverse school. Upon moving to Kansas I experienced a stark contrast to my previous, albeit limited experience: public schools that were racially isolated, reflecting the racial segregation of residential neighborhoods. I became interested in the ways school districts do or do not encourage racial diversity in schools. While I perceive attending a racially diverse school to be a benefit for students I understand that many do not feel the same way. Thus, I am interested in hearing peoples' stories and perceptions about racial educational quality.

This study focuses on the experiences of people from Greensboro, North Carolina, my hometown and the city from which I graduated high school. Thus, I have a unique connection to the study. As a researcher I have tried to minimize the effect of my bias but as is always true in qualitative research it is impossible to rule out the inevitable existence of some sort of bias or skew in data. However, by overtly including the role of the researcher and potential bias I intend for the results of this study to be generalizable to the extent deemed fit by readers and future researchers.

3.9 Conclusion

Through semi-structured interviews with high school graduates of Greensboro, North Carolina this study examines individuals' perceptions of racial educational quality through the lens of desegregation and resegregation. Specifically, the study presents the research question: What are the prevailing stakeholder opinions on school desegregation and racial equity in schools in a post desegregation era? This is an important topic of focus because data demonstrates that schools are becoming more segregated while public focus on racial balance in schools has diminished. As the schools are becoming more segregated these this change is not nearly as pervasive a topic in public discourse as was true prior to and during desegregation

efforts of the 1960s and 1970s. Thus, the emergence of resegregated schools across the United States in conjunction with the continued racial achievement gap alongside the lack of public discussion concerning educational inequity and possible remedies demonstrates the need for continued study and research concerning both the public opinion and impact of the racial makeup of schools and thus the racial educational quality of schooling.

Chapter 4

FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

As previously noted, the purpose of this study is to address the emergence of resegregated schools across the United States alongside a lack of effort on the part of school districts and courts to remedy the current racial inequity in education. The current study presents the research question: What are stakeholder opinions on school desegregation and racial equity in schooling in a post-desegregation era? To that end, based on participant responses to interview questions this field study examines multiple questions: To what extent is racial educational inequality occurring? How do individuals of different races perceive such educational inequality? Are policies designed to reverse racial educational inequality needed or not?

To understand peoples' opinions concerning these questions it is necessary to address differing views across both racial and generational cohorts. Therefore, this study involves interviews with black and white individuals who went to high school in the early 1970s, late 1980s and 2000s. These generational groups were chosen based upon the characteristics of the historical time period in relation to desegregation and resegregation. The 1970s were the years of the most aggressive desegregation effort while the 1980s saw the beginning of decline of desegregation efforts. Finally, the 2000s were a time period of no structured desegregation efforts at all and in fact an increase in racially segregated public schools. Therefore, the scope of this study broadly examines racial educational quality over the last forty years. Thus, the current

study addresses the research question: What are the prevailing public views on school desegregation and racial equity in schooling in the post desegregation era?

Participants who graduated from high school in the 1970s attended high school during the height of mandatory desegregation efforts in Greensboro, North Carolina. For this reason both black and white individuals in this cohort cannot separate their high school experiences from the racial aspect of both their high school and the larger community during that time. Two of the white participants from this time period were bused to a predominately black high school. One participant, Shelley, attended Ragsdale High School. Thus, she was actually in the Guilford County Schools rather than the Greensboro Public Schools. Because she attended school in the outskirts of town in a rural community with a largely white school population in a school that was not involved with desegregation efforts her experience was different than the other four participants her generational and racial cohort. The final white participants in the 1970s cohort attended Grimsley High School, the oldest and highly historic white high school. While Betsy and David attended Grimsley desegregation efforts had begun but in many ways the experience of these two individuals were quite different than Kelly and Jason, who were bused to the historic black Dudley High School. Of the four black participants from this same generational cohort two remained at Dudley High School while white students were bused in and the other two, Frank and Michael, were bused to and graduated from Smith and Grimsley, respectively.

During the mid to late 1980s the Greensboro Public Schools, like many school districts nation wide, were at the beginning of decline in regards to desegregation efforts. For the nine black and white participants in these two generational cohorts school assignment did not largely impact their high school experience. Most of these individuals attended high schools near their homes with a student population that largely reflected the racial make up of the neighborhood in

which they lived. While their high school experiences were not greatly impacted by desegregation efforts their opinions and stories describe elementary and junior high school experiences that were impacted by school assignment because during those years the school district still employed “pairing” school efforts to racially balance schools.

Black individuals in the 2000s generational cohort all attended either Smith High School or Dudley High School. During the 2000s Smith has become and remained the most racially, ethnically and linguistically diverse school in the district while Dudley has returned to its days as a predominately black high school of pre-desegregation years. White participants from the 2000s generational cohort either attended Western High School or Northwest Guilford High School. Western Guilford, which initially was a predominately white high school in the 1990s, is also becoming more racially diverse as the make up of nearby neighborhoods has changed over time. On the other hand, Northwest Guilford, which is also located on the outskirts of Greensboro, (annexed into the district during the merger with Guilford County Schools in the early 1990s) has a student population that is overwhelmingly white, as dictated by the surrounding areas. All nine of the participants in this recent group of high school graduates has or is working toward higher education goals. For more demographic information about participant characteristics see Figure 1 in chapter three.

4.2 Overview of findings

The current study focuses on examining the public views on racial inequality in education within the historical context of desegregation following *Brown v. Board* and the subsequent resegregation. The major findings fall into three broad themes, which will each be discussed in this chapter. First, individuals’ views on equity in schools differs based on race for participants

from the 2000s even though individuals' from the 1970s and 1980s cohorts have similar beliefs regardless of their race. Secondly, echoing the contradictory pattern of previous research (Orfield, 1995; Wells et al, 2009), participants from several cohorts reiterate the importance of diversity in schooling while also highlighting a lack of support for mandatory busing in any way, shape or form. Finally, the overwhelming support for the preference for both neighborhood schools and school choice programs was a prominent finding in all three generational cohorts. In short, this study focuses on the predominant theme of participants' opinions and perceptions related to school desegregation and racial equity in schooling.

4.3 School equity: 1970s and 1980s, a shared perception

For much of the time during which desegregation efforts were implemented, the public discourse regarding racial educational quality remained the same. This public narrative indicated that a problem existed: schools and educational opportunities for students of different races were not equal. Even while the public generally acknowledged the existence of this problem still there remained no agreement on how best to solve the problem. Desegregation, which involved the use of busing efforts to racially balance schools and provide "equal opportunities" for students of all races became the method for solving the acknowledged problem. The findings of this study indicate that in the twenty-first century public discourse regarding racial equity in schooling is radically different because of the decline in a public narrative focused on race in schools as in previous generations. For members of recent generations it is no longer a commonplace acknowledgement that the schools and educational opportunities of black and white students are unequal even though schools are increasingly segregated by race and the racial achievement gap continues to widen.

The results of this study indicate that the participants of the 1970s, both black and white, openly acknowledge that the schools in Guilford County are currently unequal. These individuals graduated from high school between 1973 and 1975. The class of 1973 was the first graduating class after busing was initiated in the fall of 1972. Thus, the participants in this study who were a part of the 1970s cohort had a unique experience in Greensboro, NC. At that time, the schools in Guilford County were divided into the Greensboro City School system and the Guilford County School system. These two school districts have since merged. In 1972 Greensboro City Schools had only four high schools. One of these schools, Dudley High School, was the only black high school. Beginning in the fall of 1972 white students were bused to Dudley while black students were bused to all three of the other high schools: Page High School, Grimsley High School and Smith High School. Thus, the high school experience of participants in this cohort was overwhelmingly impacted by the implementation of mandatory busing required by desegregation mandates from the courts as indicated by Shelley, a white 1970s graduate of Ragsdale High School, “It was a big thing, the integration. It really was. It upset a lot of people and that carried on for a long time.”

Busing in Greensboro was a controversial topic and the object of much public debate. Because of the central role of desegregation and busing in the arena of community focus it is not surprising that the implementation of desegregation through busing impacted the high school experience of those participants in the 1970s cohort, both black and white. Sarah, a black graduate from the 1970s cohort provided this description of her high school experience in light of busing and desegregation: “It was an interesting experience and one that I do not regret. It had a huge impact on my high school experience. I’m glad that I did have a chance to go to Dudley that first year when it was all black and then got to see it during the transition when it

was integrated. I saw it from both experiences.” Therefore, her understanding and those of her classmates and consideration of equity in schools is largely influenced by the historical importance of their high school experiences. It is no wonder that all participants in this cohort were quick to acknowledge the current inequity in Guilford County schools.

When asked if all students in Guilford County currently receive the same quality of education regardless of the school they attend, one participant, a white woman who graduated in 1974 indicated that the neighborhood and community plays a role in the quality of education received:

To be perfectly honest, I'm not sure. I think for different reasons it does matter what school a child goes to. My assumption is that it is about the neighborhood and the community. But my guess is that the teachers are not the same either... I mean in terms of quality. Betsy

Betsy attended a predominately white high school that was integrated while she was in high school. She also now works as an administrator in the Guilford County Schools and thus has a unique perspective on the current state of schools within the county. While she acknowledges that the neighborhood and community in which the school is located plays an important role in the quality of the school black participants from the same generational cohort also provide similar statements. Alfred, an African American 1973 graduate of the historically black Dudley High School touches upon the relationship between the race and class in regards to high poverty neighborhoods that tend to be largely minority:

No, I don't think they are all equal. I don't think they are all equal because... I think there are some good intentions that go awry... I think because of the way the accountability system is set up it encourages teachers to try to teach in more affluent schools. So the high poverty schools struggle to maintain good teachers and the schools in the poor, topically black or minority, areas then continue to get worse and worse in comparison to the majority white schools in more affluent neighborhoods. Alfred

Interestingly, while both black and white participants of the 1980s cohort also believe that the schools are not currently equal, this belief, for some of the participants, is not quite as strong as those demonstrated by the 1970s cohort. This may be due to the fact that individuals from the 1980s cohort attended school during a time in which racial equity in education was not as prominent a conversation as it had been a generation earlier. Because of the changes in public discourse and narrative regarding desegregation it is understandable that race and racial equity did not influence their high school experiences to the full extent of those from the 1970s. However, both black and white cohorts from the 1980s generational cohort provided candid perceptions about the currently quality of schools in Guilford County.

