

INCREASING DIVERSITY IN THE CITY SCHOOLS: UNEXPLORED PATHS OF OPPORTUNITY



A Policy Memo from the
Organizers and Strategic
Action Committee of the

“Looking Back, Moving Forward”
Conference on School Diversity
and Equity



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“LOOKING BACK, MOVING FORWARD”

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In its school rezoning and closure process from May 6 - June 3, 2013, the Richmond School Board voted to close 3 schools and change 14 elementary school zones despite opposition that overwhelmingly outweighed support at both public hearings. Though there were a wide range of concerns cited, including the rushed timeline, lack of transparency and absence of clear criteria for closing and rezoning these schools, many stakeholders expressed particular disapproval related to the potential increase in racial isolation that would result from the plan, formally known as Option C.¹

While regional efforts to promote school diversity—a central theme of the "Looking Back, Moving Forward" conference—remain critical, the school board actions present a specific challenge which could be addressed within a single school system through innovative policies with a record of success in other locales. To that end, this memo has three broad purposes.

- We identify key demographic changes that present opportunities and challenges for promoting school diversity in Richmond Public Schools (RPS). We also provide a synthesis of more than six decades of social science research showing that integration is still a deeply worthy policy goal.
- We outline the racial impact of current student assignment policies, in addition to the projected impact of the June 2013 rezoning.
- And perhaps most importantly, we close with a vision for moving forward in a way that more comprehensively fosters the many benefits of school diversity in Richmond City.

WHY HERE? WHY NOW? OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF THE PRESENT MOMENT

The projected outcomes associated with the board's recent decisions do not build upon several contemporary trends suggesting that school systems in America's central cities are being presented with new opportunities to create high quality, diverse schools. For the first time in almost a century, America's largest cities are growing faster than surrounding suburbs. This includes a rise in the population of young children: a recent

¹ See Reid, Z. (4 June 2013). "Richmond School Board votes to close 3 schools." *Richmond Times Dispatch*. Available at: http://www.timesdispatch.com/news/local/city-of-richmond/richmond-school-board-votes-to-close-three-schools/article_d0a7ca44-ccb-d-11e2-a83c-001a4bcf6878.html.

“LOOKING BACK, MOVING FORWARD”

RACE, CLASS, OPPORTUNITY AND EQUITY IN SCHOOLS IN THE RICHMOND REGION.



article in the Richmond Times Dispatch cited a 7% increase in the population under 5 years of age since 2000.² One of the key factors driving urban growth is an increasing retention of young, white, well-to-do professionals and families who seek out urban amenities and favor diverse environments.³ But instead of working to promote school diversity in a systematic way, the board voted on a plan that reinforces existing neighborhood segregation and further concentrates white and middle class students into a small handful of elementary schools.

The recent school closures have been touted as a budget savings, although neither costs nor projected savings were shared with the public during the three-week process, despite repeated requests from the public and individual members. Nor did the board provide new costs associated with the recent rezoning, such as increased transportation for 300 students and additional rezoning consultant fees. If the rationale for another elementary rezoning process—the first was completed just 10 months earlier by the previous board and a citizen advisory committee—was a “balancing of elementary zones,” the impacts contradict the decision. Most alarmingly, Option C decreased utilization at three of the district’s newest schools (Broad Rock, Oak Grove, and Miles Jones) while putting significant enrollment pressure on two of the oldest (Fox and Francis). Indeed, Fox was projected to be at 130% capacity.

As this memo lays out, however, stakeholders motivated by increased school efficiency can find appealing results from the boosts in enrollment and per pupil revenues related to the creation of diverse, equitable, and inclusive schools that will attract and retain the new generation of families moving to the city.

