## ABSTRACT

BOSHOFF, AMANDA LYN. An Exploratory Study on the Impacts of Busing for Diversity on the Secondary Student Experience. Under the direction of Dr. Lisa Bass.

The research is clear that racially and socio-economically diverse schools lead to better student outcomes in academic proficiency, academic growth, expressive language, leadership skills, college admission, attendance, self-confidence, and critical and creative thinking abilities. Since the Brown v. Board of Education Decision in 1954, districts have grappled with strategies to ensure that schools are diverse. Nearly a quarter of the way into the twenty-first century, our nation's public schools continue to grapple with continuous resegregation following decades of judiciary rulings, legislation, and local policy efforts to diversify and integrate public schools (Frey & Wilson, 2009). This qualitative, exploratory study seeks to gain a better understanding of the student experience and student perceptions around the practice of busing for diversity to ensure socio-economic balance in a large district in the State of North Carolina that has a rich history of working to ensure that schools are balanced and diverse. Student subjects from secondary schools within the district who attend a school that is more than 10 miles from their home (and not the closest school to their home) as part of a student assignment plan were interviewed to determine their experience regarding academic support, family engagement, social well-being, and engagement in extracurricular activities. In addition to offering a novel glimpse of student perceptions and voice around their own experiences, this study affirms the research that promotes diverse schools while considering measures that should be taken to ensure that students who are bused as a part of this student assignment plan are provided with an equitable student experience when compared to peers who attend a neighborhood school. Findings are centered around seven themes and note that students are widely negatively impacted by busing due to lengthy bus rides, earlier and later pick-up and drop off times, the inability to

participate in extra-curricular activities, including athletics and arts, and face negative social impacts due to the distance from home to school. However, the study noted that overall, students have a positive perception of the school they attend, receive dedicated support from teachers and staff, and reported that school administrators, coaches, and teachers work to support them through strategic instructional schedules, targeted community family engagement and sometimes transportation. This study notes that if busing is to continue to be a strategy to diversify schools, more efforts must be made to ensure equitable access to school programming.

# An Exploratory Study on the Impacts of Busing for Diversity on the Secondary Student Experience

by
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## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to great teachers, whose impact stretches farther than they will ever know.

## BIOGRAPHY

Amanda Boshoff is Doctoral Candidate in Educational Leadership at North Carolina State University. She received a bachelor's degree in secondary history education from North Carolina State University in 2005 and a master's degree in school administration from North Carolina State University in 2014.

She currently serves as the Principal of Athens Drive Magnet High School in Raleigh, North Carolina which was named the Top Magnet School in America in 2024. Prior to becoming the Principal of Athens Drive Magnet High School, she served as a middle school principal, high school assistant principal, and social studies teacher.

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Nearly a quarter of the way into the twenty-first century, our nation's public schools are grappling with continuous resegregation following decades of judiciary rulings, legislation, and local policy efforts to diversify and integrate public schools (Hagins, 2022; Hinnant-Crawford, 2021; McNeal, 2009, Wishon, 2004). Many public-school districts have implemented student assignment plans that utilize busing, magnet programming, and intentionally drawn base assignment maps with the goal of ensuring that schools are diversified to reap the research-based benefits that affirm diverse schools lead to higher academic achievement rates for all students, with elevated rates of increased growth and proficiency for minority students (Gerstl-Pepin, 2002; Kurlaender & Yun, 2007; Wells et al., 2016).

Following the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling in 1954, numerous districts across the United States were ordered by the Courts to participate in student assignment practices that enlisted busing for desegregation to ensure that schools were moving towards integration (Reardon et al., 2006; Smardon, 2009; Woodward, 2011). Court-ordered busing to achieve school desegregation was used mainly in large, ethnically segregated school systems, including Boston, Massachusetts; Cleveland and Columbus, Ohio; Kansas City, Missouri; Pasadena and San Francisco, California; Richmond, Virginia; Detroit, Michigan; and Wilmington, Delaware, among others (Smardon, 2009).

However, limited progress was being made to ensure racial diversity in schools, especially in the Southeastern United States until *Brown v. Board II* encouraged increased efforts "with all deliberate speed" and remanded future desegregation cases to lower courts (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1955). At times, state legislatures and governors chose to defy integration

orders, forcing the hand of the federal government to intervene in support of the Brown II ruling predominantly in southern districts (Woodward, 2011).

The *Coleman Report* (1966), a commissioned product of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, doubled down on the idea that socioeconomic integration could increase academic achievement more than any other school strategy, touting the benefits of social capital. The report put a research-based onus on the importance of a child's background and socioeconomic status in determining academic outcomes, offering that the students in one's class can have a greater impact on a student's learning than the teacher in the classroom (Gordon, 2017). While controversial at the time, the *Coleman Report* increased the belief and practice that school systems should make further efforts to integrate schools for racial and socio-economic diversity despite the pushback experienced in the 1960s (Dickinson, 2016). To do so, districts across the nation implemented busing for diversity and introduced the first magnet schools to better integrate public schools. These policies were often met with resistance and would preface decades of legal action regarding student assignment policies across the country.

Despite numerous challenges, the practice of busing for diversity was reaffirmed in *Swann v. Charlotte Mecklenburg* in 1971 when the court upheld the ability of federal courts to utilize busing to further desegregation efforts in public schools. Since that time, several major cities have implemented busing for diversity, although nearly all currently under the premise of socio-economic status to avoid legal implications of busing or student assignment practices around race.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the United States was as close to seeing the promise of racial equality fulfilled regarding public schooling as it had been during any period since Reconstruction thanks to progressive and affirming Supreme Court decisions that called for

integration. Segregation that had characterized the U.S. public school system since its inception was steadily decreasing (Cascio et al., 2008; Guryan, 2004; Lutz, 2011). As a result, minority students became less likely to drop out of high school and graduation rates reached their highest in history (Guryan, 2004). Unfortunately, in the early nineties, the Supreme Court ruled in *Board of Education of Oklahoma City v. Dowell* (1991) that once school districts were declared unitary (that is, not separated into racially defined sub-districts), they could be permanently released from court oversight. *Missouri v. Jenkins* (1995) further limited the power of federal courts to enforce integration orders and emphasized that release to local control of school districts should be the end goal of all desegregation plans. As a result of these rulings, hundreds of school districts, more than half of all ever under court orders to begin and maintain desegregation, were eventually released from court oversight. By the mid-1990s, it was easier than it had been in nearly half a century for schools to be free from federal mandates to induce and maintain racial integration (Amsterdam, 2017; Plaza, 2018).

This research centers around a North Carolina school system that has a long-standing history of busing students to achieve racial and later, socioeconomic diversity. This system has been long celebrated for its efforts and continuous commitment to ensure that schools are able to balance enrollments so that no school would serve a student body with more than 40 percent of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch and more than 25 percent of students reading below grade level (Carter III et al., 2022). Unlike many of the South's large school districts, this district has never been the subject of court-ordered desegregation yet was born under federal pressure to integrate through a bold consolidation of its city and county schools. Since 2000, the system has utilized students' socioeconomic status and levels of academic achievement in determining student assignment plans, dividing the county into geographic nodes of about 150

students that are then assigned to varying schools to meet diversification efforts. Each node of students is assigned an elementary, middle, and high school as a part of their schooling pathway. More rural and suburban schools, especially in affluent neighborhoods, draw students from the inner-city, who are bused upwards of 45 minutes to an hour to meet the goals of the districts' student assignment plan.

The subject school system consists of nearly 200 schools in a large, predominantly suburban, county with 12 municipalities that serves approximately 160,000 students. District-wide, more than 20% of students qualify for free and reduced lunch. To diversify schools, the district has a student assignment policy that often identifies population nodes of students in impoverished areas that are assigned to a school in a wealthier area that could be as far as 20 miles from the student's home. Approximately 23% of students are assigned to attend a school farther from their neighborhood school as a part of the policy (Carter III et al., 2022).

Numerous studies (Domina et al., 2021; Glazer, 2009; Ipka, 2003) over the past fifty years have affirmed the benefits of racially and socio-economically diverse schools. Such studies must be considered in assessing the research questions that seek to determine the academic and social experiences and perceptions of secondary students in the district who are bused for diversity away from their neighborhood school (Kozol, 2005; Ogletree, 2004). In doing so, any challenges and benefits that such policies present for students and families that might impact their formative middle and high school experience must be thoughtfully examined. In addition, the successes and consequences of diversity driven student assignment systems must be weighed to ensure the best outcomes for students when determining student assignment plans that offer strategies to increase the diversity of the student body.