Unfortunately, it absolutely matters where a kid goes to school. I feel like kind of being on the inside as an employee and a parent and a past student I see it. The expectation level in the low performing schools... there is such a lack of discipline...The extra funds and extra programs have not been very successful in the low performing schools...It's like the low performing schools are that way because of where the families can afford to live. So poor families live in poor neighborhoods and those schools are the ones that aren't as good and they are also the ones with more students of color. Ryann

Again, the quotation above highlights the participants connection between the neighborhood a family can afford to live in and the quality of school located in that neighborhood. When asked specifically about the different between Dudley High School, which in 2012 is 98% black and Northwest Guilford that is 97% white, a black participant from the 1980s cohort had this to say about whether or not the students at these two schools received the same quality of education:

You know, I would really, really, really with all my heart like to say 'Why sure they do'. But I just cannot in good conscience tell you that I believe that. I cannot in good conscience tell you that I believe that. And I don't know this, it is just my perception.
Braxton

Braxton, a black male, graduated from Smith High School in 1986 and still lives in Greensboro but does not have any children nor is he connected with the school system in any way, unlike Ryann, quoted above. Ryann has a unique perspective because she graduated from a Guilford

County high school in the late 1980s and currently works in the district as an administrative assistant and also has a daughter in the schools. Both of these black participants who graduated in the late 1980s clearly believe that the schools are currently unequal. Their white counterparts in the 1980s generational cohort also provide opinions and perceptions that the schools are unequal due to the part of town in which the school is located.

Demographically speaking, the further east or the further south you go the worse the neighborhood gets...and I believe that is reflected in the schools. I think there are difference in the schools in different parts of town. Tavin

In Greensboro in the late 1980s the city and county school districts had not yet consolidated but the pending merger was in the forefront of community discussion as can be seen in the number of articles published in the local newspaper during the late part of the decade. Additionally, during the late 1970s and early 1980s busing plans were still in effect for the elementary schools in town through a process in which a predominately white elementary school and a predominately black elementary school were “paired” together for attendance purposes (McLeod, 1984). Thus, students who attended the white school for 1st-3rd grade then attended the predominately black school for 4th – 6th grade. Through this process the district continued to bus students across neighborhoods for the purpose of racially balancing elementary schools. This was not done for middle schools or high schools and by the late 1980s the last remaining elementary schools were “unpaired” (Adams, 1989). Due to this “unpairing”, participants from the late 1980s, both black and white would have had some exposure to community desegregation efforts during their elementary school years but largely the public conversation to which they would have been exposed was about the city schools versus the county schools, which in many respects was also a conversation focused on the inequity and significant racial segregation existing in the two systems.

One white individual who graduated from Page High School in 1989 remembered being bused across town to a predominately black elementary school for 4th – 6th grade. When asked about the quality of schools now he acknowledged the inequity then and now:

I would say that it mattered back then, when I was in school and I'm sure it still matters today. I think part of it is, at least to me and my perception and reading stuff, I would still think if I had kids and I'm trying to get the best I'm going to try to have my kids go to Page or Grimsley. I know that Northwest is also now a top tier school. I know the Dudleys and the Smiths and some of the other schools are going to have challenges... So yeah, I still think that is still there. I know that's tough to break. Steven

In the end, both black and white participants of the 1980s were quick to acknowledge the inequity in school quality in the Guilford County Schools in 2013. This perception may possibly be due to the impact of the community discourse on busing and consolidation that persisted during the 1980s at the height of their schooling experience. While the public discussion concerning desegregation was largely different than it had been in the previous decade their experience was most certainly impacted by the phasing out of busing and the pending district consolidation. Their experience would have been impacted by these changes because many families and neighborhoods were re-zoned in light of the end of busing and upcoming district merger. Additionally, both black and white participants from the 1970s seem to have difficulty separating their high school experiences from integration. Instead, their high school experience, and thus their perception of schools today is so deeply intertwined with the public's response to integration and busing that it shapes their understanding of school equity in the current time. Participants from the 1970s grew up in a time during which racial equity in schools was at the forefront of community discourse.

4.4 School equity: 2000s, disagreement between racial cohorts

While both black and white participants of the 1970s and 1980s generational cohorts provided similar responses and opinions concerning the current inequity in the Guilford County Schools one of the more interesting findings of this study is the lack of agreement between black and white participants from the 2000s generational cohort. Participants from the 2000s are clearly delineated along racial lines in a way that the other two generational cohorts are not. White participants from this cohort feel confident in the current opportunities for people of all races both in Greensboro and nationwide. Additionally, they describe the Guilford County Schools as relatively good schools with equal quality schools throughout the county. Thus, they feel strongly that it does not matter what school students attend as can be seen by the quotations below. On the contrary, black participants are quick to contradict this opinion. These individuals feel strongly that schools in Guilford County are not equal and that the predominately white schools provide better educational opportunities for students than do the predominately black schools.

When asked about the quality of public schools in Guilford County several of the white participants from the 2000s generational cohort indicated their belief that the district has quality public schools even while also confirming the belief that it does not matter what school a child attends because all schools are of equal quality.

Yeah, the schools are good. I think the people in Greensboro are more worried about the schools nationwide in comparison to other countries than they are about the local schools. If the schools everywhere in the United States are doing well then the schools here must be doing well too. So does it matter where they go to school? Um, I don't believe so. No, I really don't think so. Tyler

Given that Tyler, and three of the four other white participants from this cohort do not yet have children, their perspective on the quality of schools across the district is limited to their own experiences in high school with little context outside of that experience. However, that factor

does not lessen the validity of their perception of school quality but is simply important to note in comparison to the perceptions of previous cohorts for whom the task of choosing schools for children has most assuredly impacted their understanding of school quality in Guilford County.

Another white male who graduated from Northwest Guilford High School, a predominately white school, in 2006 indicated a belief that there is a difference in the educational experience provided between public and private schools in Greensboro but that when it comes to the public schools they are all of the same quality.

I have friends that went to Greensboro Day School [private school] and they are now working on Wall Street. But I think they pay for that kind of education and so they expect a great education. In terms of public schools I think we do have great schools in terms of success rates for students and graduating and going on to universities. The district has really good schools. They are all really good schools. George

When pressed about the high levels of minority students and poverty in some schools while other schools remain largely white and affluent white participants from the 2000s cohorts indicated the belief that such schools, those in poor neighborhoods with high levels of minority students and high poverty rates, are not necessarily worse schools than others.

Not necessarily, because like I said my husband is a teacher and he teaches in a Title I school and even with those students, the majority of them being lower income, means that the school itself gets more funding for things. Like they have three classroom sets of iPads so they go get more funding that way and there is a teacher incentive for teaching in those schools, a bonus as like a retainer so I think really it works out. Lindsay

Thus, the white students having recently graduated, while they acknowledge that the makeup of schools is not the same; that there are predominately white affluent schools and predominately minority and poverty stricken schools, this group of participants indicates that this kind of school makeup does not necessarily dictate the quality of education received by students. Moreover, the location and makeup of the school does not mean that some schools are better quality schools but that instead, all the schools in the district are all of relatively equal quality. Finally, several

participants indicated that the standardization movement with a focus on standardized testing equalizes schools because the requirements are the same, which means that students will receive the same education, regardless of the school. Thus, when asked if it matters what school a student attends one participant responded:

Yes and no, but I'm going to say no because of the standardized testing across the board...Academically I think it is the same across the district...If a family doesn't think education is important then that child probably won't do well in school but it isn't the fault of the school. That is on the family. Callie

George, quoted above echoed this shared sentiment. He too, believes that while the schools are equal and it does not matter which school a student attend, ultimately what matters is the families wealthy and the value placed on education in the home.

No, no, I don't think it matters at all... But I do think that some areas, where the families are wealthier...however they got their wealth they had an appreciation for education and they want to make sure their kid is going down the same path and so I think some of those schools, whose families may not have been as fortunate and maybe grew up in poverty think less about those things because it's more about how are you going to bust your butt each day just to get by... I don't think they think so much about college. But that's about the family. I don't think that is the fault of the school and I don't think that means it isn't a good school or that the school is less good than the other schools. It's just... I don't know...I guess it's just about the family. George

On the other hand, black participants from the same generational cohort provide a stark contrast in perceptions and beliefs about the racial equity in education in the present time.

Does it matter? Oh yeah. I think it does...academic wise I think it definitely matters.... If you aren't in a special program like the Academy of an IB program or whatever I think it really matters. Jonathan

Jonathan, a black student who recently graduated from Dudley High School in 2009 was a part of the Academy at Dudley, a school within a school program for high achieving students at Dudley. While Jonathan believes that he received a decent education that is somewhat comparable to that of a white student at affluent Northwest Guilford High School he acknowledges that if you are a typical student, attending Dudley as your neighborhood school

and not part of the Academy then you are likely to receive a sub par educational experience than your counterparts at Northwest.

One student, a biracial female who self identifies as African American is not convinced that Guilford County has good public schools:

Yes and no. I think there are certain schools that are valued more than others. Alexis

She goes on to discuss the difference in the schools in Greensboro with the belief that they are not all of equal quality:

Yes. It absolutely matters. I think that the schools that are predominately white in Guilford County or draw from predominately white neighborhoods have better school in general – the schools just look different, the funding is better, the books are better... What does that mean if you are supposed to have the same expectations for all students? I think it is all about how money is distributed and how, in my opinion, it tends to disproportionately affect students of color, in particular black students. Alexis

While Lindsay, a white student quoted above, perceives that poor, largely minority schools actually receive more funding than affluent schools, Alexis, a black female who attended Smith High School, a predominately minority school, believes that the funding for her school and other similar schools is disproportionately lower than white, affluent schools within the same school district.

Interestingly, while all black participants from the 2000s generational cohort believe strongly in the inequity of schools they do not feel that desegregation through busing is the answer. While they do not think busing is the answer, they do feel strongly that something must be done because the schools are so clearly unequal.

I don't think it should be about where a kid goes to school. That shouldn't be the issue. The issue is that the schools are not set up equally. They're not... the caliber of the schools are different.... the facilities are not equal. The kids that go to these affluent predominately white schools get a different education... I don't know if sending black kids there or vice versa is a good idea. I don't know if keeping them all separate is a good idea. What I do know is that the schools are not equal. The challenge should be making sure that all the schools have the same resources...it's so frustrating. Alexis

When pushed further on the issue of whether or not the district should actively diversify schools based on either race or class even if it involved busing Alexis went on to say:

I think if we bus kids to schools to balance the racial make up we run the risk of having kids labeled “oh the black kids are here to sprinkle some pepper in the salt’ but this isn’t really their school it’s still our school’ So then you have parents of color who feel worse about their situation because now they are being compared to the white parents in that school. Alexis

Clearly Alexis feels strongly that busing would likely not help the situation of racial equity in schools and in fact might do more harm than good for the educational experience of black students and for the self-perception of black families. Additionally, another black participant who graduated from Dudley in 2006 agreed that the idea behind busing and racially balancing the schools was, while commendable, perhaps not practically realistic.

