

## CFCR Position Statement on Concentrations of Poverty and Racial Isolation within CMS

In 2015, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education (BOE) committed to deciding whether changes would be made to the CMS student assignment policy.<sup>1</sup> A number of considerations prompted this commitment, including pressure from the community when the number of high minority, high poverty schools increased from 12 to 53 within ten years of redrawing school boundaries and changing busing practices in 2002, and, in 2016-17, rose to 74. Other factors such as overcrowding, lengthy bus rides, and inequitable distribution of resources were also leading considerations. In February 2016, the BOE approved Phase I of a student assignment plan that focused on the use of magnets. Phase II, approved in May 2017, focused on changes to school boundaries and feeder patterns.

CFCR supports substantive action undertaken by CMS and the BOE to reduce concentrations of poverty and racial isolation across the district and within schools. Student assignment is one tool in addressing those realities as well as the other identified issues. Its success in reducing concentrations of poverty and racial isolation relies on effective implementation, continued evaluation of impact, and exploration of additional strategies. One such strategy is a \$922 million bond referendum, proposed by BOE and approved by Mecklenburg County voters in November 2017.<sup>2</sup> In addition, CMS is strategically working to close gaps in educational equity and create access to opportunity for students across the district. In 2018, CMS released its inaugural *Breaking the Link* report, which sought to interrogate the links between demographics (i.e., race, income) and student outcomes.<sup>3</sup> Further, CMS launched a publically-available performance dashboard to track key education indicators (e.g., enrollment, student proficiency and growth, suspension) across student subgroups categories (e.g., race, gender, grade level).<sup>4</sup>

Studies show that socioeconomic and racial diversity in schools benefit students and may relate to higher academic achievement. Specifically, students who attend racially diverse schools demonstrate improvements in critical thinking, communication, and problem solving skills. These students are less likely to drop out of high school and more likely to attend high-quality colleges, that lead to have higher paying, more prestigious occupations. Finally, attending racially diverse schools offers long-term positive benefits such as lower likelihoods of incarceration and better health outcomes.<sup>5</sup>

Racially diverse schools have been found to benefit students of all races where students of color, in particular, have higher levels of achievement in diverse schools than in segregated schools.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, research supports the intersection of racial and socioeconomic diversity as a strong predictor of student

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<sup>1</sup> In 2010, the BOE approved a student assignment plan that closed ten schools, created various magnet programs, and replaced several middle schools with K-8 schools, and agreed to review student assignment policies in six years

<sup>2</sup> Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools. (nd) *CMS bond information*. Retrieved from <http://www.cms.k12.nc.us/cmsbondinfo/Pages/default.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> Barnes, F., Messinger, L., Coughran, M., Schell, R., Freije, S., McRae, D., et al. (2018). *Breaking the Link*. Retrieved from <http://www.cms.k12.nc.us/cmsdepartments/accountability/Documents/Breaking%20the%20Link%20English.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools (2018). *Performance Dashboard- BETA Version*. Retrieved from <http://www.cms.k12.nc.us/cmsdepartments/accountability/Pages/PerformanceDashboard.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> Ayscue, J., Frankenberg, E., & Siegel, Hawley, G. (2017). *The complementary benefits of racial and socioeconomic diversity in schools* (Issue Brief No. 10). Retrieved from <http://school-diversity.org/research-briefs/>

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

achievement where school-level socioeconomic status is as important for student achievement as student-level socioeconomic status, particularly in the South.<sup>7</sup>

CMS estimates its student assignment plan will result in 74 schools with increased socioeconomic diversity; however, CFCR believes these goals are overstated. In fact, projections show only 12 schools will significantly change (measure as  $\geq 10\%$ ) in terms of socioeconomic diversity and three of these shifts will result from an additional partial magnet. A vital element of CFCR's Mission is that the educational needs of children in our community are met, particularly the vulnerable children we serve. CFCR will work with CMS and other community partners to monitor progress, help make the plan a success, and continue to advocate for educational equity in our community.

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*