WHY EFFORTS TO PROMOTE SCHOOL DIVERSITY ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

The recent actions of the school board are of concern because the consensus of nearly 60 years of social science research is that segregated

² Geiger, J. (8 July 2013). “Day care a challenge as more parents live, work inside the city.” *Richmond Times Dispatch*. Available at: http://www.timesdispatch.com/workitrichmond/news/day-care-a-challenge-as-more-parents-live-work-inside/article_705e2e12-e739-11e2-b631-0019bb30f31a.html

³ Frey, W. (2012). *Demographic reversal: Cities thrive, suburbs sputter*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution; Jones, W. (4 February 2011). “Virginia’s population reaches 8,001,024.” *Richmond Times Dispatch*. Available at: 7/23/12 at <http://www2.timesdispatch.com/news/news/2011/feb/04/virginias-population-reaches-8001024-ar-819748/>

“LOOKING BACK, MOVING FORWARD”

RACE, CLASS, OPPORTUNITY AND EQUITY IN SCHOOLS IN THE RICHMOND REGION.



nonwhite schools remain deeply unequal, while diverse schools are associated with benefits for all kids. Racially and socioeconomically isolated schools are strongly related to an array of factors that limit educational opportunities and outcomes, including:

- less qualified teachers,
- high levels of teacher turnover,
- less successful peer groups,
- inadequate facilities and learning materials,
- less challenging curricula than schools in more affluent communities,
- fewer AP- or honors-level courses,
- higher rates of student discipline and expulsion,
- higher dropout rates, and
- lower likelihood of college completion.

On the other hand, there is also a mounting body of evidence indicating that well-structured desegregated schools are linked to profound benefits for all children. Racially integrated educational contexts provide students of all races with the opportunity to learn and work with children from a range of backgrounds. These settings foster:

- critical thinking skills that are increasingly important in both educational objectives and our multiracial society,
- reduction in students' willingness to accept stereotypes,
- heightened ability to communicate and make friends across racial lines,
- heightened academic achievement for minority students, with no corresponding detrimental impact for white students,
- loftier educational and career expectations,
- high levels of civic and communal responsibility,
- higher graduation rates for minority students,
- higher earnings later in life for minority students,
- better health for minority students,

“LOOKING BACK, MOVING FORWARD”

RACE, CLASS, OPPORTUNITY AND EQUITY IN SCHOOLS IN THE RICHMOND REGION.



- perpetuating effects across generations, so that students of all backgrounds who attend integrated schools are more likely to seek out integrated settings later in life.⁴

A STEP BACKWARDS FOR EQUITY AND DIVERSITY

The June 2013⁵ approved elementary rezoning plan was a step backwards for a number of reasons (see Appendix, “Racial Impact of June 2013 School Board Rezoning Process” for related map and tables).

- Prior to the recent 2012 redistricting process, the last time RPS conducted a widespread rezoning of all schools it was under court order to desegregate. At least partly as a result, the previous elementary zones were more integrated than our neighborhoods, with the potential for even more diverse schools with increased enrollment of schoolchildren in those zones. Grassroots efforts underway in what have historically been diverse zones, such as those of Cary, Chimborazo, and Westover Hills elementary schools, demonstrate the potential for increased diversity and the greater willingness and capacity of communities to invest in their zoned school.
- Despite these positive trends, the impact of the recent rezoning process was to preserve and add to a handful of majority white school zones in a city school system that is just 10% white. Indeed, the June 2013 board approved elementary attendance boundaries resulted in stark declines in the share of white students living in the Cary and Blackwell school zones, as well as a sharp increase in the share of white students in the Westover Hills zone. Meanwhile, the zones surrounding Mary Munford and Fox remained overwhelmingly white.

⁴ A summary of research on the harms of segregation and the benefits of integration can be found in the section, “Desegregation and Segregation: What the Evidence Says,” in the report *Miles to Go: A Report on School Segregation in Virginia, 1989-2010*. Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Civil Rights Project. Available at <http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/integration-and-diversity/miles-to-go-a-report-on-school-segregation-in-virginia-1989-2010>.