You know...In theory, yes, but it’s interesting because I think the parents of the students attending the all black schools have a great sense of pride in their neighborhood schools and they are wary about sending their kids to the Pages and the Grimsleys and things like that. But if the families of the black or minority students want that [to be able to attend a predominately white school] for their kids then I think that the school system should provide that experience but in my mind pushing to do something like that would get a lot of push back on both sides. It sounds good in theory; I mean, you know, ‘diversity rules’ and all that good stuff. But in practicality I think it would be highly negative on both sides and it isn’t something that I would support.... the schools aren’t equal, I get that. But I’m not sure that busing would solve the problem. Diana

Thus, one of the most interesting findings of the current study is the dichotomy between the perspectives of the black and white graduates of the 2000s. This generational cohort attended high school during a time period characterized by the absence of any effort to create racially balance and equalized schools. Moreover, while the participants of the 1970s and to a slightly lesser extent the 1980s all agree that schools are not equal in quality, the individuals of the 2000s are not in agreement that such disparities exist. For the 2000s cohort the disagreement regarding racial equity in schooling falls along racial lines. This is evident by the profound division as to

whether or not a problem exists. While the 1970s and 1980s cohorts all acknowledge that currently schools are not equitable along racial lines there is no agreement as to how this problem should be solved. Participants from the 2000s as a group are not in agreement that such a problem even exists, thus a conversation about how to solve such inequity in schools cannot take place. While black participants of the 2000s generational cohort are quick to acknowledge the lack of equity in schools across the district the white participants indicate their belief that all schools in the district are in fact equal in terms of the experiences available and student outcomes. Additionally, the findings of this study indicate that the white participants of the 2000s are under the impression that currently schools all provide equitable educations for students of all races.

4.5 Contradiction: Diversity in schools without busing

One of the themes that emerged in the findings from this study supports prior research demonstrating the contradiction between support for diversity in schooling and the lack of support for busing or other methods to create such diversity (Well et al, 2009). This finding was particularly evident in both the black and white cohorts from the late 1980s in which participants supported the need for diversity in schools and the positive impact such diversity has on students but with clear and consistent opinions against the use of busing measures. White participants from the 1970s cohort indicated similar opinions to participants of the 1980s while their black counterparts from the 1970s did not. More specifically, white participants from the 1970s provided clear support for diversity in schooling, particularly as it positively impacted their high school experience even while they did not support a return to busing efforts. Conversely, several of the black participants of the 19870s cohorts felt that the positive impact of diversity in

schooling was not worth the trouble, especially in terms of the logistical problems associated with busing. The interviews with both racial cohorts from the 2000s did not indicate strong feelings, either positive or negative, concerning the diversity in schools as with previous generations.

One white participant who graduated from Grimsley High School in 1986 and attended an Open School magnet program as a child fully supports diversity in school by saying:

I think diversity is really good for all walks of life. I think it's really good for the poor kids to see how the other classes live and vice versa. I really do and I think for them working together and collaborating together in groups at school to do work maybe even being friends with people and going to their neighborhood after school to play or hang out it is so important... I have another friend who put her daughter in private school and when I talked with her about it she said she didn't want her daughter to be in school with... she didn't use the term 'black kids' but it felt like she was lumping all poor or low performing black kids or immigrants into a group. Whereas I think the diversity is just amazing. Both from my experience as a student in an Open School in the 70s and then as a teacher and now as a parent with two kids in magnet schools. Sadie

However, when asked about the use of busing to create this kind of diversity Sadie supported choice programs such as magnet schools as the best way to create diverse programs throughout the district. All five of the white participant from the 1980s cohort also supported the district's rather extensive choice program, which includes magnet schools, early colleges, middle colleges, and specific academy programs at many high schools but did not support the use of mandatory diversity policies including busing.

Interestingly, one white individual who currently sends both of her kids to Catholic private school also supports the multiple programs of choice available in the public schools:

Well I think... I do like that. I think that [magnet schools] would be an option for us if we couldn't do private school. Because it promotes kids that want to be, or at least their parents want them to be there for a reason, whether it's for a specific program or whatever... I like the idea that there is a choice and I like that it creates a little bit of a competition where it makes administration prove that it's a better school and that kind of thing. Kind of in the same way that there are so many private schools. Alice

While this opinion about the creation of competition between schools did not appear in any other interviews it is a unique perception, particularly coming from an individual from the late 1980s cohort who attended high school during a time in which choice and privatization were a driving force in education as well as other markets and industries as discussed in chapter two. Another white individual from the 1980s cohort also indicated his support for choice in schooling options and acknowledged that while he believes in diversity in schools he feels that if he had children he would still want them to go to the best school possible, even if that meant that they went to a predominately white, affluent school.

Yeah, it's tough. I believe you should have a choice. For me, flexibility and options are key and I try to think about it from another perspective. Of course if you have a kid and you want them to succeed and you want the best thing possible for them... I know I've been talking a big game but I'm sure if I had a kid I would work to have them in the best school possible. I would try to position that child with the best school possible and if it happens to be Page over Dudley even if the experience would be different I would probably, whether consciously or subconsciously try to get them to the best school possible. Now that said, I would be open to other options if there were magnet schools or other programs. Steven

So while Steven whole-heartedly believes in the benefit of diversity in schooling he admits that the feasibility of providing diversity in schools is a problem:

Well, I personally favor diversity... I'm a believer in diversity. I just think we live in a world where you are not insulated. You can maybe try that, but you have to be able to work and live with all kinds of people and school is a good time to introduce that.... But I think it sort of comes back to the busing stuff, you know. For anyone to sit on the bus for forty-five minutes just to help create that diversity seems crazy. But part of it is the reality of how we live today. If you want to bring people together from different economic backgrounds you aren't going to get it by drawing a map like square blocks. You are going to have to bring people in from all over the place and that just isn't a popular idea. Steven

An interview with one white participant from the 1980s clearly outlines the over arching theme described in this section. When asked about diversity in education, Tavin, a 1986 graduate of Western Guilford High School, replied:

I think that it is a more realistic picture of the America to be... nonwhites are the majority of births now so you had better get used to living in an ethnically and racially diverse world because whites are going to end up having a much smaller piece of the pie so you might as well get adjusted to that landscape because that's the way it's going to be... But no, I don't think the district should force schools to be diverse. No, I don't think. I think that's just the way it works out. I don't think that they have much to do with it. But I think as minorities have come up the economic ladder a little bit even the good schools are becoming more ethnically diverse. Tavin

While his perception of the Guilford County Schools is perhaps a little misguided considering the existence of highly racially identifiable schools (see racial demographic information of all schools in Appendix C) in various geographic areas of the district he is not alone in his belief that the schools are more racially diverse than is actually true. Several other participants in the 1980s cohort, of both races, and several white participants of the 2000s cohort were surprised to by the current demographic data of the schools. Alice, a white graduate from the 1980s also indicated her belief that the schools are currently very racially diverse. However, she also admits that she largely is uninvolved with the public schools as she sends her two daughters to private, Catholic school. However, given the existence of magnet programs, to which Tavin's young children were enrolled during elementary school, there are more schools that are racially and ethnically diverse alongside the existence of highly segregated neighborhood schools in the same district.

Both black and white participants from the 1980s cohort indicated the belief in the value of racially diverse schooling experiences. All nine participants were in agreement that mandatory policies including busing that would actively seek to diversify the schools were not acceptable ideas. When pushed to provide other ideas for creating diversity in schools each struggled to provide alternatives. In particular, Alice (quoted above) whose kids currently attend Catholic school states that:

I would love to see that [diversity in schools]... but I don't know if it is so much of busing or if it's just as simple as making sure that when students are working in groups that you separate it out and don't just let the kids get in their own groups and choose friends of their own race... But in terms of school assignment, no. I don't think most students would want that changed and certainly not their parents... I think it's just too much... I don't know. But I don't think that would be a good idea... I don't know. I don't have an answer. Maybe sporting events and playing the other team? I just don't know. I'm hoping that some of those kids that go to totally white or totally black schools are involved in things outside of school that might allow them to interact with other races.
Alice

Along with the white participants from the 1980s cohort all four black participants also supported the benefit of diversity in schools, but again while they unanimously do not support the use of busing they do, as a group believe in the value and success of choice programs such as magnet schools.

I think students should be given the opportunity to branch outside of their surrounding communities because they need to see what else is out there, particularly communities of poverty. They need to see what else is out there. I applaud Guilford County for providing those opportunities... socially; they need to learn to come together. Ryann

Another black participant from the 1980s provided overwhelming positive support for the Guilford County Schools based on their commitment to school choice and magnet schools options.

Well Jones, where I went to elementary school is a little tiny school in the hood. And now it is a really, really great school that people from all over the county want to go to. Kids come from way on the other side of town to go to that little school. So that neighborhood school, I'm so grateful is now educating the little children that live in the projects in the Hampton Homes, the projects, who have not gotten that opportunity before. So I think what they've done is they are not basing the quality of education based on where the school is. Now they are just creating better schools in those areas where if you are there and those mothers don't have the opportunity to send their kids to these other schools if they go to the neighborhood school their children are still given the opportunity to be educated with the best of them and I just think that is my kind of wonderful. I really do. I just think they have done a wonderful job. I've been watching. They've been doing a wonderful job. It's about the school program and not where the school is. I think that is so cool. Braxton

While Brian is extremely supportive of the magnet programs available throughout the district, he and the others in his cohort are not in favor of forced busing as a method for providing this kind of diversity in schools. Instead, a layer of nostalgia for neighborhood schools, even if those schools may be racially segregated, rose from the participants' responses.

Place of schools to provide diverse settings? "That's a good question. Economics tends to put people in groups. So like if you can't afford it you don't live over here you live over there or whatever... I don't think it is the school system's job to work against that. I applaud the efforts to make it more like society should be. But do I think it is the schools' responsibility? No, I don't. That's tough. But the ultimate answer is no – I don't think the school system should actively seek out ways to create schools that are racially diverse. No. No I don't think the schools should be responsible for that. Kennan

A black female from the 1980s cohort echoed similar sentiments about the detriment of forced busing as a way to provide racially diverse schools:

I think that [busing] is a disaster, doing it like that.... they [kids] don't have the social skills to make that transition. I don't think they should do that. Any kind of integration like that should be voluntary like the Magnet schools, Open schools, early colleges, and middle colleges. Oh and the IB programs and Academies. Ryann

Conversely, while both black and white participants of the 1980s cohort consistently indicated clear support for diversity in schools this was not the case for the 1970s cohort, in which only the white participants believed strongly in the need for diversity. All five of these participants provided statements of desire for racially diverse experiences for their children and grandchildren as exemplified by Betsy, a white 1970s graduate from Grimsley High School who's career led her to school administration in the Guilford County Schools, "The more diverse situation is better. I think parents now are too protective of their children. They think that anyone that is different from them is going to have a negative influence on their child and I don't believe that to be true."

While white participants from the 1970s were vocal about their support for diversity in schools and the need for district support of such efforts black participants from the 1970s

provided ample examples of intense pride for black communities and the value of neighborhood schools, both historically during their high school experience and in the current time. Thus, the existence of diversity simply was not a focus of the conversation with black participants from the earliest cohort.

Yes, I think policies should support neighborhood schools. If there are neighborhood schools the schools should reflect the neighborhood. But schools should have a level playing field. They should start out equal with the same equipment and materials available to them and with the same quality of teachers. I like neighborhood schools but they need to be GOOD neighborhood schools. Sarah

Sarah, an African American woman from the 1970s cohort, held strong beliefs in the necessity of strong and equitable neighborhood schools. Her response was similar to other African Americans in her generational cohort. However, there was one individual who, while also providing numerous examples of the benefit of neighborhood schooling also recognized the difficulty of the situation: racially segregated neighborhoods leading to racially segregated schools and the problem in working against this and the downfall of busing in the current day and age.