## Research Problem Statement

This qualitative, exploratory study focused on the experiences of eight students who attended secondary schools in the subject school system. These students lived anywhere from 15-20 miles away from the school they attended and had bus rides to and from school of around one hour in duration each way. The distance that these students were bused to school presents many challenges and costs that fell on these bused students and their families that the system and schools must work to mitigate. For example, these students must have arrived at their designated bus stop much earlier than other students-often more than 90 minutes prior to the school start time and returned home an hour or more after school ended. They also faced challenges to participation in afterschool activities, clubs, extra-curriculars, athletics, and the arts, which were sometimes further exacerbated by variables including the multi-track year-round middle school schedule in which students attend school for nine weeks and have a three-week vacation period. In the social context, it was often difficult for these students to maintain friendships with student peers who lived near the school due to a lack of transportation to and from events in the area.

Additionally, barriers to parent participation in their student's education were often present in that work schedules and distance made it difficult to attend family nights, parent conferences, open house events, sporting events, celebrations, and even in picking students up when they were ill or subject to disciplinary consequences. Students were often unable to secure rides to and from athletic practices. Access to track-out programming and childcare was also limited in the neighborhoods of these families, as offerings of afterschool programming, track-out camps, etc. vary depending upon the area, and were limited in the inner-city, where there were no year-round schools. Outside of distance, track-out programming and after-school

programming was also a costly and often infeasible option for low-income families in the county.

In past years, prior to the current teacher and bus driver shortage, the district took measures to mitigate inequities by providing after school activity buses to take students to and from school so that they could participate in athletics, academic support sessions, and other extracurricular activities. However, the driver and staff shortage ended all supportive practices that were in place to provide equitable access to after school programming. The removal of these services was to the detriment of the students who were bused for diversity. This research problem sought to ascertain the balance of required resources to provide equitable experiences for students when considering the benefits of diversifying school communities, when juxtaposed with the burdens of attending a school far beyond the neighborhood school.

## Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain a better understanding of the social and academic challenges and benefits that students experienced when bused for diversity to a school that is more than fifteen miles from their home. Eight individual students from identified secondary schools who met this criterion completed a demographic profile and were interviewed individually through a protocol of questions that sought to determine their perceptions and experiences, including both benefits and challenges, as secondary students who were bused for diversity as part of a student assignment plan implemented by the North Carolina school district.

As public-school systems reaffirm their commitments to equity in policy, vision, and practice, student assignment planning remains at the forefront of ensuring equitable student experiences and academic achievement for all students.

## Research Question and Methodology Overview

This research project involved an exploratory qualitative study examining student opinions, experiences, and perceptions about attending a school more than 10 miles from their home as part of a student assignment plan that includes a busing for diversity policy by exploring the following questions:

1. What are the academic and social experiences and perceptions of secondary students in the North Carolina Public School System who are bused for diversity away from their neighborhood school?
2. What challenges and benefits does this policy present for students that impact their secondary school experience regarding academics, access to extracurricular activities, and family engagement?

To derive a full understanding of the impacts of students affected by this policy, eight student participants of varying genders and ethnicities were interviewed to assess impacts on academics, social-emotional, extracurricular, and family engagement at the secondary level. This study was contained to two schools in the subject district; a middle school and high school, to provide appropriate representation of secondary schools, which served to portray the impacts of Board policies more reliably on local students.

## Significance of the Study

While prior literature has thoroughly examined the benefits of diversity in schools, a limited body of work exists that provides the perspectives and perceptions of secondary students who were impacted as a direct result of student assignment plans that were implemented to diversify schools. These plans often have consequences for those students who were assigned to attend a school long distances from their homes, which must be weighed against the perceived

benefits. Through a better understanding of this student assignment policy's impact on students through their own stories and experiences, district and school leadership are better able to make informed policy decisions and advocate for funding and resources that provide students with equitable access to athletics, academic and extra-curricular after school programming, track-out programming, and support for family engagement opportunities. While the busing for diversity policy has shown to have research-based benefits regarding increasing student achievement data, increasing graduation rates, and serves to benefit all students in the school system, the study district and others who implement such student assignment policies must accept responsibility for, and take measures to ensure, that students were fully served and have access to the equitable comprehensive opportunities that they would have if attending their neighborhood school. As an exploratory study, these voices also broaden the understanding of the impacts of student assignment plans that promote busing for diversity that may have a substantial impact on policy at the school and district level. This study differs from prior works by offering a genuine student perspective on the benefits and drawbacks of being bused for diversity as it pertains to the academics, extra-curriculars, social, and family engagement aspects of school.

## Definition of Terms

This study requires the clarification and definition of terms related to the study that were most frequently used.

- *Busing for Diversity*: The practice of assigning and transporting students to schools within or outside their local school districts to diversify the racial or socio-economic make-up of schools.
- *Equity*: Freedom from favoritism or bias, justice according to right or natural law. Educational Consultants from EDEquity, Inc. (2015) define equity as: Applying

additional or different resources to ensure all students receive what they need to meet and exceed grade level standards. Educational Consultants from EDEquity, Inc. (2015) define educational equity as: Educational equity is the belief that access to quality instruction for all students will be achieved when the result of deliberate actions to close the racial achievement gap becomes the driving force of the organization. Equity is about understanding the assets students bring to learning

- *Free & Reduced Lunch*: Children in households with incomes below 130% of the federal poverty level or those receiving SNAP/Food Stamps or TANF qualify for free meals. Those with family incomes between 130% and 185% of the federal poverty level qualify for reduced-price meals.
- *Magnet School:* a public school offering special instruction and programs not available elsewhere, designed to attract a more diverse student body from throughout a school district.
- *Multi-Track Year-Round School*: Multi-track means that groups of students (4 in Wake County) were on different schedules while attending the same school. At any given time, 3 tracks were in school, and one is "tracked out" which means, on vacation. Some vacation time, national holidays, is shared by all tracks.
- *Socio-economic status*: One's social standing or class. It is typically measured by combining income, education, and occupation. Many school districts use the free/reduced lunch status for the socioeconomic student data.

## Limitations and Delimitations of Study

This study is limited in that the data collected relied on the student participants providing thoughtful and honest data in their interviews. The study relied on student perception regarding

student assignment policies in addition to their own experiences related to academics, extra-curricular involvement, and social-emotional well-being. It should be noted that the study is limited to only eight students, four in high school and four in middle school, who were bused for diversity out of a population of nearly 20,000 students as a part of this student assignment plan. And as previously noted, the study was limited to one school district and two schools within that district.

## Positionality Statement

I am a 41-year-old white woman born and raised in the southern United States of America. I hold a Bachelor of Arts in History, a Master of Arts in School Administration, and am working towards a Doctoral Degree in Education Leadership, all at North Carolina State University. I am a first-generation college graduate and neither of my parents completed the requirements to earn a high school diploma. If it were not for high quality teachers, schools, and access to educational opportunities, it is unlikely that I would have had the support to obtain higher education and ultimately attain a position as a school leader. Therefore, I am committed to ensuring that all students have equitable access to educational experiences and opportunities that may improve the trajectory of their lives and make them productive citizens.

I have worked for a large North Carolina school system for the duration of my professional career, approaching 20 years-eight as a teacher and 11 years as a school administrator. I have always worked at diverse schools and have committed to operationalizing equitable experiences for all students. As an employee of the subject district, I also have extensive knowledge regarding student assignment planning and background knowledge of the system's commitment to ensuring that schools have a diverse population of students. As a student at North Carolina State University and an employee of the 14th largest school system in

the United States, I was able to access the necessary resources to conduct my research. However, I recognize that my positionality is shaped by my privilege and access to resources, and I am cautious to not make assumptions based on my own experiences and opinions. As a high school principal, I will be intentional about selecting student subjects from schools other than my own, to which I have no connection or direct position of power. I acknowledge that this research was an area of interest on the relevant topic of school diversification and integration in a current political environment that is leading to the resegregation of schools in this system. I was especially interested in learning directly from students the ways in which adults in positions of leadership can support access to resources and close opportunity gaps that exist due to bureaucratic systems and structures.

The literature review in Chapter 2 sought to provide a thorough understanding of the historical context of the integration of schools since the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954. The review also examined a great body of research in support of diverse schools that iterated a positive impact on student achievement and social-emotional well-being. Contradicting viewpoints were also examined as they relate to the research problem.

# CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

## Background

Following the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling in 1954, numerous districts across the United States participated in student assignment practices that enlisted busing for desegregation to ensure that schools were moving towards integration (Eubanks, 2004; Gordon, 1994; Gutierrez et al., 2009). However, limited progress was being made to ensure racial diversity in schools, especially in the Southeastern United States until *Brown v. Board II* encouraged increased efforts "with all deliberate speed" (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1955).

The *Coleman Report* (1966), a commissioned product of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, supported the idea that socioeconomic school integration could increase academic achievement more than any other school strategy. The report put a research-based onus on the importance of a child's background and socioeconomic status in determining academic outcomes, also offering that the students in one's class can have a greater impact on a student's learning than the teacher in the classroom. While controversial at the time, the *Coleman Report* increased the belief and practice that school systems should make further efforts to integrate schools for racial and socio-economic diversity despite the pushback experienced in the 1960s (Dickinson, 2016). To do so, districts across the nation implemented busing for diversity and introduced the first magnet schools to better integrate public schools (Archbald, 2004; Henry & Feurerstein, 1999; Payne, 2019). These policies were often met with resistance and would preface decades of legal action regarding student assignment policies (Dorsey, 2008; McConnell, 2020; Merritt, 2005).