⁵ The School Board agenda for August 5th indicated that members would discuss several more boundary changes, impacting Bellevue, Chimborazo, Francis and Broad Rock elementary schools. A newspaper account of the meeting indicates that the students who were transferred out of Broad Rock to Francis will be allowed to return to Broad Rock. See Reid, Z. (6 August 2013). Richmond School Board approves attendance adjustments despite protest. *Richmond Times Dispatch*. Available at: http://www.timesdispatch.com/news/local/education/richmond-school-board-approves-attendance-adjustments-despite-protest/article_f7002aab-aca3-5deb-bab9-c5f0a7573027.html.

“LOOKING BACK, MOVING FORWARD”

RACE, CLASS, OPPORTUNITY AND EQUITY IN SCHOOLS IN THE RICHMOND REGION.



- In order to accommodate some of these shifts, Option C shifted many students—the vast majority of whom are black and Latino—to different schools, and in some cases, reassigned students out of a new facility (per the 2012 rezoning) into an older one. For example, students living in Walmsley (more than 80% of students living in the neighborhood are African American) south of the river were zoned away from the new Broad Rock elementary school back to Francis Elementary.

It should be noted that the figures embedded in the maps and tables reflect enrollment patterns based on the share of students in grades 1-8 (public and private) currently residing in elementary attendance zones. These numbers provide a critical look at the racial impact of the rezoning if all children utilized their assigned public school, and must be considered alongside enrollment projections that factored in open enrollment and other choice options like private schools.

THE PATH WE'RE ON: INCREASING SEGREGATION UNDER CURRENT STUDENT ASSIGNMENT FRAMEWORK

Currently, RPS offers students and families the option of attending their zoned neighborhood school or choice through three processes: open enrollment for any school with capacity for students outside the school zone, charter school lottery, and applications for 8 different secondary specialty programs.

It is important to recognize that school choice without explicit civil rights protections--like extensive outreach, free transportation and diversity goals--has been linked to high levels of segregation.⁶ This is because already advantaged families are more likely to know about and apply to schools of choice. They are also far more likely to have the means to get their children to the school. The current open enrollment policy in RPS does little to address these issues.

Without any kind of choice program, though, a student assignment policy that relies solely on proximity to the nearest school virtually guarantees that existing patterns of neighborhood segregation will be reflected in the school enrollment.

⁶ Orfield, G. & Frankenberg, E. (2013). *Educational delusions: Why choice can deepen inequality and how to make schools fair*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

“LOOKING BACK, MOVING FORWARD”

RACE, CLASS, OPPORTUNITY AND EQUITY IN SCHOOLS IN THE RICHMOND REGION.



Results from the hybrid model of choice and neighborhood schools in RPS include (see Appendix, Figure 1 and Table 4):

- Dramatic increases in black-white elementary school segregation levels over the past two decades (racial isolation in elementary schools now surpasses levels of isolation in neighborhoods).
- Clear preferences for schools in low poverty, predominately white neighborhoods on the part of both black and white families, countering the notion that all groups prefer neighborhood schools.
- No significant increase or decrease in the share of white students enrolled in the city school system. For at least two decades, the overall share of white enrollment has remained stable at roughly 10%.

Given the characteristics of RPS' current student assignment framework, these results are not surprising and have in fact been documented in other cities with similar policies.⁷ A recent report from New York City noted that zoning plus choice equaled a "perfect storm of segregation and unequal access"⁸ since, without civil rights safeguards, both have been individually associated with increased racial and socioeconomic isolation. Recognizing that past policy decisions in RPS have been linked to sharp increases in segregation, particularly at the elementary school level, the following section outlines a variety of alternative options that would help ensure a more equitable and inclusive future.

⁷ See, e.g., New York Appleseed. *Within our reach: Segregation in NYC district elementary Schools and what we can do about it: School-to-school diversity*. New York, NY: NewYork Appleseed. Available at: https://www.appleseednetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/First-Briefing-FINAL-7_10_13.pdf.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 11.

“LOOKING BACK, MOVING FORWARD”

RACE, CLASS, OPPORTUNITY AND EQUITY IN SCHOOLS IN THE RICHMOND REGION.