It would be ideal if you could do neighborhood schools because people just lived together. Obviously that still doesn't happen. There are racially integrated communities in Greensboro, but not enough of them. And there also just aren't enough white students going to the public schools now because of private schools. Looking at Guilford County I think we have just given up on the whole diversity issue. It's impossible. You have a school system that is majority minority and so there is only so much racial balance that you are going to get anyway because the supply of white kids is diminishing. ... Except for these enclaves of white communities on the outskirts of town. So you look at Northern and Northwest Guilford and they are all white schools. The rest of the schools in the county don't look like that...in the days when we just had the four city schools integration was really easy.... so now it's just logistically impossible...I think magnet programs can work and all of these specialized schools and academies can work because again if the parents value the program over the neighborhood then they will be willing to send their child... I think they can play a role at least in providing high quality opportunities for gifted and talented students in some of these predominately black and/or poor schools. But it's harder now. It is certainly harder than it used to be. Alfred

While black participants, such as Sarah and Alfred, have strong feelings about the value of neighborhood schooling with support for diversity in schooling mostly absent from the conversation the white participants from this same cohort provided opinions and perceptions indicating more similar beliefs to both black and white participants from the 1980s:

Yeah I think schools should have black and white students. The schools should do their part but I think it also has to come from the home. I think it is a good experience because they need to learn this. If they don't, when they get older they won't be able to get along with other people. It gets harder when you get older. The schools should do their part but I think it also has to come from the home. David

This belief in the value of diversity in schooling largely stems from positive experiences during high school and these white graduates from the 1970s all provided multiple examples of the perceived benefit of their high school experience, much more so than the black participants of the 1970s who largely felt it was uneventful and historically unproductive. This can be most easily seen in the statements of Alfred, a black graduate from the early 1970s:

Being a part of the desegregation group, so to speak, I've seen it from what it was to what it became to what it went back to. And I've thought a lot about this and I've written a lot about this...and it really saddens me.... You know, in the conversations that I've had with my white classmates over the years...none of us really wanted to do it but we kind of see now that it was a really good cause and it wasn't as bad as we thought it was going to be. In fact, it was pretty good and plus we kind of paved the way and so we all kind of felt at least we did it... We were leading the way. And now we all look at it and say 'what was the point, why bother?' Because look at where we are now. I sense this sadness and this regret that we just didn't stay committed to it. I know why they merged, they were trying to stay committed to it by merging but if you don't have that community will...Alfred

Therefore, based on the findings in this study the sentiment held by white individuals having graduated in the 1970s at the height of desegregation efforts in Greensboro, NC is much more positive about their high school experience than their black counterparts. While this does not mean that black graduates of the same time period had negative experiences during high school it means that they did not feel the experience was perhaps as personally meaningful or impactful as

white graduates. Another white participant from the 1970s provided this quotation describing his personal benefit:

I definitely learned tolerance. I'm not prejudiced at all. What I got out of the whole thing is that there are asshole white people and there are asshole black people and there are some really nice white people and some really nice black people. You can't just make a generality. In school you are going to have the ones that want to work hard and get ahead and you are going to have the ones that are just lazy as crap. And it's not about race. There were obviously some advantages that the white people had – home life and what not and that kind of thing. So I felt like some of the black kids that were getting ahead had more to overcome so I had a lot of respect for them. Jason

Similarly, a white woman who had been bused to all black Dudley High School for her senior year also felt strongly that her high school experience had positively impacted her both then and now as an adult.

That was a good experience though because I had never, ever, ever had the experience of being in the minority... I think it has helped to shape my opinions. It helped me tremendously when I did nursing in being able to interact with black families and patients. Kelly

In the end, while both black and white participants of the 1980s cohort believe in the value of diversity in schools none of the participants support the idea of forced busing, further echoing the findings of previous research and public opinion data concerning busing as an integration method. Interestingly, the 1970s cohort split along racial lines in terms of support for diversity. While black participants of the 1970s perhaps did not believe that diversity was necessarily a bad thing or negative experience, they simply did not support it to the extent as white participants in the same generational cohort; ultimately it was not a large part of their narrative. However, their white counterparts in the 1970s cohort fully support the need for diversity in schooling, largely giving examples from their high school experiences as to the benefit of having attended a desegregated high school.

Additionally, it is important to reiterate that during interviews with individuals from the 2000s the importance of diversity in schooling was not a major point of discussion as it had been with both earlier cohorts. While both black and white participants of the 2000s indicated that diversity in schooling was probably a good thing, neither group was particularly adamant or opinionated one way or the other. Instead, both racial cohorts of the 2000s, in addition to earlier cohorts, provided ample support for neighborhood schools as well as school choice programs thus leading to the third and final theme presented in the findings of this study.

4.6: The best of both worlds: Neighborhood schools and schools of choice

As touched upon in the previous section, several cohorts indicated overwhelming support for neighborhood schools and all cohorts were against any form of mandatory busing. However, one of the other interesting findings related to participants' perception of racial equity in schooling is the overwhelming support for programs of choice, such as those currently in place in the Guilford County Schools in addition to support for neighborhood schools. Typically, school districts employing a neighborhood school assignment plan create school boundaries and assign students to schools that are located within their immediate neighborhood. School choice programs typically allow parents the opportunity to choose to enroll students in one of several different schools within the district. Currently, the Guilford County Schools have multiple schooling options including both neighborhood schools as well as a school choice program in which parents can elect to enroll their child in one of several options including magnet schools and other specialized programs.

Because of the current nature of the Guilford County Schools and the existence of both neighborhood schools and schools of choice these two models came up frequently in interviews

about school quality and the perception of racial quality in schools. Thus, individuals' preference for neighborhood schools and "schools of choice" programs became a central topic of discussion in interviews with individuals of several cohorts. As mentioned in the previous section, while white participants from the 1970s acknowledge the benefit of diversity in schooling and both black and white participants were in agreement that busing was not a feasible or beneficial plan for creating diversity in schools black participants from the 1970s were extremely clear in their support for neighborhood schools. Support for neighborhood schools on the part of black participants, particularly from the 1970s cohort stems from an intense pride in black communities. Thus, multiple black participants from this early cohort provided descriptions of their childhood and schooling experience based on community pride for their neighborhood school including one gentleman who described his experience in this way:

You had developed relationships with kids you had known for so long. And still you had discipline out there. There were parents looking out for you... not just your parents. All those people could discipline you and could keep you on the right track. Michael

This same participant went on to further describe his neighborhood experience with an intense pride for the people of his community and the impact of the teachers in his neighborhood:

My neighborhood was all teachers. Back then there was nothing over there but teachers, doctors, architects and a few lawyers. Benbow Park was the neighborhood for black professionals. Both of my parents were teachers so they pushed education. It was really important to them. But it was also really important to everyone else in the neighborhood, too. Michael

Other black participants of the 2000s cohort also echoed similar sentiments regarding the Benbow Park area and more broadly black participants of all three generational cohorts described intense feelings of pride for the predominately communities and schools. While the existence of intense pride for black schools has been addressed in previous literature it is important to note the uniqueness of Greensboro, North Carolina in regards to black schools. The Greensboro

community had a long history of great pride in its black schools. Additionally, with the presence of two historically black colleges in Greensboro this heritage of intense pride in black schools played a major role in the desegregation efforts of the 1970s and the way such efforts were perceived by the black community. While the presence of such nostalgia and community pride was overwhelmingly present for those individuals who graduated in the 1970s it was also true for those of the late 1980s and 2000s but to a lesser extent. This prevalence of intense racial pride for neighborhood schools has been discussed in prior literature and the inclusion of this theme in the current study further supports prior research (McNeal, 2009; Orfield, 1995). To be clear, black participants of all three generational cohorts provided examples of intense pride for black schools and also overtly indicated a preference for neighborhood schools.

This preference for both neighborhood schools and schools of choice came across most clearly in interviews with both black and white participants from the late 1980s cohort. One white participant from the 1980s cohort indicated his support for choice in schooling because it gives students and parents options:

I like the magnet program. So I would of course be in favor of keeping a magnet program... some kids respond better to different kinds of programs. And some kids respond better to a traditional form of teaching and there is nothing wrong with that... I definitely believe in the early college and middle college programs too. They provide a lot more choices for parents and they are all tax-funded options, which I almost can't believe. I think they've got some great concepts out there right now. Tavin

Black participants from the 1980s echoed this sentiment supporting the provision of multiple choices for students and parents as well:

I think whatever fits your child the best. So I think the district should have lots of options and let parents decide. If it's working for a kid then that is most important. Keane

Thus, while participants of both races from the 1980s cohort overwhelmingly support choice in schooling options for parents there is also a great deal of support for neighborhood schools and the value that such experiences provide a child:

I would go back more towards community schools. Keep the kids as local as you can with the familiarity of the same students and teachers in a geographical area. They start doing this busing and making racial balance here of economic balance there, you know.
Kennan

Kennan, a black male who graduated from Smith High School in 1989 was the most vocal supporter for neighborhood schools but in essence his support for neighborhood schools was more accurately a dislike for mandatory busing than a lack of support for school choice programs:

I agree with it [busing] in some sense that if you have a lower income area sometimes those schools get deprived of the things other schools have in an area with more resources, that can happen. But I don't think that busing kids from one side of the town to another to make that balance is the right answer... I think it is AN answer, it is an attempt to make things better but I don't think it is necessarily the right answer... I think that schools should be provided with the same or equal resources but kids should be kept as local as possible. Kennan

In addition to support and perceived value for both neighborhood schooling and school choice programs on the part of black and white participants from the two earlier cohorts this was also true for the more recent graduates. Black participants from the 2000s cohort also indicated high levels of pride for Dudley, the predominately black high school and the surrounding black communities located on the southeaster side of Greensboro. Alternately, white participants having recently graduated from high school overwhelmingly support neighborhood schools and student assignment plans based on neighborhood schools.