Despite numerous challenges, the practice of busing for diversity was reaffirmed in *Swann v. Charlotte Mecklenburg* in 1971 when the court ruled in favor of busing for diversity to integrate schools. Since that time, several major cities have implemented busing for diversity,

although nearly all currently under the premise of socio-economic status to avoid legal implications of busing or student assignment practices around race. To fully understand the history of busing in the United States, it is important to analyze and understand the history of major cities and districts that implemented busing programs to ensure student diversity in public schools. For that purpose, the review of literature will provide an overview of the history, benefits, and challenges surrounding the use of busing to integrate schools following *Brown*, including the impact of landmark court decisions and specific case studies of American cities who utilized a variety of student assignment tools to diversify student populations. The remaining focus will be on the research surrounding the benefits of socio-economically and racially diverse schools, the consequences of diversity driven student assignment plans, and policy and data implications for increasing K-12 diversity in public schools.

**Boston Public Schools, Massachusetts**

In the wake of *Brown* (1954), Boston continued to evade changes to separate, unequal, and segregated public schools (Carson, 2004). A strong NAACP chapter, with help from attorney and Civil Rights activist Edward Barshak, demanded more from their public schools, targeting de facto segregation, and calling for action from the ineffective Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (Scott, 2004).

In 1974, a federal court order (*Morgan v. Hennigan*) mandated the desegregation of Boston Public Schools through a system of busing students. The mandate led to a series of racial protests and riots that brought national attention during the first years of implementation. As part of the plan, the United States District Court laid out a plan for compulsory busing of students between predominantly white and black areas of the city. The plan was implemented for over a decade until the late 1980s and influenced the demographic shifts of Boston's student population,

leading to a decline in public school enrollment and “white flight” to the suburbs (Anderson 2006; Formisano, 2004).

In an exhibit from UMASS Boston’s MOSAIC Project, entitled *What About the Kids?: A look into the student perspective on Boston desegregation* (Beaubrun & Prescott, 2015), researchers interviewed and collected artifacts from students who were bused for diversity at the elementary, middle, and high school levels during the tumultuous forced desegregation period. They noted the following differences in the impact of busing on each level:

> The first section, Elementary, demonstrates the innocence of young children more afraid of making new friends than of racism and violence. They were also the children who sent more letters of prayer than opposition.
>
> According to many of the essays written by middle school students, they were initially afraid of violence and being bused far from home. By the end of the first year, they admitted to “having the best year ever.” These students attest that very little violence ensued at the middle school level.
>
> High school students demonstrated the greatest opposition to busing than any other group of students. Their reasons varied from being afraid of violence to starting a new school for senior year. Many high school students opposed starting over because they already had a position on a sports team, bought class rings, or worked close to home. Forced busing during high school proved difficult. It is also this age group where the most violence erupted including fistfights, stabbings, and riots. More notable than the violence is the cooperation and peace that came after. High schools in Boston began to set an example for racial tolerance and cooperation among students.

While Boston, like other cities across the United States, grappled with mandated desegregation rulings such as *Morgan v. Hennigan*, there was also an entity called the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity, Inc. who sought to increase the level of integration in Boston Public Schools. METCO, born out of the Civil Rights Movement, was a voluntary, yet partially state-supported program to provide Boston residents with opportunities to attend schools in neighboring suburban districts that were predominantly white and overall, more affluent to promote voluntary desegregation efforts through an application process (Angrist & Lang, 2004). Their mission and vision statements offer a clear pathway towards their aims to improve the overall student experience in Massachusetts schools through a partnership with Boston City Schools and more than 30 surrounding districts:

- Mission: The Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity, Inc. (METCO) provides students with a strong academic foundation rich in cultural, educational, ethnic, socioeconomic, and racial diversity and fosters the opportunity for children from Boston and from neighboring suburbs to develop a deeper understanding of each other in an integrated public-school setting.
- Vision: The Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity, Inc. (METCO) strives to be a leader in voluntary school integration within the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and across the nation to promote school diversity, close the achievement gap, and overcome racial barriers. (METCOINC.org, 2023)

In its first year of existence in 1966, the first 220 METCO students rode buses from Boston neighborhoods to schools in seven suburbs of Boston, including Arlington, Braintree, Brookline, Newton, and Wellesley. These other districts acknowledged the benefits of diversifying their predominantly white student populations, and more and more districts signed

on to take part in the program over the years. METCO secured funding to support transportation, family engagement efforts, and more through the Department of Education and the Carnegie Corporation. To further advance the efforts of METCO, supporters succeeded in getting the Massachusetts State Legislature to pass Massachusetts General Law Chapter 76, Section 12A (the Racial Imbalance Act), which granted school committees the right to "*adopt a plan for attendance at its schools by any child who resides in another city, town, or regional school district in which racial imbalance...exists in a public school in order to eliminate such racial imbalance."* This legislation made the Commonwealth of Massachusetts financially responsible for any town that wishes to enroll students from outside the district for the purpose of racial integration, and the state has supported METCO every year since, with enrollments peaking at around 3,500 participants each year. While the funding for METCO is dependent upon legislated decisions in the budget annually, it is important to note that the program has been funded annually at some level since 1968 and continues to support more than 3,000 students annually at over 190 public schools outside of Boston (METCO.org, 2022). METCO continues to be one of few programs in the nation that seeks to diversify schools through inter-district collaboration.

Much has been written to support the efforts of the METCO program and the way in which it has gone about the business of desegregating schools for so many years. In the work, *The Other Boston Busing Story: What's Won and Lost Across the Boundary Line*, Susan Eaton provides readers with statistics that show a great contrast of high school graduation rates that support the notion that METCO participants graduated with much higher success than their Boston City counterparts regarding race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status. Through interviews with more than 30 METCO student alum, she concludes that "METCO's suburban

schools were, in the eyes of past participants and their families, clearly connected to wider opportunities in American Society" (Eaton, 2001).

A report by Angrist and Lang (2004) found that METCO was a promising approach to improving the education of children living in poverty who had been previously assigned to predominantly segregated Boston City Schools. They noted that participation in the program increased reading achievement levels, increased high school graduation rates, lowered rates of disciplinary exclusion, and had no lasting negative effects on the achievement of their suburban classmates (Angrist & Lang, 2004).

Outside of the METCO program, in 2009, the Boston Board of Education renewed the debate around busing programs for diversity within the City of Boston. As of the mid-2010s, Boston shifted demographically to a majority minority school district, with Latinos making up the largest sect of the student population. While Boston Public Schools, like most other districts, ceased to bus for diversity around this period, various busing programs remain to support school choice and educational equity (Burkholder, 2010; Rabovsky, 2011). Ultimately, an analysis of the busing program in Boston revealed that the policy provided invaluable services to minority student groups. For example, busing provided Latino students with access to bilingual immersion Boston schools that had a proven record of helping students who speak Spanish become more fluent in English while maintaining high test scores (Vaznis, 2009).

**Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Schools, North Carolina**

Following *Brown* (1954), Charlotte, North Carolina schools were slow to integrate, although did not experience much of the violence and unrest that other southern city counterparts did (Farinde et al., 2014). However, Charlotte did become the target of a major desegregation suit that led to a landmark ruling that would impact integration efforts and student assignment

policy far and wide. In the mid-1960s, the Swann family sued to reassign their 6-year-old son from an all-Black school to an integrated school closer to their home. The Swann *v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education (1971)* case became a landmark decision, requiring the district to reassign students to new schools to balance their racial composition. This case not only began the intentional desegregation of Charlotte schools, but also paved the way for districts across the nation as they pursued busing plans for diversity to comply with integration orders (Hale, 2018).

For decades following Swann, school enrollment and student assignment practices, including busing, were designed to achieve racial integration, making Charlotte "the city that made desegregation work" (Godwin et al., 2006). During this period, test scores for black students continued to rise and suspension rates decreased, especially at the elementary and middle school levels. However, entering the late 90s, "Black achievement as measured by standardized tests has leveled off to a point well below the achievement of white students, and this gap has remained relatively stable" (Hovenkamp, 1996).

In 1997, Charlotte was the target of another suit that ultimately ended mandatory busing and redrew assignment boundaries. In this case, William Capacchione sued the district because he believed that his child was denied entry to a magnet program based on race, ultimately leading to the reaffirming of a 2001 state court order to stop using race in school assignments. As a result, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools devised a new student assignment plan that drew boundaries based only on classroom capacity and the geographical concentration of students (neighborhood schools). This new plan resulted in nearly half of all students in the district changing schools between 2001 and 2003 (Mickelson, 2001).