PATHS FORWARD: OPTIONS FOR MORE SYSTEMATIC SCHOOL DIVERSITY

Additional policy options could enhance the choices within RPS as well as the potential for more broad-based school diversity. Each of the proposals below (progressing in order from short-term to long-term goals) builds directly on the existing student assignment policies in RPS.

The School Board should:

1. Seek a superintendent with a deep commitment to fostering equity, inclusion and diversity in a changing school system.
2. Commit to conducting rezoning efforts with a goal of fostering racial and economic diversity to the utmost extent possible by adopting a policy statement to that end.
3. Adopt rezoning criteria that includes diversity, to the maximum extent possible given demographic trends, prior to the upcoming middle and high school rezoning processes.
4. Support community outreach and faculty and staff training efforts to enhance neighborhood reinvestment, equity, and inclusion in schools under-utilized by surrounding neighborhoods.
5. Ensure equity through school system transportation for all open enrollment students.
6. Expand communication about the open enrollment and specialty secondary school process with a strategic year-round outreach plan.
7. Unify and streamline the application process for all specialty programs to increase participation and ease of use.
8. Modify the current open enrollment model to a controlled choice plan for all elementary, middle and high schools, with the understanding that it may be phased in at different grade levels. Controlled choice, like open enrollment, links student assignment to family preferences. Controlled choice plans require that all families submit a ranked list of school preferences to the central

“LOOKING BACK, MOVING FORWARD”

RACE, CLASS, OPPORTUNITY AND EQUITY IN SCHOOLS IN THE RICHMOND REGION.



office. The central office then bases student assignment decisions upon numerous factors, including proximity, racial and socioeconomic balance, sibling preferences, and/or student achievement. Most controlled choice plans include a provision guaranteeing enrollment in at least one school within walking distance. Popular and successful controlled choice plans have been implemented in a wide variety of school systems across the country, including Champaign, Illinois, Cambridge, Massachusetts and Louisville, Kentucky.⁹

9. Apply for the next round of federal funding under the Magnet Schools Assistance Program (MSAP), which would enable RPS to use federal dollars to create schools with attractive curricular or thematic offerings (e.g., IB, Montessori, dual language programs, etc.) in high poverty, racially isolated neighborhoods.¹⁰ Magnet schools are often used in combination with controlled choice plans. Though RPS has previously tinkered with the magnet concept in the form of model schools, it never committed to the desegregation goals inherent to the historical development of magnets.¹¹

It is important to remember that school boundary lines help drive housing patterns. In other words, if zones are drawn in a way that concentrates racial groups and/or poverty, it can be very difficult to integrate the surrounding neighborhoods in a stable way. Conversely, attendance zones that encircle a racially and socioeconomically diverse group of neighborhoods can help foster stable and diverse residential patterns. Controlled choice plans and magnet schools go even farther, though, by opening up the entire urban housing market because families understand that they can move anywhere in the city and still access a high quality, diverse school.

⁹ See, e.g., Civil Rights Project/NAACP LDF. (2008). *Still Looking to the Future: Voluntary K-12 School Integration*. Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Civil Rights Project. Available at: <http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/integration-and-diversity/still-looking-to-the-future-voluntary-k-12-school-integration>.

¹⁰ Goldring, E. & Smrekar, C. (2000). Magnet schools and the pursuit of racial balance. *Education and Urban Society*, 33(1).

¹¹ Duke, D. (1995). *The school that refused to die: Continuity and change at Thomas Jefferson High School*. New York, NY: State University of New York Press. In fact, promotional materials related to early magnet efforts in Richmond expressly indicated that the programs were not for the purpose of desegregation (Duke, 1995, p. 161).

“LOOKING BACK, MOVING FORWARD”

RACE, CLASS, OPPORTUNITY AND EQUITY IN SCHOOLS IN THE RICHMOND REGION.



CONCLUSION

The recent rezoning and school closure actions fail to address the broader issues facing RPS and the city. The troubling elements of both decisions must be viewed against the backdrop of changing demographic trends in urban areas and overwhelming evidence that diverse school environments provide many advantages for preparing the citizens, workers, and leaders of the 21st century. Instead of continuing on the current path, the RPS school board should forge a new path to increase diversity and effective and equitable use of resources.