Interestingly, black participants from the 2000s cohort described Dudley in a way more similar to those of the 1970s cohort than the 1980s cohort:

Man, Dudley was the pride and joy of the black community in Greensboro. They may have been terrible academically (and my friends would admit that) but they had great athletics and an overwhelming sense of community pride. You didn't see that at Smith... Our school was so diverse so there wasn't really a cultural cohesion in the way that Dudley was all black. And of course Dudley had a history that couldn't be rivaled... I always felt like Smith was a better school than Dudley but that we got slighted. Diane

Although support for neighborhood schools on the part of black participants is easily demonstrated by this intense pride for black schools such support for neighborhood schools was also clearly and overtly indicated by white participants from all three generational cohorts including those from the most recent graduates of predominately white high schools. For these individuals the support for neighborhood schools is due largely to the lack of support for busing efforts of any kind:

You know, you don't want to sit someone on a bus for two hours to get to school. You have to get them there and then you have to get them back so economically it's not really a smart idea. Tyler

Another white participant of the 2000s cohort who graduated from Western Guilford High School in 2003 echoed this sentiment about the logistics of busing being a deterrent but also indicated that such efforts just for the purpose of racial balance is unnecessary:

I understand why they would want to do that. But I don't think that is the right thing to do – to put kids on a bus for an hour and half before school starts... Economically and environmentally it makes no sense unless of course there is a school with a different program that would better suit the needs of a student. But just for balance – I don't think that is necessary. Lindsay

Thus, Lindsay, and other members of her cohort do not support busing for racial balance but do in fact support school choice programs even if such programs require lengthy bus rides to other parts of town. Thus, it appears that the logistics of moving students across the city to attend school is not the issue but instead it is a matter of choice. When done by force for racial balance such efforts are unsupported but when done by choice for participation in special school programs such efforts are highly popular. Additionally, white participants from the 2000s find

value in neighborhood schools because the students know and form bonds with students in their neighborhood community:

We are actually in the process of moving and it's a neighborhood school and like that she will be in a school with other students that she will already know from the neighborhood. It will be the opposite of what I had because I changed school so many times. I would love for her to be able to go through school from elementary all the way through high school with the same people – the kids from our neighborhood... that would be ideal.
Callie

Callie also went on to provide a more detailed explanation of her support for the neighborhood school model in light of what she believes the purpose and goal of schooling should and should not be:

It might be narrowed minded but I think the job of schools is to help the kids interact with each other and have manners but the main goal is academic. Those take precedence over 'should we have a certain amount of low income students in this school or not.' So honestly I like the model of neighborhood schools versus someone way on the other side of town being bused over to the whole other side of town because even though it's in the same district it is completely different. So they end up growing up in one kind of environment and having that be their home, however, their friends at school may or may not live around...I think having congruency between school and home plays a big role. Not a lot of chaos or confusion or even an hour-long bus ride to go to a school even though there is one ten minutes away. So no, I don't, I really like the model of neighborhood schools, the one closest to your home. Callie

In summary, black participants from all three generational cohorts indicated high levels of pride and nostalgia for their black neighborhoods and communities in conjunction with a support for neighborhood schools. However, both black and white participants from the 1980s cohort indicate high levels of support for both neighborhood schools and school choice programs. The white participants from the 2000s cohort indicate high levels of support for neighborhood schools both for the intrinsic value of such schooling experience, like the ones they had, but also largely because of the logistical problems associated with school assignment plans that are not based on neighborhoods. However, at the same time these white participants support the

existence of school choice programs even if the logistical problems may be the same as mandatory busing, in choice programs it is an option not a requirement.

4.7 Conclusion

The current study explores multiple questions including: How do participants of the 1970s and 1980s cohorts perceive desegregation efforts of the past? To what extent is racial educational inequality occurring? How do individuals of different races perceive such educational inequality? Are policies designed to reverse racial educational inequality needed or not? The scope of this study broadly examines desegregation, resegregation and racial educational quality over the last forty years. Thus, the current study addresses the research question: What are stakeholder opinions on desegregation and racial equity in schooling in the post desegregation era? In summary, the findings of this study indicate that individuals' views on equity in schools differs based on race for participants from the 2000s even though individuals' from the 1970s and 1980s cohorts have similar beliefs regardless of their race. Secondly, echoing the contradictory pattern of previous research, participants from all cohorts reiterate the importance of diversity in schooling while also highlighting a lack of support for mandatory busing in any way, shape or form. Thirdly, the overwhelming support for the contradictory preference for both neighborhood schools and school choice programs was a prominent finding in multiple cohorts. In short, this study explores stakeholder opinions of historical desegregation efforts and perceptions of racial equity in schooling. Results indicate a marked contrast of perceptions of current racial equity in schooling for participants in the two early cohorts and those of the most recent cohort. Of the six sample cohorts five perceive schools in Guilford County to be unequal while the sixth cohort, white participants of the 2000s, do not perceive any inequity in educational settings for students of different races. Additionally,

the results of this study indicate contradictory support for both neighborhood schools and school choice programs along side a contradictory support for diversity in schools without the use of busing.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction and overview

As previously indicated, the purpose of the present study is to explore stakeholder opinions on school desegregation and racial equity in schooling given the lack of public discourse regarding the current resegregation of schools. Thus, this project involves a qualitative study addressing individual opinions and perceptions by examining questions such as: 1) To what extent is racial educational inequality occurring? 2) How do individuals of different races perceive such educational inequality? 3) Are policies designed to reverse racial educational inequality needed or not? The present study addresses these questions by exploring differing views across both racial and generational cohorts. This study involves interviews with black and white individuals from the early 1970s, late 1980s and 2000s. Therefore, the scope of this study broadly examines racial educational quality over the last forty years and focuses on the research question: What are the prevailing public views on racial inequality in schooling in the post desegregation era?

Based on the findings presented in this study it is clear that across all three generational cohorts, both black and white participants do not support a return to mandatory desegregation efforts. Instead, support for neighborhood schools and also school choice programs, such as those currently in place in Greensboro, are extremely high. Choice programs, like those in Greensboro, allow parents to enroll their children in the local neighborhood school or in a specialty program located elsewhere in the district. While both black and white individuals from the 1970s and 1980s cohorts believe racially segregated neighborhood schools are unequal, the

two racial cohorts of the 2000s were not in agreement. For this younger generation the white participants believed and supported the idea that all schools across the district are equal in quality while their black counterparts readily acknowledged the inequity in schools. This finding is particularly interesting as it highlights the discrepancy in public perception of current school quality. However, even with this acknowledgment of inequity from recent black graduates from the 2000s, members of this cohort were not in favor of mandatory integration. Instead, they fully support the idea that high quality schools in their communities is possible and should be the goal but that choice programs including magnet schools, early college, middle college and academy programs should also be available to students throughout the district, regardless of neighborhood of residence. Therefore, black participants overwhelmingly believe that schools can and should be equal and that such equality comes from parental support, teacher quality, equitable school funding and the choice to go to neighborhood schools or other specialty programs. Moreover, while people agree that diversity is important for academic, social and normative outcomes perhaps true integration into white culture for minorities is to have the freedom and ability to choose between multiple quality options and that freedom to make that choice is true equality.

5.2 Disenchantment of the 1970s

Based on participants' perceptions and beliefs the findings of this study largely demonstrate that both black and white participants from the 1970s believe that desegregation efforts were largely ineffective, supporting public opinion data and related literature previously explored in this study (Orfield 1995; Orfield 2001). Arguably, this failure was due to policy implementation issues leading to the perception that desegregation was not effective in creating long lasting change in schools. Additionally, black participants from the 1970s indicate that

while their experience in desegregation was not negative it was not necessarily positive either while participants indicated much higher levels of positive experience and personal satisfaction with the experience, particularly in regards to long term personal gains. As previously discussed this finding is consistent with previous findings of work examining the experiences of desegregation participants (Wells et al, 2009).

Thus, white graduates from the 1970s indicate that while participating in desegregation was generally meaningful to them on a personal level, desegregation as a policy was largely unsuccessful. This finding also extends to other generations as previously explored by Wells et al (2009) in which white graduates from the class of 1980 heralded their experience as personally beneficial and meaningful even though public sentiment regarded desegregation efforts as unsuccessful. For black and white individuals from the 1970s their opinions of desegregation efforts are most eloquently described as that of disenchantment. Many of these individuals reflect on the feeling of historical importance of their experience. However, retroactively reflecting on the experience black participants, more so than white, feel that the experience was a wasted effort and that desegregation as a policy was a failed social experiment and that such efforts to racially balance schools were in vain. Thus, both blacks and whites view desegregation as a failing policy with no good solution but regret that the efforts of their generation did not leave a lasting impact:

Being a part of the desegregation group, so to speak, I've seen it from what it was to what it became to what it went back to. And I've thought a lot about this and I've written a lot about this...and it really saddens me.... You know, in the conversations that I've had with my white classmates over the years...none of us really wanted to do it but we kind of see now that it was a really good cause and it wasn't as bad as we thought it was going to be. In fact, it was pretty good and plus we kind of paved the way and so we all kind of felt at least we did it... We were leading the way. And now we all look at it and say 'what was the point, why bother?' Because look at where we are now. I sense this sadness and this regret that we just didn't stay committed to it.... I think as a social experiment it was actually working but we did not stay committed to it. We did not stay committed to it as a

community. And so today our schools are more segregated than they were then. And I think that's a shame. Dudley is 97 plus percent black now. Alfred

For both black and white participants of the 1970s there is a sense of pride at having been part of the effort and sadness and disenchantment at the failure of the effort. During the 1970s racially segregated schools were ideologically unsupported and so to an extent desegregation was a remedy but in terms of policy and implementation it was never popular. Thus, while the problem (racially segregated schools) was agreed upon the solution (desegregation) was not and thus was quickly abandoned.

5.3 Choice narrative of the 1980s

Participants from the late 1980s attended high school at a time when desegregation efforts were finishing, ending and withering away. Thus, for these graduates *desegregation* is largely not part of the vocabulary used to discuss their high school experience since the public discussion of desegregation and busing had mostly dwindled to nonexistence. Instead, interviews with these individuals indicated high levels of belief that local schools should be high quality alongside the availability of multiple choices. This narrative of choice mimics the narrative of their high school upbringing and historical focus on the free market. Thus, the findings for both racial cohorts of the 1980s are fairly predictable given the historical placement of their high school experience. For these individuals the public discourse and political landscape of the community was more like the 1970s than the most recent cohort of the 2000s. Specifically, these individuals attended high school during the years of intense community debate about neighborhood schools and the “unpairing” of schools leading to the decline in desegregation efforts throughout the district. Additionally, many of these individuals currently have young children who are attending public (or private) schools in Guilford County. As

parents, now in the 2000s at the height of choice programs and resegregation in Guilford County it is not surprising that these individuals provide opinion narratives that support choice for both neighborhood and specialty program schools. Both black and white participants of this cohort are largely against busing for racial balance and much prefer either neighborhood schools or school choice programs or both, which given the historical placing of both their high school experiences and their parenting time period supports the validity of these findings. Interestingly, black individuals are not committed to value of desegregation and busing but for different reasons than their white counterparts. As the non-dominant group, blacks perceive the need for busing to exist as a demeaning characterization on the poor quality of black schools. Instead, these individuals would much prefer for there to simply be good, high quality black schools in their black communities and neighborhoods rather than having to evoke the commitment of the white community to appease the needs of black children by busing measures and desegregation efforts. Through these measures the whites and the white community still would not be giving up or losing their inherent privilege and because the efforts would not be based on choice and autonomy it would not truly provide blacks with equality.

While the rhetoric of “school choice” is heard often throughout interviews with both black and white participants of the 1980s cohorts it is important to point out that school choice is not necessarily an alternative neighborhood schools. District may provide a choice for alternative schools (as in Guilford County with the numerous Open Schools, magnet schools, immersion programs and other specialty schools) in a practical sense for that individual but as an institutional or system option school choice actually reinforces the existence of neighborhood schools. If parents are unhappy with the neighborhood school they have the option to send their student to an alternative school based on choice. That action actually reinforces and legitimizes

neighborhood schools. In essence, the leaving of neighborhood schools on the part of proactive and involved parents actually encourages the perpetuation and existence of neighborhood schools. And, since the parents who will potentially choose to send their child to an alternative school will be a small proportion those choice of most parents to stay at the neighborhood school is a reinforcing factor for neighborhood schools, even if such neighborhood school are inequitable in comparison to other neighborhood schools.