Following the *Capacchione v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools* decision and resulting impacts to student reassignment in 1999, Charlotte has once again become segregated. A report

in 2019 shows that Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools were as segregated as they were before the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954 and that the achievement gap has widened between white and minority students (Nordstrom, 2020).

**Wake County Public Schools, North Carolina**

In contrast to many other large Southern school districts, Wake County has never been the subject of court-ordered desegregation. In the 1970s, under federal pressure to develop plans for integration, the majority-black Raleigh City Schools and majority-white surrounding county district merged to form the Wake County Public School System (WCPSS). To balance school enrollments, district leadership utilized students' race as a primary factor in school assignments until a federal court decision ended mandatory desegregation efforts in the nearby Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (Carter, 2023).

In 2000, upon ending race-based busing, Wake County Schools shifted to using students' socioeconomic status and levels of academic achievement (NC End of Grade Test proficiency) in school assignment planning in lieu of race. As part of the plan, the district was divided into geographic nodes of about 150 students. WCPSS assigned each node to a base elementary, middle, and high school pathway, which served as the base school for attendance in the node (Carter, 2023, WCPSS.net). This proved to be a continuation of prior busing efforts to alleviate high poverty rates in schools.

In 2010, Wake County took a step back from its long-standing busing program due to a change in the School Board majority, reducing the number of students bused to approximately 20% of the total student population (~32,000). The newly elected Board chose to decimate the busing plan in favor of creating community-based schools, citing environmental, economic, and costs of busing as reasons to move away from prior student assignment policies that focused on

the integration of schools. Supporters of this change argued that community schools would promote “increased parental involvement and school pride” (Wright, 2010). Opposition to the new emphasis on community schools argued that community-based schools would only increase inequities in school funding, re-segregate schools, and lead to lower levels of academic achievement (Glazer, 2010).

Currently, WCPSS is still busing approximately 23% of its student population based upon free and reduced lunch status and academic achievement levels, attempting to limit the number of students in each school eligible for subsidized lunches to under 40 percent to avoid legal challenges that would strike down a race-based student assignment policy (Winter, 2010).

Overall, Wake County Schools have maintained remarkable success in balancing public schools, attaining high levels of academic achievement, and strong efforts to create magnet schools. In Gerald Grant’s work, “*Hope and Despair in an American City: Why there are no bad schools in Raleigh*”, he professed:

> And then there is Raleigh, where more than 8 of 10 pass, and the visiting researcher is told--and it seems true--"there are no bad schools in Raleigh." (State requirements, of course, do vary widely, and North Carolina's are among the least rigorous, but even so the differences between the two cities are huge.) One of the first schools visited in Raleigh, in the historic black district, serves a student population that is majority black with one-third of children from low-income families. The school nevertheless attracted whites from across the county to its [magnet] programs in art and science. In 3rd grade 94 percent of white children and 79 percent of blacks passed the state math test. By 5th grade 100 percent of both blacks and whites passed the test." There are very few such public schools in northeastern and midwestern cities of similar size. And if there are, they

> are generally in rapid transition to becoming all-black. There may be the occasional KIPP or charter school that is predominantly minority and scores high. But this is a traditional public school, and all Wake County public schools seem to be similar in achievement and attractiveness.

A 2023 study indicated that students who learn alongside more high-achieving students because of reassignment policies have stronger academic achievement. In WCPSS, it was noted that reassigned students performed slightly better on statewide tests and were less likely to be suspended, especially when they were learning alongside higher-performing and wealthier peers (Carter, 2023).

Of all case studies of the use of busing for diversity in the United States, Wake County is among the least contested and tumultuous, with some continued success today. The current Board of Education has reaffirmed a commitment to diverse schools, high student achievement, and only seems hampered by the limitations of a national teacher and bus driver shortage that were proving problematic in affirming student assignment policies that promote diversity.

## Challenges & Benefits

Numerous studies over the past fifty years affirm the benefits of racially and socio-economically diverse schools and must be considered in assessing the research questions that seek to determine the academic and social experiences and perceptions of secondary students in the subject district who were bused for diversity away from their neighborhood school (Yun, 2007, Wells et al. 2016, Coleman, 1966). In doing so, any challenges and benefits that such policies present for students and families that might impact their formative secondary school experience must be thoughtfully examined. In addition, the successes and consequences of diversity driven student assignment systems must be weighed to ensure the best outcomes for

students when determining student assignment plans that offer strategies to increase the diversity of the student body.

This review seeks to provide an in-depth overview of research over the past fifty years that analyzes student assignment planning aimed at intentionally diversifying schools while also considering the consequences of such policies and programs as well as a glimpse of how districts across the nation have grappled with school integration in the school system vignettes. In doing so, the review provides a platform for informed decision making regarding the benefits and challenges faced by students who were impacted by reassignment for diversification. Such information may serve in making policy improvements that uphold the academic benefits while mitigating challenges surrounding access to extra-curricular activities, family engagement, and social well-being for students who were most impacted by such policies. Ultimately, a review of the literature in conjunction with the research can glean which efforts for school diversification and desegregation were most successful, and whether the benefits and challenges associated with efforts were worthwhile in determining how to best serve students.

## Benefits of Racially and Socio-Economically Diverse Schools

Over fifty years of data exists to support the idea that socioeconomic balance benefits students in K-12 schools (Coleman, 1966; Wells et al. 2016; Yun, 2007). As the world becomes an increasingly global community, the academic and soft-skill benefits of working and learning in more diverse settings is undeniable and increasingly sought after by parents. The 2015 National Assessment of Educational Progress supports the idea that all children, regardless of socio-economic status, see academic and other gains because of integration-including increased expressive language, leadership skills, college admission, attendance, self-confidence, and critical and creative thinking abilities (Kurlaender & Yun, 2007). Additional studies reveal that

"exposure to diversity enhances critical thinking and problem-solving ability" as well as increases to "student satisfaction and motivation, general knowledge, and intellectual self-confidence" (Wells et al., 2016). Wells et al. also suggests that the simple act of focusing on the day-to-day experiences of diverse populations in schools may be the missing link to massive academic gains, especially when educators were intentional in nurturing interactions with students and their peers to produce "creativity, motivation, deeper learning, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills" (Wells et al., 2016).

A 2012 study by Basile further concludes that the integration of schools leads to more efficient and equitable access to all kinds of social and cultural capital, noting particularly that early integration in schooling offers students longer lasting and greater impacts. An increasing number of parents are acknowledging that students are growing up in a far more diverse world and that access to diverse schools will lend to students being better able to navigate adulthood in an increasingly global society in which students must utilize diplomacy and respectfully affirm diversity both in and outside of the workplace (Basile, 2012).

Massey and Fischer (2006) have also noted an increase in educational expectations from staff and students in well-integrated schools in comparison to similar segregated schools. They note that these higher expectations lend to greater postsecondary outcomes and access to higher education for all students, especially minority populations and students with lower socio-economic status, adding to the body of work that suggests efforts to diversify schools and classrooms serves all students well beyond K-12 schooling.

In a study spanning a decade long look at drop-out rates and PISA scores, researchers noted, "desegregated schools likely played a more effective role in counterbalancing student-level non-school problems that did segregated ones" that generally led to racially and

economically diverse schools having been more successful that their segregated counterparts in improving achievement, graduation rates for students of color, and sending students to college (Perry et al., 2022).

A 2019 study by Parris et al. both added to and challenged the body of literature by seeking the perceptions of ethnically diverse students on whether school diversity mattered to them. While school climate is a proven predictor of important academic and social outcomes for all students, differences in perceptions of school climate have emerged across varying demographic groups. The work noted that students were divided on their experiences and the value of being a part of a diverse school community, especially if it meant that the school was farther than their "neighborhood" school. The authors offered that because the bused students, often those most marginalized, carry most of the burden of assignment plans for diversity that they should also be offered the choice to attend neighborhood schools in lieu of forced busing (Parris et al., 2019).

The reality that oftentimes the most marginalized students carry the brunt of these assignment plans permeates through much of the research with regards to busing plans. One exception to this is the implementation of Magnet School Programs. The U.S. Department of Education defines a magnet school as "a public elementary school, public secondary school, public elementary education center, or public secondary education center that offers a special curriculum capable of attracting substantial numbers of students of different racial backgrounds." The term "magnet" refers to how these schools attract students across traditional school boundaries with innovative curricula to desegregate racially isolated schools or to reduce racial isolation in a district or consortia of districts. Magnet programs' innovative, theme-based curricula may emphasize certain subjects, such as visual and performing arts or science,

technology, engineering, and mathematics, or may adopt distinct instructional models, such as dual language immersion, Montessori, or International Baccalaureate programs (Reynolds, 2016; Walton et al., 2018).

Over the past four decades, the US Department of Education's Magnet Schools Assistance Program has provided federal grant funding to support districts in developing Magnet programs to assist in diversifying schools. Unlike situations in which inner-city students would be bused into the suburbs, identifying schools as magnet application schools seek to integrate inner-city or urban schools with students from the suburbs who may be drawn to a particular magnet theme or academic program. Some districts support these magnet choice options with busing, but others rely on parents who have the ability and resources to drive their students to and from these magnet schools. As of 2023, 45 out of 50 states have free-standing magnet schools, and the remaining five offer some type of magnet programming in their district, serving more than 3.5 million students nationwide (ed.gov, 2023).