A policy framework that takes a more systematic approach to balancing preferences across schools would help alleviate stark disparities in white enrollment at certain schools and offer more children the opportunity to learn and grow together in diverse learning communities. We of course recognize that limitations to full integration remain, given the still extreme racial and economic isolation of the city school system. But as more young professionals and families enter and stay in the city, we must concentrate on fostering stable, diverse learning environments wherever possible. By establishing a controlled choice framework, committing to a renewed emphasis on the magnet school concept, with an emphasis on the desegregating purpose of magnets and providing external supports for neighborhood-school investment, RPS could leverage the trend of rapidly changing city demographics without sacrificing equity and opportunity for all children. Instead of pursuing the status quo of stratification and inequality amidst decades-old static enrollment trends, the city school system could be a national—and local¹²—model of diversity and inclusion that would attract new city dwellers and offer improved academic, social, and lifelong benefits for all of its students.

¹² Indeed, many of these lessons and suggestions apply to other area school systems in the midst of demographic change and rezoning processes.

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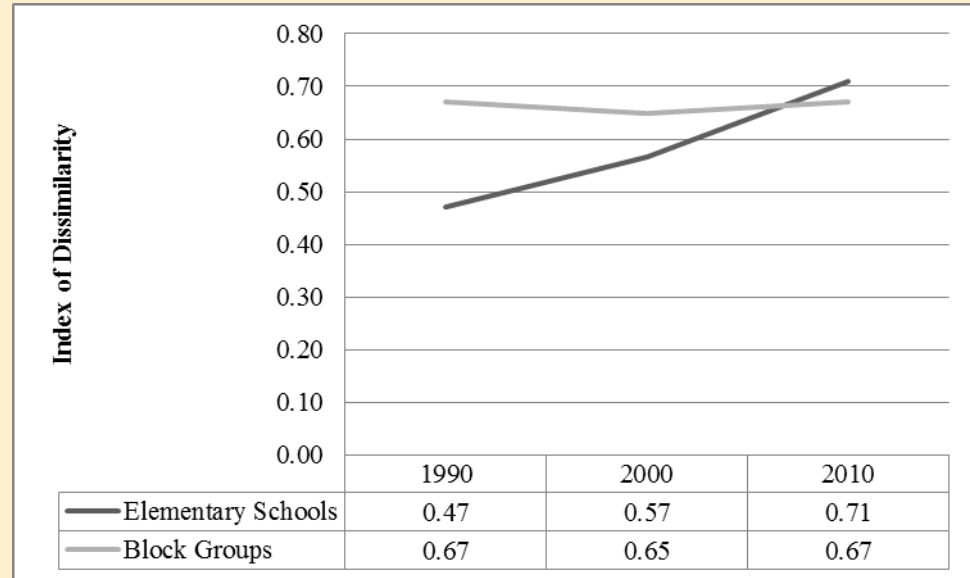
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APPENDIX: SUPPORTING TABLES AND FIGURES

Contemporary Patterns of School and Residential Segregation in Richmond

Figure 1: Black-White Segregation Levels, Richmond City Elementary Schools and Neighborhoods, 1990-2010



Source: NCES' Common Core of Data, 1992, 1999, 2010; U.S. Census, SF3 1990, 2000 and 2010.