Parents will remain at the neighborhood school for a variety of reasons: some will be ignorant of other options, some will not want to choose, some will be loyal to their neighborhood school and many simply will not be unhappy enough with their neighborhood school to opt out of the local option. There are many reasons for people not to choose to leave the neighborhood school. Thus, the parents who do choose to leave the neighborhood school and attend a specialty school are the most conscientious and motivated parents. When this population of families is taken out of the neighborhood school population then the neighborhood school population is reinforced because potentially unhappy parents are no longer part of the community.

In the 1970s with mandatory busing, which required students to leave their neighborhood schools, which threatens the “taken for grantedness” of neighborhood schools. In the 1980s with the “choice” narrative and the introduction of magnet schools, open schools and other alternative schools open to enrollment based on parent choice the school district signaled a transition in policy with lasting implications for district practice. By providing the choice to attend alternative schools the policies perpetuated the existence of neighborhood schools.

Broadly, for participants of the late 1980s, their opinions and belief somewhat mirror those of the 1970s but to a lesser extent, including the narrative of choice described above. This is logical because their high school experience was less entrenched in the desegregation

narrative. During the 1980s desegregation withered away from the public narrative. Thus, the four cohorts of participants who went through school during the 1970s and 1980s experienced an intense disenchantment. This is particularly true for black individuals who now reflect on the way in which desegregation was demeaning and perhaps did not create the intended outcomes set forth at the outset. Additionally, many black participants expressed their belief that quality black schools are possible and that this, in fact, should be the goal rather than the intentional racial balancing of desegregation efforts.

5.4 Disillusionment of the 2000s

While participants who graduated in the 1970s are saddened and regretful of the lack of impact their efforts of their generation made on the long term racial equity in schooling the narrative of the recent graduates shows the disillusionment of the younger generation. White members of the 2000s cohort do not perceive the schools to be inequitable in any way while the black participants of the same cohort readily believe that such inequity exists. The lack of agreement between the two races is a striking finding and one that was not true for earlier generations. This finding, the disconnect in perceptions of black and white recent graduates of the 2000s cohorts is the most significant finding of the current study and one that is previously unexplored in other related literature but highlights the need for continued study related to racial inequality in education.

Members of the two older cohorts identify and acknowledge the current racial inequity in schooling due to racially isolated neighborhood schools. While black recent graduates also readily acknowledge the existence of this inequity their white counterparts from the 2000s generational cohorts do not. This indicates a critical divide in the national narrative about

equality in public schooling at the present time. While black participants of the 2000s are quick to acknowledge the racial inequity in neighborhood schools at present they are not calling for a reallocation of students that would create racially balanced schools. Rather they, as a group alongside their black counterparts from the 1970s and 1980s, believe that good high quality black schools can and should exist. Additionally, all black participants feel that choice programs should also always be available. Thus, while black participants certainly do not advocate in any way for a return to legal segregation they instead want legal and policy support for equality and choice in schools. In the end all participants, both black and white, desire the autonomy to make choices about school attendance but such choices should be between multiple high quality options.

It is argued in the current study that the acknowledgement from the 1970s and 1980s cohort that the schools are not in fact equal is due to their collective experience attending school during a time when equality was actively sought, alongside a public narrative and discourse acknowledging the inequity of the time if not about an agreement on how to rectify the situation. On the other hand, the students of the 2000s have attended and graduated from high school during a time period in which racial educational equality has been largely absent from the public discourse or educational policy while resegregation has increased. Thus, the generational cohort of the 2000s has been greatly impacted by the lack of effort on the part of society to discuss or even acknowledge the inequity in school. Arguably, this lack of discourse has allowed recent white graduates to believe that all schools are of equal quality and that racial inequality in education does not exist. However, for black students attending racially segregated and often lower quality schools are aware of such inequities, even absent a public narrative describing such an occurrence.

Because policies like busing no longer exist and both laws and policies discourage any conversation about race when it comes to school options, we presently live in a situation in which most of the white participants of the 2000s cohort are very unlikely to consider schools that are not consistent with their racial and economic background. As the youngest cohort only one white participant and one black participant from the 2000s currently has children and neither of those children are yet school age. Even though this study did not ask white participants from the 2000s cohort to consider which school they would choose if they were selecting schools for their children it is likely that these individuals would not have considered schools outside of their racial demographics. The current lack of public conversation about race and schools tends to desensitize individuals to the racial inequality that exists. In this context individuals, particularly white individuals are not likely to seek out schools that are unlike their own majority white schools, thus perpetuating the current inequality. Therefore, the fact that these individuals do not have children demonstrates a threatening issue because if they were seeking schools for their children they would likely search for a similar or better experience than they had which means they will not likely consider majority nonwhite schools. Thus, these white individuals will search for schools in a very segmented ways by only comparing the “good” schools to other “good” school without any consideration for less desirable schools like those racially identifiable black schools in Guildford County.

While it is possible that white participants from the 2000s are simply unaware of the problem, the current racial inequity in school options, it is also possible that these individuals actually are cognizant of the inequality in their community but are unwilling or unable to acknowledge this inequality. Perhaps whites in the 2000s cohort were very reluctant to acknowledge the privilege with which they grew up by not wanting to acknowledge that within

Guilford County there are currently low quality schools that also happen to be those schools attended mostly by minority students and students of a lower socioeconomic status. If these white participants were to acknowledge and verify the perception that such lower quality schools exist then they would also have to acknowledge, in turn, that they had attended schools on the other end of the spectrum, all white predominately affluent schools, and had thus benefited from this white privilege.

In the end it does not particularly matter whether these white individuals are completely unaware of the current inequality across the schools in Guilford County or if they are merely unwilling and unable to acknowledge the existing inequality and thereby overtly recognize the presence of privilege in their own lives. In either scenario the result is the same: a continuation and perpetuation of racial inequity in schooling. Unfortunately, one limitation of this current study is that white participants from the 2000s were not pushed further to explain their opinions in light of these two possible scenarios: unawareness or denial. However, such a conversation should take place in a future study focused on the perceptions and opinions of recent graduates on the existence of racial inequity in public schools.

5.5 Discussion and implications of findings

As previously indicated, the major finding of this study is the discrepancy in perceptions between the white and black participants of the 2000s cohort. However, the consistency across all six cohorts demonstrating a lack of support for busing should also be noted. While all participants from each of the six cohorts did not approve of the busing efforts to combat racial segregation in schools the perceptions and opinions of individuals from the two older cohorts undoubtedly changed over time. For individuals of the 1970s and 1980s cohorts, like other

desegregation participants, perhaps did not approve of it but went along with such efforts it because they had to, by law. That dynamic may have impacted their views. For those who were subjected to school integration and busing by mandate, the experience is likely to have impacted their views on race, schools and justice and fairness in general. It is unsurprising to find that they are aware of current racial inequity in schools even though they were not overtly supportive of desegregation efforts such as busing they had to go along with it by law and that certainly has impacted their current views on schools. Alternately, when the policy is not in place, as has been the case for the participants in the later cohort, people are not forced to participate in a solution. When this is the case citizens often do not find themselves in situations where they must confront and recognize the existence of the problem, racial inequity in schools.

Brown, from the very beginning was a counter majoritarian ruling because even though it was a unanimous court vote, to ensure such a vote required that no implementation clause be included in the ruling, limiting the impact of the ruling from the start. As discussed in chapter two, pressure from courts for adherence to the ruling did not come forcefully until the early 1970s, a historical narrative precisely played out in the desegregation timeline of the Greensboro Public Schools. Thus, desegregation efforts were a legal mandate pushed upon the public that was overwhelmingly unwanted by the majority. But even though the majority was unsupportive of busing, desegregation impacted peoples' views.

The current legal framework, represented by the recent ruling in *Parents Involved*, has shifted completely and not only lacks a push for racial equity in school assignment but actually legally prohibits the discussion of race in school assignment efforts in any way. Specifically requires that race not be used in any way as a factor in creating voluntary race conscious student assignment plans. If districts discuss race in any way it is now, according to *Parents Involved*, a

violation of *Brown*. Therefore, at the present time laws discourage and prohibit the discussion of racial makeup of schools. In this kind of legal context it is unsurprising to find individual and group views that are diverging in the way the findings of this study demonstrate

Now that the counter majoritarian ruling of *Brown* has transitioned to a majority ruling of *Parents Involved* the public majority has received the ruling desired; one that encourages society not to discuss race in any way in regards to schooling. Under these circumstances two things happen: 1) society does not talk about race or focus on schools in terms of racial makeup or racial equity and 2) the current system becomes more and more unequal but neither the majority or minority groups wants a solution through the implementation of a policy, such as mandatory busing. Additionally, if the system continues to become unequal in the long term the results will have a negative impact on all parties involved both majority and minority. Thus, the results of this study and the implications of these findings demonstrate a compelling public issue in the long term if not in the immediacy. This premise, the existence of a long-term benefit for all involved parties, both black and white, was the underlying argument at the outset of *Brown*. The efforts of those involved with the passage of *Brown* were done so in the name of public good. When the legal framework is not just lacking but is actually in clear opposition to public discussion of race, as is the case with the ruling of *Parents Involved*, then the discursive conditions for a productive societal discussion concerning racial equity in schools are completely absent. Thus, a public conversation and awareness is no longer possible. When this is true the system likely gets worse and inequality increases, which threatens economic stability in the long run but people are so short sighted that they are unaware that the system is actually becoming more diverse at the same time. In an increasingly diverse society, the tendency of individuals to

shy away from the discussion in the way demonstrated in this study by the responses provided by the participants of the 2000s cohorts creates a potential problem.

5.6 Theoretical reflections on the findings

As became clear by the end of the research process, the work of Hochschild is critical to understanding and interpreting the findings of the present study. If Hochschild's theory concerning class structure is correct the findings of the current study would indicate a contradiction between idealism and practicality on the part of participants from the 1970s with this exhibited to a lesser degree by those from the 1980s (Hochschild, 1984). Hochschild argues that schools, as an institution, further the myth of equal opportunity in education, which at the same time prevent actual equality from occurring thereby allowing the continuation a hidden class structure through racial segregation. The results of this study support this argument as participants from the 1970s and 1980s provide narratives of contradiction between the ideal of meaningful racial integration in schools and the practicality and perhaps even genuine interest in efforts to achieve such an end. Individuals having graduated in the mid 1970s at the peak of desegregation policy efforts articulate an overwhelming support for the idea of desegregation and integration all the while unsure if it was successful due to the ineffectiveness and logistical issues of busing efforts. These beliefs were supported by individuals who graduated in the 1980s but to a lesser extent, which again follows the expectation given that the structure of their experience was altered, as the 1980s were a time of steadily decreasing desegregation policy efforts. Finally, the results of the 2000s provide a stark contrast to previous decades. Black participants having attended schools with high minority and low income populations recognize the current social class structure that exists in their community and can identify the way in which the local

school system plays a part in said structure where as the white individuals from this same decade provide narratives demonstrating their lack of understanding or experiential knowledge about the class structure.