Magnet schools are a good example of the desire to implement managed or controlled-choice programs that provide families with school choice options while simultaneously establishing desegregation commitments to establish and/or maintain diverse and equitable schooling environments. Overall, especially large districts are best served when implementing several high-quality strategies including the implementation of Magnet School Programming or busing for diversity to achieve the highest rate of school integration possible (Saporito & Sohoni, 2006).

## Consequences of Diversity Driven Student Assignment Plans

While the literature strongly supports the diversification of public schools, noting in nearly every case that student achievement, critical thinking, and soft skills are positively

impacted, there are many consequences of diversity driven student assignment plans that leaders and policymakers must work to mitigate. Research suggests that most of these consequences overwhelmingly become the burden of minority and/or students who derive from low socio-economic areas (Bacher-Hicks, 2021). Often, these students bear the burden of being bused long distances away from their neighborhood schools into predominantly white or upper-middle class schools, have increased discontinuity in the schools and feeder patterns throughout their K-12 experience, and have limited access to extra-curricular activities and academic opportunities as compared to their peers (Domina et al., 2021; Woodward, 2011).

Much of the literature noting the consequences of diversity driven student assignment plans presents a particular city or district in which busing was utilized as a strategy to integrate or diversify schools following the Brown decisions of 1954 and 1955 and additional impetus from the Civil Rights Act of 1964. One such example is Woodward's (2011) article entitled "How Busing Burdened Blacks: Critical Race Theory and Busing for Diversity in Nashville-Davidson County", in which the author highlights the notion that black students often travel nearly twice as far to school under reassignment for diversity plans, often passing both their own neighborhood schools as well as predominantly white schools on the way to their assigned school. For many black families, this assignment plan was a means to access high quality resources despite the unfair burden of busing. Woodward also notes that the students of Nashville who were targeted as part of the reassignment plan experienced an inordinate amount of discontinuity in the schools they attended, averaging more than five schools in their K-12 career with frequent reassignments due to a lack of continuity and stability in feeder pathways. Perhaps most concerning is that students often had differing school assignments for kindergarten and first grade, causing a major disruption to the formative early years of education and

socialization. When Nashville first implemented busing for diversity, many white families opted out of public schooling (despite not bearing the burden of most busing) due to concerns over a perceived decline in academics and fears surrounding discipline and safety. In the data Woodward presents, immediately following the implementation of busing, test scores increased district-wide and concerns over safety and discipline failed to actualize both in quantitative data and perception. Numerous lawsuits would ensue in the Nashville-Davidson schools challenging the district's busing policy and those that were most impacted by reassignment over the following decade.

Additional research on the diversification efforts of another southeastern district, the Wake County Public School System in North Carolina, can be found in the 2021 article entitled "The Kids on the Bus". The literature reaffirms that through the district policy of busing nearly 25% of the student population based on socio-economic status, positive results in both academics and disciplinary data were achieved (Domina et al., 2021). The authors offered that reassignment modestly boosted reassigned students' math achievement, reduced reassigned students' rate of both in-school and exclusionary suspension, and had no-offsetting negative consequences on other outcomes (Domina et al., 2021). While this analysis supports the benefits of diverse schools, it advances the body of literature in tackling the idea that mandatory busing might "exact a social and educational toll from reassigned students". In this regard, the authors noted that little research existed to address this question as most of the literature examines student achievement outcomes and often does not speak to the student experiences and consequences of the reassignments that make school diversity possible. In their research, they concluded that several "spill-over" effects occur because of busing for diversity. One such effect is that of a constant changing of classroom peers due to reassignment. Often students bused for diversity

find themselves in non-traditional feeder patterns over the course of the K-12 experience and are more likely to be impacted by reassignment plans, resulting in changing peers and the pressure to make new social connections, sometimes annually (Carlson & Bell, 2021). Distance to school assignments, a greater potential that students would not attend school with neighborhood peers due to limited assignment node sizes and declines in family engagement for bused students were also noted as consequences in assignment policies that bused students for diversity. Perhaps even more concerning is the determination that the effect of reassignment differs by more than two miles closer in proximity for white and Hispanic students than black students who are reassigned, bringing to light that some student groups experience reassignment differently (Domina et al., 2021).

## Policy and Data Implications for Increasing K-12 Diversity

According to the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, the desegregation of U.S. public schools peaked in 1988. Since that time, schools have become more segregated because of changes in demographic residential patterns with continuing growth in suburbs and new communities, as well as the gentrification of older urban areas. Jonathan Kozol found that as of 2005, the proportion of black students at majority-white schools was at "a level lower than in any year since 1968", noting that “changing population patterns, with dramatically increased growth in the South and Southwest, decreases in old industrial cities, and much increased immigration of new ethnic groups, have altered school populations in many areas” (Kozol, 2006). School systems across the United States are currently facing a turning point in which significant action will be required through student assignment policies to ensure that schools do not become increasingly segregated.

Much of the literature outside of benefits and consequences of diversification tackles recommendations for policy makers on how to successfully advocate for students in areas in which diversity policies may be challenged (Daniel, 2004; Daniel & Walker, 2014). Roberts (2019) suggests that school superintendents and administrators must be known as an uncompromising presence for diversity, and an advocate for all children in policy-shaping sessions that are conducted with "integrity, intentionality, evidence-based decision-making, and consensus-seeking". She also notes the need for administrators to "articulate, implement, incentivize, and celebrate diversity efforts". Further, Roberts (2019) calls on parents to be a voice for integration to keep issues surrounding diversity in school "always on the table and part of the conversation affecting school policy". It is important to note that to make political and policy strides in diversifying schools, not only should the documented benefits to low-income students be highlighted, but policy makers must promote the "emerging recognition that middle- and upper-class students benefit in diverse classrooms (Wells et al., 2016).

Williams and Houck's (2013) examination of the desegregation policy in the Wake County and Charlotte Mecklenburg systems of North Carolina also present important policy perspectives while navigating political challenges to busing and desegregation. In the early 2000s, challenges to Charlotte-Mecklenburg's diversity policy moved to a scenario in which students predominantly attended neighborhood schools with very limited busing for diversity. As a result, schools have become more segregated, with data noting that while overall performance of students in Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools is somewhat aligned with Wake County, there is much greater variance in school-to-school performance, with a likelihood that schools in Charlotte-Mecklenburg are performing at extremes-low and high, with a high correlation to socio-economic status. In contrast, Wake County has maintained a high level of busing for socio-

economic diversity and in conjunction with a thriving Magnet schools program, data suggests that Wake experiences higher growth, higher performance composite scores, and that Wake schools perform at higher levels overall despite some efforts to move to choice-based plans and eliminate busing efforts circa 2011. The authors note that Wake should be weary of Charlotte's controlled-choice plan in terms of resegregation and student achievement moving forward. They also note that in many cases, Wake and Charlotte-Mecklenburg can be seen as two examples of districts that have experienced "the rise and fall of desegregation policy" (p. 585).

Researcher Richard Kahlenberg of the Century Foundation argues that educating students of different social and economic levels in the same classroom is a powerful tool for increasing achievement, noting that "in most cases, low-income students in school districts with socioeconomic programs are doing better than low-income students in segregated districts". He also argues that socioeconomic is the best approach of the four turn-around strategies that the U.S. Department of Education requires of districts that receive federal economic-stimulus funds to choose from to address low-performing schools-others include moving to charter school governance, replacing principals and staff members, etc. (Zehr, 2010). Utilization of socioeconomic integration is a viable policy option for improving low-performing schools, especially in urban and suburban areas (Chapman, 2014).

## Conclusion

Research shows that the academic and soft-skill gains of diverse schools are undeniable. While student assignment policy efforts to increase diversity in school populations are necessary and lend to better outcomes for students, it is important that policy-makers and school leaders take care to mitigate challenges of busing that are often experienced by minority students (Bankston & Caldas, 1996; Lyons & Chesley, 2004). School districts that are committed to

busing or magnet programs for diversification have a responsibility to ensure that they are equipped to provide equitable and sound participation in academic, extra-curricular activities, and family engagement efforts for all students and families to reap the many benefits offered from socio-economic and racially diverse schools (Bryant et al., 2017).