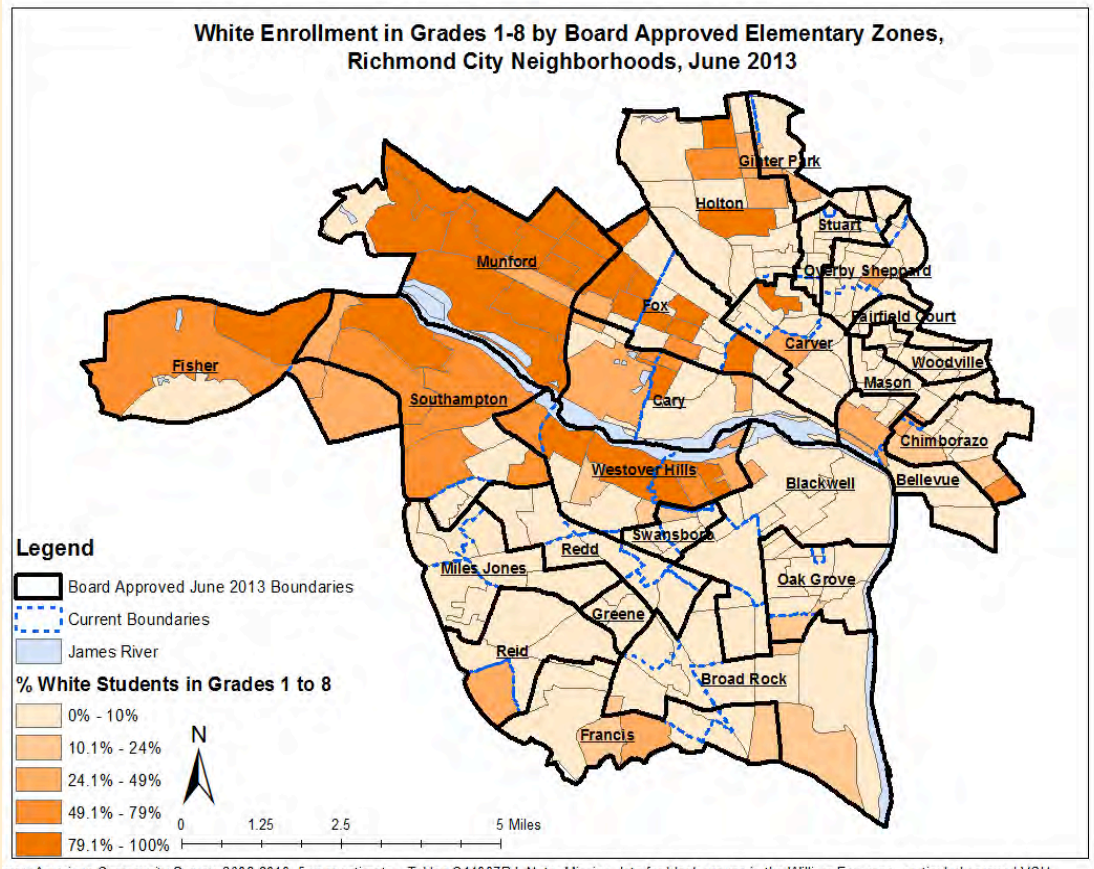
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RACE, CLASS, OPPORTUNITY AND EQUITY IN SCHOOLS IN THE RICHMOND REGION.



Racial Impact of June 2013 School Board Rezoning Process

Figure 2: White Enrollment in Grades 1-8 by Board Approved Elementary Zones, Richmond City Neighborhoods, June 2013



Source: American Community Survey, 2006-2010, 5 year estimates. Tables C14007B-I. Note: Missing data for block groups in the William Fox zone, particularly around VCU.

“LOOKING BACK, MOVING FORWARD”

RACE, CLASS, OPPORTUNITY AND EQUITY IN SCHOOLS IN THE RICHMOND REGION.



Table 1: Percent White Students in Grades 1-8 by Elementary Zone Configurations, Richmond City Block Groups, 2006-2010