In addition to Hochschild's work concerning class structure the idea of social integration versus system integration proves applicable in interpreting the findings of the current study. Social change is the change in the institutional structure of a social system (Lockwood, 1964). Desegregation and integration efforts were intended to work towards changing the institutional structure or system of public schools. However, such efforts were unsuccessful in bringing about system integration of public schools. Instead, as the issue faded from the forefront of societal discourse social integration occurred. However, social integration, in which there is a lack of conflict does not automatically imply system integration in which the conflict is actually resolved. Thus, during the 1970s and 1980s the existence of desegregation policies and the public discourse, while highly negative, highlighted the existence of the problem. In the 1990s and into the 2000s the lack of both policy and public conversation indicates social integration rather than system integration because the issue, racial equity in schools, had not in fact been solved; the public had simply stopped discussing the problem.

Additionally, if there is a conflict of interest between the group or groups who hold and exercise power and authority over those in non-dominant groups the use of power to sustain institutions is likely (Lockwood, 1964). This concept is critical to the findings in this study particularly related to the disillusion and contradiction of the youngest generation of participants. For those having graduated during the 2000s, black participants experience opposition to the status quo of racial inequality in schools while the white students are misguided about the

situation. Because whites maintain power and authority over nonwhites and do not believe in the existence of an inequity it is unlikely that system change will occur.

5.7 Future research

The results of this study are poignant and timely for the many school districts across the nation currently undergoing a swift and steady resegregation by both race and class. As the resegregation trend continues to gather momentum alongside the increasingly dominant charter school movement, equitable access to high quality schooling opportunities for students of color and students of low income neighborhoods will likely continue to diminish unless school districts and communities actively work against the current trends. The results of this study highlight the need for future study regarding racial educational equity in public schools.

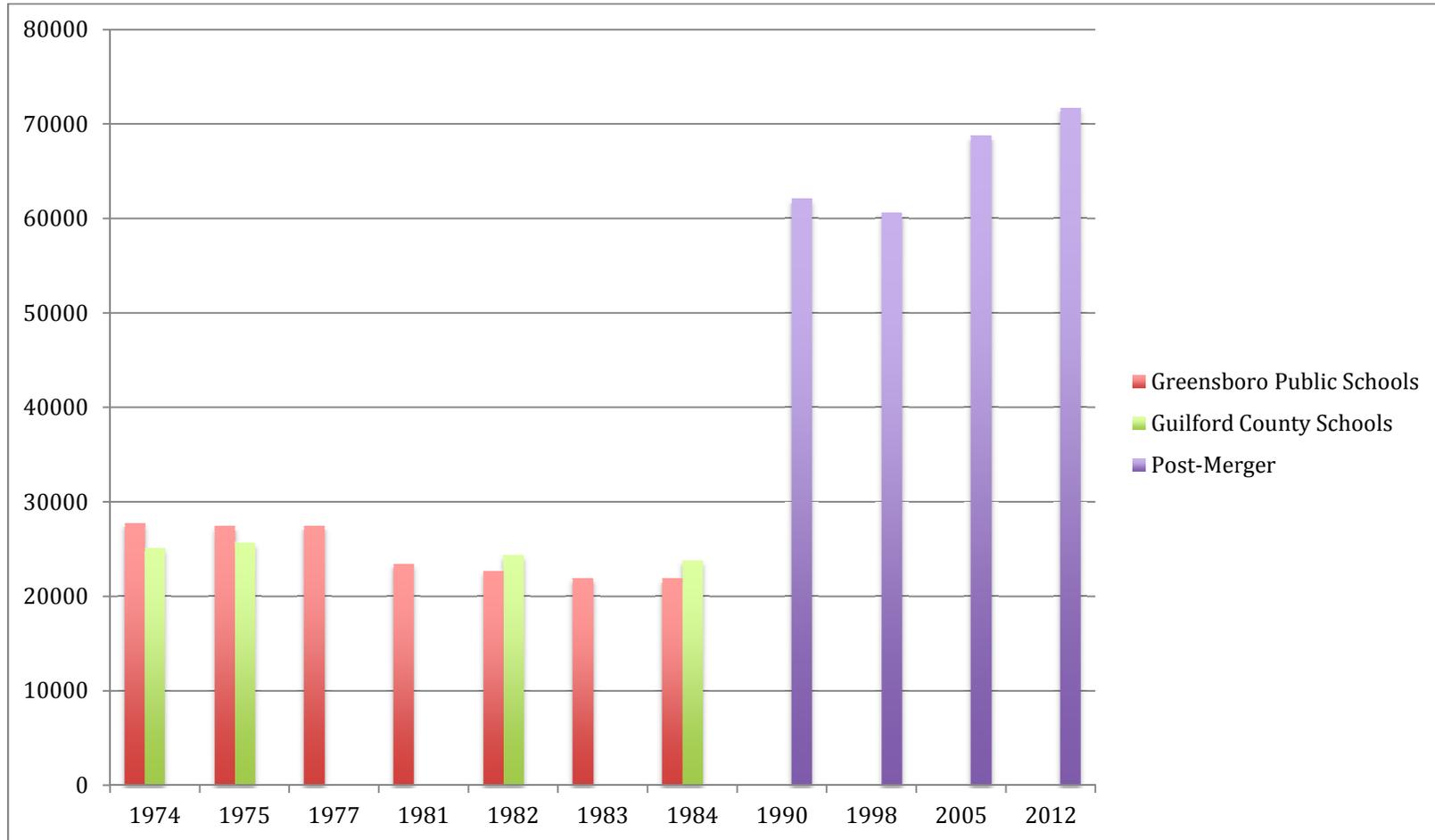
Ultimately this study highlights the important consideration that when it comes to the issue of racial equity in schooling the existence of a policy is perhaps equally as important as the success of said policy. When desegregation policies, such as busing efforts, are in place the public conversation focuses on the problem (racial inequity in schooling) in addition to the solution, even when the solution is highly unpopular as was the case with busing in the 1970s and 1980s. On the other hand, when policies are not in place the public conversation dies away which may lead to the impression that the problem has been resolved, even if that is not at all the case. Thus, in the case of racial equity in schooling the absence of a policy has led to a growing disillusion and inequity along side a glaringly quite public narrative.

Therefore, the findings in this study demonstrate a need for a reinvigoration of the conversation regarding the impact of desegregation efforts and the current state of racial equity in schools as previously called for in prior research (Saaticioğlu & Carl, 2011). To initiate a

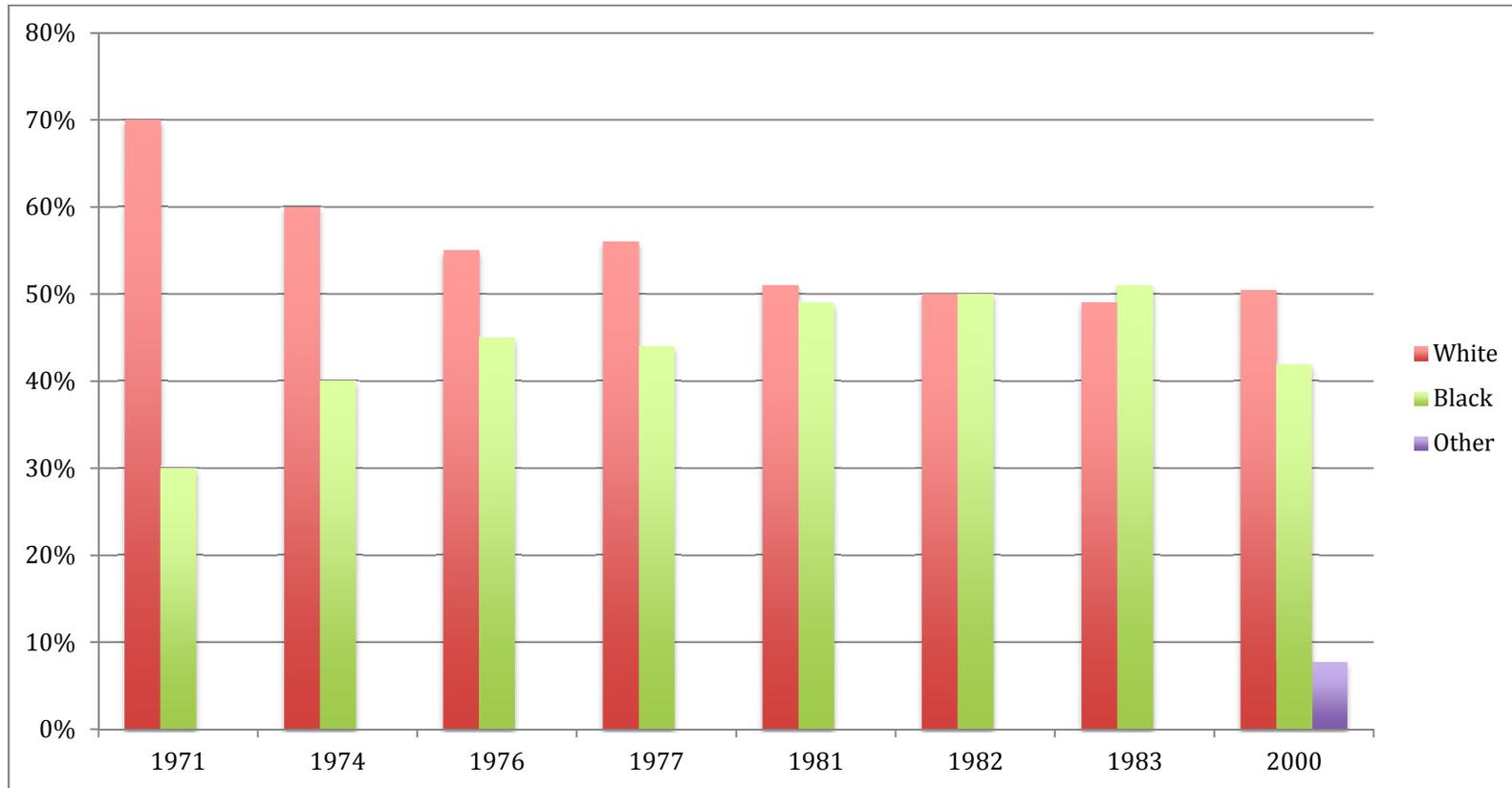
reinvigorated public discourse, society must address issues presented here that largely exclude mandatory transportation but may include housing policies, inter-district choice, school funding formulas, and broader economic and social equality initiatives. These factors are the underlying causes of the issues presented in this study. Desegregation researchers often overlook these broader issues but in actuality in so many ways school inequity is a symptom of such underlying causes. Without addressing these issues school equity will not be possible. Thus, a renewed conversation is needed but this future conversation must be broader in scope to and focused less on desegregation and resegregation from a historical lens but instead on equity in schooling in a larger context and cannot be simply considered as an education policy issue.