While parents, policymakers, and the Courts might view desegregation as a tired issue, researchers offer that renewed energy and focus are necessary to curtail a return to the inequities and inequalities of pre-Brown public education (Carsey, 2004; Hanushek et al., 2009). A promising education policy should also look to act on decades of research findings and the experience of educators on the ground who affirm that children of all races and backgrounds reap huge benefits from attending racially and economically diverse schools (Eaton & Rivkin, 2010). Some of the most successful and long-standing desegregation plans, for example, METCO in Boston, MA and busing as part of student assignment planning in Wake County, NC do incur increased transportation and human resource costs. In a time of budget constraints and labor shortages, Eaton notes that it is vital that we think creatively about how to sustain racial diversity:

> Many states allow for "open enrollment" through which students may attend schools outside of the community where they live. Such plans could become tools for diversity, through recruitment in neighborhoods of color. Entities could do more to create racially and economically diverse schools by enrolling students from more than one municipality. (Eaton, 2010, p. 5).

While funding, support, and policy for the continued desegregation of schools will vary greatly from state to state, it is important that educational and policy leaders seek to build a learning community to expound on and replicate successes of other districts in the best interest of

students, utilizing all tools and supports at their disposal as they determine what works best for their own community.

Despite the vast body of research that exists on school diversification following the *Brown* decision, there is still much to be done regarding the collection of student and family perception and experiential data regarding the impacts of being assigned to a school beyond their neighborhood school for the purpose of diversification. Only then, can all benefits and challenges be thoughtfully considered and addressed by school leaders and policymakers to ensure the best possible outcomes and experiences for all students. This study seeks to provide a glimpse of the student experience to add to the literature around the benefits and challenges faced when attending a school far from home as part of a student assignment plan aimed at diversifying schools. Additionally, the study will provide an updated source of qualitative student interview data post-Covid, amid a teacher and bus driver shortage as schools navigate times of budget constraint.

# CHAPTER 3*:* METHODOLOGY

## Research Question and Study Design

This qualitative, exploratory case study was designed to examine the lived experiences of eight secondary students in a large public school district in North Carolina who were bused for diversity as a part of a Board adopted student assignment policy that aims to limit high concentrations of students with low socio-economic status. The study sought to better understand the benefits and challenges of attending a school that is ten miles or more from the student's home and not the closest school to the student's home. More specifically, the study identified and analyzed the impact that the busing of students per the current student assignment plan had on academics, social & emotional well-being, family engagement, and access to extracurricular activities. Overarching research questions were as indicated:

1. What are the academic and social experiences and perceptions of students who are bused for diversity in lieu of attending their neighborhood school?
2. What challenges and benefits does this policy present for students and families that impact their middle school experience regarding academic benefits and challenges, access to extracurricular activities, and family engagement?

The qualitative, exploratory case study approach was most appropriate because it is useful in studying a current, real-life case in progress to gather accurate information, and is bound by parameters including a specific place, timeframe, and the subjects involved who share a commonality (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this case study, parameters were defined as identified secondary students of the subject district who travelled more than ten miles one-way to school during the 2023-2024 school year time frame. These students were part of remote nodes that are bused to a school in a suburban area, typically of middle to high income in a larger base

attendance area. A case study method was also appropriate as it helped to shed light on "decisions" through the lens of the study participants (Yin, 2018). In this case, the study sought to draw qualitative, data-based conclusions regarding the benefits and challenges of the student experience in the decision of implementing a busing for diversity plan based upon student interviews. This study sought to provide a "thick description" of these lived student experiences to produce findings and interpretations that allowed readers to derive a deep understanding of the problem, research questions, and data analysis (Bloomberg, 2023). It also shed light on how leadership may work to address the need for student supports and the mitigation of inequities in the development of future assignment plans that feature voluntary desegregation efforts such as busing. The case study method and interview protocol also provided an enlightening overview of the student experience through student voice, which is lacking in prior research and case studies around the impacts of busing for diversity. The exploratory nature of the study lent to even greater possibilities to acquire a variety of new knowledge and perspectives when there are no single set of anticipated outcomes (Creswell, 2013).

## Location Context

The subject district is among the largest in North Carolina as measured by population. The district encompasses multiple municipalities, as well as rural county land with a diverse student population make-up. The total population of the county exceeded one million as of the most recent census in 2020. The primary demographic make-up was recorded as 58% white, 21% black, 11% Hispanic, and 9% Asian. Over 90% of adults reported to have earned a high school diploma, and more than 55% possessed a 4-year degree as of the last census in 2020.

The subject school district is among the largest public school system in North Carolina and among the top 20 in the nation by population, serving more than 160,000 students at nearly

200 schools. The district had more than 20,000 employees as of the 23-24 school year, and an operating budget of over 2 billion dollars. The subject district has long been celebrated for its commitment to voluntary desegregation efforts that seek to ensure that schools are diverse and have access to equitable resources. In the early 1970s, the city and county school systems merged to form a larger system that serves all students in the county who opt for public schools. The then newly created system utilized busing to diversify schools, first by race, and later by an assignment plan that focused on socio-economic status that continues to exist today. This district also built a thriving, nationally recognized magnet program that provides specialized programming designed to attract predominantly affluent students to attend schools in urban areas of the county, often in low-income neighborhoods.

## Sampling & Participants

Student participants were identified based upon their proximity to the school and residency in a node identified as being bused for diversity to their base school utilizing bus manifests and the student information system database, with additional assistance from the subject district's Office of Student Assignment. All identified secondary students, four from middle school and four from the high school level, travelled more than 10 miles to the school, with an average of a 45–70-minute bus ride time each way. Every student identified also had at least 2 other secondary schools within 5-8 miles of their home that were not viable options for them to attend per the designated, binding assignments of the district student assignment plan. Additionally, only students who were considered "upperclassmen" at the schools, and who had at least one year of prior experience attending the school were asked to participate (7th or 8th graders at middle school and 10th, 11th, or 12th graders at the high schools). These upper grades students had a better understanding of the culture of the school, longer-term relationships with

staff members, and theoretical access to participate in extracurricular activities and athletics at the school (district policy prevents 6th graders from participation in athletics). These subjects also had a greater understanding of resources and support that may be provided by the school and system at-large as well as the challenges and barriers faced in attending a school a greater distance from their home than most students in the district. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants for confidentiality. Tables are provided in the data analysis overview that outline student's age, grade level, distance traveled to school, and other pertinent demographic information.

## Data Collection and Synthesis

Data was collected through the facilitation of individual one-on-one interviews of each of the eight participants in the study. Students were interviewed at their school, in a known and comfortable location, through a common interview protocol consisting of 14 questions and additional follow-up questions when necessary, for clarification. Interviews were conducted face-to-face and were recorded using Otter.ai software to aid in transcription and provide the researcher with a digital record of the responses for later detailed analysis. Study participants were given a brief overview of the reason for the study and were informed that their responses and names would remain anonymous. Access to interview this sample of students was approved by the North Carolina State University Institutional Review Board, WCPSS Internal Research Review Committee, Assistant Superintendent, Principal, and was further contingent upon the receipt of written parent and permission. Students also provided their own individual consent to participate in the interviews. Each interview took approximately 30-45 minutes to complete plus additional time needed to fill out a brief survey of demographic information. All eight interviews were completed during the spring semester of the 23-24 school year. The selected

schools were in a higher income area in which low-income population nodes were bused into the school as a part of the student assignment plan to increase diversity, making them favorable options for this study.

The research questions and their purpose can be found in Table 1. Follow up questions were necessary as part of the exploratory study and were documented as adjustments to the protocol.

**Table 1**

*Interview Questions and Purpose*

| Questions | Purpose |
|---|---|
| 1. How long have you attended your current school?<br>2. Are you a bus rider, walker, or car pooler? | Ensure credibility of study by noting longevity at the school (1+ years of attendance) & confirming bus ridership. |
| 3. What are the challenges to a long bus ride?<br>4. Are there any benefits to a long bus ride? | Note the direct impact of bus ride and student perceptions regarding time/distance, as well as challenges and benefits. |
| 5. Is the school you attend the closest school to your house?<br>6. Were you assigned to attend this school, or did you apply to attend this school?<br>7. What are some of the challenges to attending a school that is far from your home?<br>8. What is the best thing about attending your current school? | Determine student perceptions and knowledge around school assignment & the challenges and benefits of the student experience at assigned school. |
| 9. How do you think your parent or guardian feels about you going to a school that is a little farther from your home? | Determine student perception of parents' views on challenges/benefits/satisfaction of attending assigned school. |
| 10. Do you participate in any extracurricular activities or sports, why or why not? | Notes level of participation in extracurricular activities. |
| 11. How do you think attending a school far from home impacts you socially?<br>12. Describe academics and support that you have at your current school?<br>13. Are there any actions that the school system or school leaders could take to make your school experience better or easier to attend a school farther from your home? | Notes student perception of need or level of support in place for students who attend school a longer distance from home.<br>Notes social and academic impacts of attending assigned school. |

Interviews were recorded and transcribed for the purposes of manual coding and data extraction to find common themes in benefits and challenges to students who are a part of the

busing for diversity program in the subject district. A coding protocol served to identify commonalities and anecdotal data in the student experience in the areas of school culture and social capital, academic benefits and challenges, family engagement barriers and supports, and level of access to extracurricular activities. Once interviews were transcribed utilizing a transcription service, data was laid out and pre-coded by circling, underlining, and highlighting significant participant quotes or passages from the interview utilizing both manual and software-based coding tools (Boyatzis, 1998). Coding was completed utilizing a three-column lay-out with the transcription of interviews and raw data in Column 1. Preliminary codes that were aligned with the themes of the research question distinctions (extra-curricular activities, academics, social-emotional, and family engagement) were be noted in Column 2. Column 3 provided the final coding for these areas for the purposes of organization and data analysis (Saldana,2021). Data for each interview was coded independently, one at a time. In deriving overarching themes, codes shared by roughly three-fourths of the study's respondents merited consideration in the analysis and potential contributions to the research findings (Harding, 2019).