	Current Elementary Zones	Board Approved Summer 2012 Elementary Zones	Board Approved June 2013 Elementary Zones
Bellevue	8.1	6.8	6.8
Blackwell	28.5	25.3	0.0
Broad Rock	2.9	3.6	3.2
Carver	10.6	10.8	10.4
Cary	61.3	61.3	16.4
Chimborazo	12.4	16.5	16.5
Clark Springs	9.4	11.6	n/a
Fairfield Court	0.0	0.0	0.0
Fisher	40.4	34.3	39.9
Fox	76.5	76.5	77.4
Francis	9.7	5.3	4.1
Ginter Park	7.6	10.0	10.0
Greene	1.3	1.3	0.0
Holton	35.1	35.1	35.1
Mason	3.4	3.4	3.4
Miles Jones	3.3	1.9	1.9
Munford	96.1	96.1	96.1
Oak Grove	1.3	3.1	4.2
Overby Sheppard	3.5	2.6	2.6
Redd	0.0	0.0	0.0
Reid	1.7	6.0	6.0
Southampton	41.3	56.6	35.9
Stuart	1.9	2.9	2.9
Summer Hill	5.1	n/a	n/a
Swansboro	3.0	1.7	1.7
Westover Hills	13.5	25.2	55.9
Woodville	2.9	2.9	2.9
AVERAGE ALL ZONES	17.8	19.3	17.3

Source: American Community Survey, 2006-2010, 5 year estimates. Tables C14007B-I.

Note: Missing data for block groups in the William Fox zone, particularly around VCU. Several other missing block groups also reported. Includes students enrolled in public and private schools.

“LOOKING BACK, MOVING FORWARD”

RACE, CLASS, OPPORTUNITY AND EQUITY IN SCHOOLS IN THE RICHMOND REGION.



Table 2: Percent Black Students in Grades 1-8 by Elementary Zone Configurations, Richmond City Block Groups, 2006-2010

	Current Elementary Zones	Board Approved Summer 2012 Elementary Zones	Board Approved June 2013 Elementary Zones
Bellevue	91.9	91.2	91.2
Blackwell	65.7	69.6	92.4
Broad Rock	56.6	67.7	69.7
Carver	83.3	84.0	84.4
Cary	24.6	24.6	77.8
Chimborazo	86.5	83.5	83.5
Clark Springs	85.8	80.6	n/a
Fairfield Court	84.1	84.1	84.1
Fisher	32.1	35.5	43.6
Fox	19.9	19.9	10.5
Francis	81.0	86.2	89.2
Ginter Park	91.2	90.0	90.0
Greene	90.7	90.7	87.1
Holton	47.9	47.9	47.9
Mason	93.9	93.9	93.9
Miles Jones	62.8	73.2	73.2
Munford	0.0	0.0	0.0
Oak Grove	75.6	68.4	67.1
Overby Sheppard	88.6	91.5	91.5
Redd	93.0	87.8	98.9
Reid	64.3	54.5	54.5
Southampton	42.3	34.3	40.8
Stuart	95.5	94.3	94.3
Summer Hill	70.8	n/a	n/a
Swansboro	66.1	73.1	73.1
Westover Hills	64.0	52.3	26.5
Woodville	94.7	94.7	94.7
AVERAGE ALL ZONES	68.6	68.2	70.4

Source: American Community Survey, 2006-2010, 5 year estimates. Tables C14007B-I.

Note: Missing data for block groups in the William Fox zone, particularly around VCU.

Several other missing block groups also reported. Includes students enrolled in public and private schools.

“LOOKING BACK, MOVING FORWARD”

RACE, CLASS, OPPORTUNITY AND EQUITY IN SCHOOLS IN THE RICHMOND REGION.



Table 3: Percent Latino Students in Grades 1-8 by Elementary Zone Configurations, Richmond City Block Groups, 2006-2010

	Current Elementary Zones	Board Approved Summer 2012 Elementary Zones	Board Approved June 2013 Elementary Zones
Bellevue	0.0	2.0	2.0
Blackwell	0.0	0.0	0.0
Broad Rock	26.2	14.9	16.6
Carver	0.0	0.0	0.0
Cary	9.2	9.2	0.0
Chimborazo	1.1	0.0	0.0
Clark Springs	0.0	0.0	n/a
Fairfield Court	0.0	0.0	0.0
Fisher	13.7	15.1	8.2
Fox	3.6	3.6	8.6
Francis	4.6	2.7	2.1
Ginter Park	0.0	0.0	0.0
Greene	7.9	7.9	12.9
Holton	4.2	4.2	4.2
Mason	0.0	0.0	0.0
Miles Jones	7.3	4.8	4.8
Munford	0.0	0.0	0.0
Oak Grove	5.7	14.2	9.8
Overby Sheppard	0.0	0.0	0.0
Redd	1.4	1.8	0.0
Reid	22.9	28.5	28.5
Southampton	3.3	1.6	4.0
Stuart	2.6	1.4	1.4
Summer Hill	12.7	n/a	n/a
Swansboro	4.8	2.7	2.7
Westover Hills	3.8	8.0	6.3
Woodville	2.4	2.4	2.4
AVERAGE ALL ZONES	5.1	4.8	4.6