Specifically, future research of this nature should focus on the experiences of past and current students of different geographic areas, not just the South, and should focus on a wider range of cities and communities (Wells et al, 2009). Additionally, while a great deal of historical research about the experiences of those students who were part of desegregation's short but passionate effort, future research should focus not on the experience of this small number of individuals but rather on the perceptions, experiences and opportunities of the hundreds of thousands of students who have recently graduated, are graduating now or will graduate in the coming years from schools in communities that are far more racially segregated than ever before. Their stories, experiences and perceptions are the ones that will highlight the current inequities and the impact such inequity will have on the large society in the decades to come.

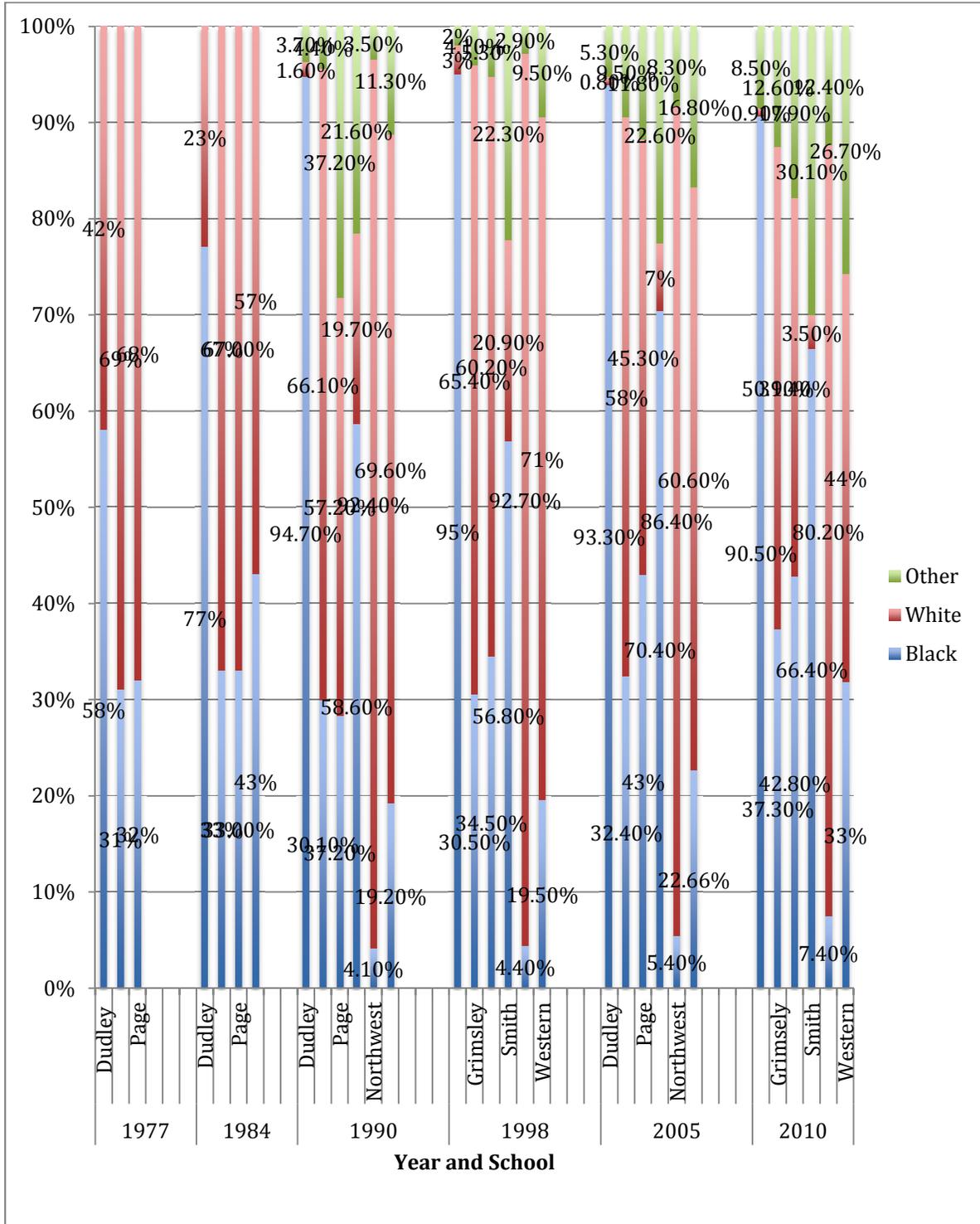
Appendix A: Guilford County School and Greensboro Public Schools Student Population



Appendix B: Student Demographic Data – Greensboro Public Schools



Appendix C: Greensboro Public Schools and Guilford County Schools Student Demographic Data by School



PARTICIPANT SURVEY

Demographic Information

Name: _____

Age: _____ Race/Ethnicity: _____

Employment Status: _____ Currently working _____ Not currently working

If working, current Occupation/Work Title: _____

Current city of residence: _____

If you currently live in Greensboro, what neighborhood or area: _____

Marital States: _____ Married _____ Divorced _____ Single

Number of children, if any: _____

High School: _____ Graduation Year: _____

Mode of transportation to HIGH school (i.e. walk, bus, car rider): _____

Background Information

Childhood neighborhood: _____

Parent(s) occupation: _____

Elementary School: _____

Mode of transportation to ELEMENTARY school (i.e. walk, bus, car rider): _____

Junior High/Middle School: _____

Mode of transportation to MIDDLE/JUNIOR HIGH school: _____

1970s/1980s Participants	2000s Participants
<p><i>High school experience:</i> Tell me about your high school experience? Walk me through a typical day. What did you like about high school? What did you dislike about it? Who were you friends with? Who did you hang out with? What activities did you participate in? How was it decided that you would attend that particular school? Did you like your teachers? Do you feel you received a good education?</p>	<p><i>High school experience:</i> Tell me about your high school experience? Walk me through a typical day. What did you like about high school? What did you dislike about it? Who were you friends with? Who did you hang out with? What activities did you participate in? Did you like your teachers? Do you feel you received a good education?</p>
<p><i>Childhood experience:</i> What kind of work did your parents do? Were your classmates all from your neighborhood? Were all your classmates black? Did you enjoy school? Like your teachers? Feel that you received a good education? Did you enjoy junior high? Like your teachers? Feel that you received a good education? Have an overall positive or negative experience?</p>	<p><i>Childhood experience:</i> What kind of work did your parents do? Were your classmates all from your neighborhood? Were there students of another race at your school? Do you remember elementary school as a positive or negative experience? enjoy school? Like your teachers? Fell that you received a good education? Did you enjoy middle school? Did students get along? Like your teachers? Feel that you received a good education?</p>
<p><i>Post high school experience:</i> How did you decide to join the workforce or attend college following high school graduation? What impacted your choice of job or college study? If college, what college did you attend? If work, how did you decide on a career path? Did you feel prepared for college? What did you study? How was your college experience or work experience different or similar to your high school experience? Do you think your college experience was different than others who were not bused or participate in desegregation? Did you move away from Greensboro? If so, why did you choose to move away? If not, what impacted your decision to stay in town? What kind of schools did your children attend? What impacted your school choice for your children?</p>	<p><i>Post high school experience:</i> How did you decide to join the workforce or attend college following high school graduation? What impacted your choice of job or college study? If college, what college did you attend? If work, how did you decide on a career path? Did you feel prepared for college? What did you study? How is/was your college experience or work experience different of similar to your high school experience? Did you move away from Greensboro? If so, why did you choose to move away? If not, what impacted your decision to stay in town? If so, what impacted your decision to return? Have you married and/or started a family?</p>
<p><i>Present:</i> Do you currently live in Greensboro? If so, what neighborhood do you currently live in? What impacted your decision to live in that neighborhood? Would you consider yourself conservative or progressive, politically speaking? Where do your children and possibly grandchildren live? Do you think Greensboro has good public schools at this time? Do you think all students in Greensboro receive the same kind of education? Do you think it is important for students to go to school near their home?</p>	<p><i>Present:</i> Do you currently live in Greensboro? If so, what neighborhood do you currently live in? What impacted your decision to live in that neighborhood? Would you consider yourself conservative or progressive, politically speaking? Do you think Greensboro has good public schools at this time? Do you think all students in Greensboro receive the same kind of education? Do you think it is important for students to go to school near their home?</p>

INTRODUCTION

The Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Department at the University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You may refuse to sign this form and not participate in this study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. If you do withdraw from this study, it will not affect your relationship with this unit, the services it may provide to you, or the University of Kansas.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to explore individuals' high school experience in Greensboro, North Carolina in the 1970s, 1980s and 2000s.

PROCEDURES

As a participant you will complete a short survey intended to gain demographic and background information. You will then be asked to participate in an interview lasting about an hour. The researcher will ask you if we can audio-tape the interview. You may consent to be audiotaped or decline as you see fit. You may still participate in this study even if you do not consent to be audiotaped. If you consent to be audiotaped, then you may stop the recording at any time. Audio-tapes will be used only for research purposes and will be shared only with a paid professional transcriptionist. Identifying information about you will be removed before having the tape transcribed so as to protect your identity from the transcriptionist. Once transcribed, the recording will be stored on a password protected computer until the study is completed and published. The recordings will be destroyed after the study is complete. The transcripts will also be stored on a password protected computer file.

RISKS

We do not anticipate that any information collected and reported would cause damage or harm to you or to any individual or institution.

BENEFITS

There are no direct benefits to participating in this study other than assisting the researcher in the project and providing your perspectives on your high school experience.

PAYMENT TO PARTICIPANTS

You will receive no compensation for your participation other than our gratitude.

PARTICIPANT CONFIDENTIALITY

Your name will not be associated in any publication or presentation with the information collected about you or with the research findings from this study. Instead, the researcher will use a pseudonym rather than your name. Your identifiable information will not be shared unless (a) it is required by law or university policy, or (b) you give written permission.

CANCELLING THIS CONSENT AND AUTHORIZATION

You may withdraw your consent to participate in this study at any time. You also have the right to cancel your permission to use and disclose further information collected about you, in writing, at any time, by sending your written request to the researcher (contact information is below).

If you cancel permission to use your information, the researchers will stop collecting additional information about you. However, the research team may use and disclose information that was gathered before they received your cancellation, as described above.

QUESTIONS ABOUT PARTICIPATION

Questions about procedures should be directed to the researcher listed at the end of this consent form.

PARTICIPANT CERTIFICATION

I have read this Consent and Authorization form. I have had the opportunity to ask, and I have received answers to, any questions I had regarding the study. I understand that if I have any additional questions about my rights as a research participant, I may call (785) 864-7429 or (785) 864-7385, write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7568, or email irb@ku.edu.

I agree to take part in this study as a research participant. By my signature I affirm that I am at least 18 years old and that I have received a copy of this Consent and Authorization form.

_____	_____
Type/Print Participant's Name	Date

Participant's Signature	

I agree to be audiotaped as part of this research project

_____	_____
Type/Print Participant's Name	Date

Participant's Signature	

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