Data was collected and analyzed to support the overarching case study on the impacts of busing for diversity on the secondary student experience and served in making policy recommendations and requests for supports to ensure equitable access to programming for bused students. Additionally, data contributed to decision-making around future student assignment plans and the construction of a cost-benefit analysis regarding ensuring diversity in the subject district, often at the expense of lower-income families. As part of an exploratory study, this data also brought to light additional areas of interest brought forth by student participants as it related to the student experience in the subject or similar districts.

## Issues of Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness and validity of this exploratory, qualitative study is grounded in what is heard and seen through the structured interviews and time spent with subjects. Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted that credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are important in establishing trustworthiness for qualitative research. To ensure credibility and transferability, research subjects were given the opportunity to thoroughly discuss the phenomenon the researcher seeks to explore; in this case, their experience in attending a school far from their home as part of a district-wide plan to increase diversity in schools (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Detailed recountals from student interviews were used to illustrate key themes and support the results for this study. In doing so, the goal was to establish confirmability and acknowledge and mitigate researcher bias through providing data analysis that is true to the experiences provided by research subjects in this exploratory study. To further this goal, interview transcriptions were conducted utilizing software and checked for accuracy. Participants were provided with a clear understanding of the goals, questions, and parameters of the study, as well as the ability to review interview transcripts as a part of the member-checking process to ensure that their experiences and verbalizations have been reflected accurately.

For this study, eight participants were chosen to demonstrate saturation so that enough data was collected to provide credibility. It was important to interview four participants from each school and level to provide the study with a more robust look into the lived experiences of the student subjects.

To further establish an acceptable level of trustworthiness, it was important that the research, including transcripts of interviews, recordings, and participation waivers be accessible

for at least 5 years following the completion of the study and that the confidentiality of the data remains protected (Yin, 2011).

## Limitations

This exploratory case study was limited to the experiences of a small number of individual students in the subject system who currently attend secondary school. The eight selected participants were a part of the approximate 23% of students in the district who are bused to meet diversity standards as part of the student assignment plan but attend a mere two of the nearly 200 schools in the subject system. Additionally, base attendance and node maps indicated hundreds of nodes, of which the student subjects belonged to a maximum of six.

It must also be noted that students interviewed were adolescents and young adults with varying opinions, experiences, and abilities to verbally communicate their perceptions as related to the research questions being posed. The sample of student subjects were predominantly minority and of lower income status, based upon the area and neighborhoods from which they were bused to the identified subject schools. Further, student interests, family make-ups, and other factors had an impact on the answers to questions posed.

## Conclusion

The exploratory case study approach with accompanying individual interviews was appropriate to collect student perception and experiential information related to the busing for diversity program in the subject district in North Carolina. Conducting these interviews utilizing a standard protocol served in bringing to light the student experience, including both challenges and benefits that students faced in attending a school that is farther from their home. By asking students targeted questions related to academics, social and cultural experiences, participation in extracurricular activities, and what their needs were related to attending identified secondary

schools, it is possible to answer the research questions that were posed to ascertain the impacts that busing had on individual students and their secondary school experience.

While this case study offers valuable information to district and school leaders, the study is limited in scope, examining a small population of students at two secondary schools in a district with nearly 200 elementary, middle, and high schools, in which approximately 23% of students are bused for diversity. Additional interviews or case studies may be desired to provide further information regarding the student experience, perhaps at different levels, including elementary, which may present different benefits and barriers for students and their families. Future studies may also seek to gain perception data from other stakeholders, including parents and school leadership, to add greater context to the barriers and benefits to a busing for diversity program and the impact it has on individuals, families, school staff, and communities at large.

# CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This research centers around a North Carolina school system that has a long-standing history of busing students to achieve racial and later, socioeconomic diversity. This system has been celebrated for its efforts and continuous commitment to ensure that schools are able to balance enrollments with a goal that no school will serve a student population with over 40 percent of students qualifying to receive free or reduced lunch and no more than 25 percent of students reading below grade level (Carter et al., 2022). Since 2000, the system has utilized students' socioeconomic status and levels of academic achievement in determining student assignment plans, dividing the county into geographic nodes of about 150 students that are then assigned to varying schools to meet diversification efforts. Each node of students is assigned an elementary, middle, and high school as a part of their schooling pathway. More rural and suburban schools, especially in affluent neighborhoods, draw students from the inner-city, who are bused upwards of 45 minutes to an hour to meet the goals of the district's student assignment plan.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain a better understanding of the social and academic challenges and benefits that students experienced when bused for diversity to a school that is more than ten miles from their home. In order to complete this study, permission was obtained to interview a sampling of students meeting specific criteria from the school district, parents of subjects, and student subjects to complete an individual interview at the student's school with questions focused on gaining a better understanding of the impacts of busing for diversity on each student's experience with regard to academics, social-emotional well-being, extra-curricular involvement, and overall connection to their school community.

The following primary research questions guided this study:

1. What are the academic and social experiences and perceptions of students who are bused for diversity in lieu of attending their neighborhood school?
2. What challenges and benefits does this policy present for students that impact their secondary school experience regarding academics, access to extracurricular activities, and family engagement?

School administration partnered to identify students who met the research criteria for the study. Twelve students and their families were invited to participate in the study through individual phone calls and information packets and consent forms that were sent home with students. The first eight students to return all consent forms were selected to participate in the interviews, which were held at the student's school during non-instructional time. Student participants were identified based upon their proximity to the school and residency in a node identified as being bused for diversity to their base school utilizing bus manifests and the student information system database with support from the school administration. Four students from the middle school level and four students from the high school level who travel more than 10 miles to their base school were selected to participate in the study. These students had an average of a 45–70-minute bus ride to school each way, with at least two other viable school options closer to their home. Additionally, only students considered "upperclassmen" at their schools with at least two years of experience in the school were selected to ensure that they would have a better understanding of the school culture, longer-term relationships with staff members, and theoretical access to participate in extracurricular activities and athletics at the school. Having been enrolled for a minimum of more than one year at the school will also mean that students have a greater understanding of resources and support that may be provided or

available at the school and system at large as well as the challenges and barriers faced in attending a school a greater distance from their home than most students in the district.

Pseudonyms were assigned to protect the confidentiality of participants. The middle school group was identified from a year-round calendar middle school with approximately 1,000 students and a free & reduced lunch participation rate of 25%. The school is in an affluent area in the district and pulls nearly 200 students from an urban node in the downtown area of the county. Two males and two females were selected to participate who were finishing grades seven & eight at the time of the interviews. The distances from their home to the school ranged from 12-15 miles, and all noted a bus ride each way of at least 45-60 minutes. All students were from minority subgroups (Black & LatinX) and half of the students participated in athletic programming at the school.

The high school group was identified from a large, comprehensive suburban high school with approximately 2,200 students and a free and reduced lunch participation rate of nearly 40%. Three males and one female were selected to participate who were finishing grades ten and eleven at the time of the interviews. The distances from their home to the school ranged from 12-14 miles, and all noted a bus ride each way of at least 45-60 minutes. All students were from minority subgroups (Black & LatinX) and half of the students participated in athletic programming at the school.

**Table 2**

*Interview Subject Demographics*

| Participant | Grade | Age | Race/Sex | Distance to School | Estimated time to school | Extra-Curricular Participation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Alfonso | 11 | 17 | Black/Male | 12 miles | 45 min. | Football Track |
| Bobby | 10 | 16 | Latino/Male | 14 miles | 60 min. | Football Track |
| Carlos | 8 | 13 | Latino/Male | 15 miles | 60 min. | None |
| Donti | 8 | 14 | Black/Male | 12 miles | 45 min. | Football |
| Elle | 7 | 13 | Black/Female | 13 miles | 50-60 min. | Basketball |
| Farrah | 8 | 13 | Latina/Female | 13 miles | 50-60 min. | None |
| Gerardo | 11 | 17 | Latino/Male | 12 miles | 45 min. | None |
| Haley | 10 | 16 | Black/Female | 12 miles | 50 min. | None |

## Data Analysis & Preparation

Interviews were recorded and transcribed over the course of a three-week period utilizing Otter.ai for the purposes of manual coding and data extraction to find common themes in benefits and challenges to students who are a part of the busing for diversity program in the subject district. The Otter.ai program offered an accurate time-stamped transcription that required minimal clean-up. Participants were named anonymously in the transcription.