Source: American Community Survey, 2006-2010, 5 year estimates. Tables C14007B-I.

Note: Missing data for block groups in the William Fox zone, particularly around VCU.

Several other missing block groups also reported. Includes students enrolled in public and private schools.

“LOOKING BACK, MOVING FORWARD”

RACE, CLASS, OPPORTUNITY AND EQUITY IN SCHOOLS IN THE RICHMOND REGION.



Current Racial and Economic Impact of Open Enrollment and Private School Usage

Table 4: Elementary School Enrollment and Zone Characteristics by Race, Economic Disadvantage, Transfer Status and Private School Usage

	School			Zone		
	White ^a	Economically Disadvantaged ^a	Transferring In ^b	White All Ages ^c	Transferring Out ^b	Attend Private School ^d
George W. Carver	0.2%	89.8%	10.2%	12.3%	21.1%	2.1%
Woodville*	0.2	97.7	12.3	3.1	17.8	0
George Mason	0.2	95.4	14.3	7.6	15.3	3.4
J.E.B. Stuart	0.3	80.6	18.8	8.1	23.8	0.8
Ginter Park*	0.4	89.4	18.5	5.8	18.9	0
Fairfield Court	0.4	95.1	15.7	0.9	19.6	0.4
Overby-Sheppard	1	88	22.1	5.2	19.9	4.9
Clark Springs	1.6	93.2	10.7	45.4	35.8	27
Chimborazo	1.6	88.4	4.5	23.4	25.2	18.8
Blackwell*	2	88.3	6.8	31.1	27.7	19.7
Bellevue*	2.4	81.4	61.4	59.8	17.6	41
Swansboro*	2.4	83.9	17.3	10.0	18.9	0
Oak Grove/Bellemeade	2.8	88.4	11.6	6.1	17.4	0.5
G.H. Reid	2.8	83.7	9	12.5	19.7	5.2
E.S.H. Greene	3.1	83.5	13.4	9.2	12.6	0
Broad Rock	3.6	84.3	6.4	14.0	19.9	0
Summer Hill/Ruffin Road	3.6	92.5	9.3	13.2	14.2	0
Miles Jones	3.7	87.5	13.1	14.2	13.9	0
J.L. Francis	4	84.1	11.2	15.5	15.7	0
Elizabeth D. Redd	4.5	80.5	5	19.8	21.9	3.1
Westover Hills*	4.6	83.7	11.4	42.3	34.2	8.7
Southampton *	8.7	65.7	23.8	56.0	24.7	35
John B. Cary *	12.6	57.8	64.8	76.2	48.4	25.4
J.B. Fisher*	20.1	39.8	63.6	74.8	15.5	64.8
Linwood Holton	30.4	44.9	26.3	52.9	20.4	26.1
William Fox*	62.9	26.1	52.6	79.4	7.5	11.2
Mary Munford*	78.6	13.5	31.6	91.0	3.9	74.9
Average	9.6	77.3	21.0	29.3	20.4	13.8



*=designated model school. a=Virginia Department of Education, 2011. b=Richmond Public Schools, 2011 rezoning analysis. Denominator for transferring out is all K-5 students in attendance zone.c=SABINS, ACS 2006-2010, represents total population all ages. d=SABINS, ACS 2006-2010. Denominator for private schools is all children in grades 1-4 living in zone.