A coding protocol served to identify commonalities and qualitative data in the student experience in the areas of school culture and social capital, academic benefits and challenges, family engagement barriers and supports, and level of access to extracurricular activities based on the interview questions. Once interviews were transcribed, the coding software provided the researcher with common themes, vocabulary, and summaries of each interview that were then

input into a table for additional coding. Within this table, data was coded by circling, underlining, and highlighting significant participant quotes or passages from the interview utilizing both manual and software-based coding tools.

The researcher then divided significant quotations and statements into tables by questions to support thematic findings within the interviews that related to the overall research questions and individual interview questions. Coding was completed utilizing a three-column lay-out with the transcription of interviews and raw data in column one. Preliminary codes that aligned with the themes of the research question distinctions (extra-curricular activities, academics, social-emotional, and family engagement) were noted in column two. Column three then provided the final coding for these areas for the purposes of organization and data analysis (Saldana,2021). Data for each interview was coded independently, one at a time before interviews were coded holistically. In deriving overarching themes, codes shared by roughly three-fourths of the study's respondents were given consideration in the analysis and potential contributions to the research findings (Harding, 2019). In some cases, either as a supporting quotation or outlier, quotations are provided in the research findings and notable themes.

Data collected was then analyzed to support the overarching case study on the impacts of busing for diversity on the secondary student experience and will also serve in making policy recommendations and requests for supports to ensure equitable access to programming for bused students. Additionally, data may be pertinent to decision-making around future student assignment plans and the construction of a cost-benefit analysis regarding ensuring diversity in the subject district, often at the expense of lower-income families. As part of an exploratory study, this data may also bring to light additional areas of interest brought forth by student participants as it relates to the student experience in the subject or similar districts.

## Findings

Themes 1-6 were arrived at through targeted questions that sought to provide a representation of the academic, social, and extra-curricular experiences of students bused for diversity in the subject district. Theme 7 became apparent through the coding process as each student noted numerous ways that they were supported individually by their teachers, coaches, and school administrators. It became clear that many of these supports were intentional on the part of school staff who worked to mitigate the impacts of students who lived a greater distance from the school than the base population making them noteworthy as an additional individual theme.

### Theme One: Challenges & Benefits to a Long Bus Ride

Every student participant indicated that they were on the bus for at least 45 minutes each way from school to home or home to school with a minimum of twelve miles and a maximum of a fifteen-mile distance. Seven out of eight respondents noted that they must get up earlier to catch the bus and arrive home later than their peers, sometimes extending their school day (time in school and on the bus) by up to two hours. While no student viewed the long bus ride as a benefit, three students noted that they can complete homework on the bus. However, two students noted that they were never able to complete work on the bus due to the level of noise and other distracting behaviors. One student noted that while the ride on the bus was long, it was a benefit because they "don't have to wait in the carpool line". When questioned about whether they understood why they were assigned to a school so far from their home in lieu of the neighborhood school, all eight students noted that it was their assigned school and did not feel that or did not know that they had an option to attend a different school closer to their home indicating little to no understanding of the overall student assignment plan. Students accepted

that this was their assigned school and did not vocally question the "why" behind their school assignment.

**Table 3**

*Challenges & Benefits to a long bus ride*

| Student | Challenges | Benefits |
|---|---|---|
| Alfonso | "Kids be wilding…more time for people to get into trouble."<br>"Vaping on the bus..really noisy…takes a long time."<br>"Wake up early and get home late…waiting at school." | No benefits. |
| Bobby | "Getting up early…getting home late." | No benefits. |
| Carlos | "Getting up early." No benefits. | No benefits. |
| Donti | "Wake up early and get home later."<br>"Bus is too loud and crazy to do homework." | No benefits. |
| Elle | | "Can finish homework." |
| Farrah | "Have to wake up earlier and I get home later."<br>"Less time to see my parents." | "Can finish homework." |
| Gerardo | "Wake up early and get home later." | "Able to do homework." |
| Haley | "Kind of sucks." | "Don't have to wait in the carpool line." |

## Theme Two: Challenges & Benefits to Attending the Assigned School

### *Transportation*

Student participants noted a variety of challenges regarding attending their current schools with transportation at the forefront. Seven out of eight students specifically mentioned that if they miss the bus in the morning or if the bus is not running that day due to the district-wide bus driver shortage, that it is usually impossible for them to get a ride to school and has an impact on their attendance. Seven out of eight students also noted that they have difficulty getting a ride from school to home if they are sick, noting that their family either has one or no cars to transport them. Two students also noted that when they have been suspended in the past, school staff have had to transport them home as they have not been able to secure a ride home.

Additionally, transportation barriers and distance posed some level of difficulty regarding student and parent participation in attending school events, participating in after-school activities, and attending meetings at the school. It should be noted that transportation barriers were more pronounced in the middle school group than the high school group. One high school student noted that "high school friends with cars can drive and give rides" and two others mentioned that their high school was on the public transit route which meant that they had an additional avenue to get to school other than school bus transportation.

### *Positive Perception of the School*

While all students interviewed were able to discuss challenges and barriers to attending a school a long distance from their house, all eight students spoke positively about their school experience. Five students spoke positively regarding their teachers, noting that they "really cared", "are the best thing about the school", and that the teachers are "good".

**Table 4**

*Challenges & benefits to attending current school*

| Student | Challenges | Benefits |
|---|---|---|
| Alfonso | "Long time to get here…if you leave something at school or get sick or suspended, then it is hard to get a ride" | "Where my friends go…pretty good school…good sports…teachers really care." |
| Bobby | "Hard to get here if you miss the bus." "Can take city bus, but takes longer." | High school friends with cars can drive and give rides"<br>"Legit school…teachers are good…lots of stuff to be involved with…mostly good." |
| Carlos | "Family doesn't have car so if I miss the bus, I am screwed."<br>"Hard to come to school events like open house"<br>"Can only get to school if the bus is running." | "Pretty good school…chill kids"<br>"Not a lot of fights…year-round"<br>"...get to know kids since elementary." |
| Donti | "Can't see friends near school…parents can't pick up if I'm sick" | "Pretty good school and all of the kids from my neighborhood go here." |
| Elle | "Can't see my friends that live near the school…can't get picked up if I'm sick…If I miss the bus or if it breaks down, I can't get to school or home." | "My friends and teachers" (are the best thing about my school.) |
| Farrah | "If the bus breaks down or I missed it, there's no way of me getting home or to school." | "My friends and teachers" (are the best thing about my school.) |
| Gerardo | "Not able to do as many extra-curricular activities..don't get many friends because they live closer to the school." | "Social Studies class"...<br>"Good teachers" |
| Haley | "If you miss the bus, you can't get to school." | "Academics and teachers that make classes fun." |

Additionally, students suggested that they had a more positive perception of the school they attended than those in their neighborhood. Three students noted that there were "less fights" at the school they attended and that the students were "better behaved." Five students indicated that either themselves or their parents were glad they attended the assigned school despite the distance due to its reputation for strong academics and teaching staff, with one student specifically noting, "my parents think it is better than the school in our neighborhood."

**Theme Three: Extra-Curricular Involvement**

All eight of the students noted some level of barriers to participating in extracurricular activities when attending a school farther from home. They noted challenges around transportation: "no bus to take me home from practice or to school on track-outs", "too hard in middle school to get rides", and that in many cases they were not able to participate at all citing that they "don't have a ride". While numerous barriers were noted, 4 of the 8 subjects did participate in a sport or afterschool activity and discussed the resourcefulness needed to do so. Students talked about coaches and other school staff giving them rides home so that they could participate or taking public transportation to get home after practices. Two students also reiterated that at the high school level they could often get rides from other peers that had cars and drove to school. Outside of participating, students also noted that obtaining an athletic physical from a doctor was a barrier to participating in sports. Those that did participate noted that their parents were rarely able to make it to games due to transportation, work, or childcare barriers.

**Table 5**

*Extracurricular Involvement*

| Student | Extracurricular activities |
|---|---|
| Alfonso | "Football & Track" |
| Bobby | "Football & track when I got to high school…was too hard in middle school to get rides, so I couldn't play."<br>"Can take the city bus to get home or get rides." |
| Carlos | "None at school…just basketball in my neighborhood." "No bus to take me home from practice or to school on track-outs." |
| Donti | "Football…hard for parents to take me during track-outs. Sometimes the coaches have to take me home." |
| Elle | "Basketball…coaches take me home so that I can play." |
| Farrah | "None…don't have a ride." |
| Gerardo | "No…no bus home from practices." |
| Haley | "None at school. I dance outside of school." |

**Theme Four: Social Connection**

Six out of the eight students interviewed noted that their social circle does not extend much farther than those students in their neighborhood who also attend the same school that they do. They noted that due to distance, they cannot attend functions that are closer to the school if invited, with one student noting, "my friend group is smaller because I can't hang out with them outside of school." While most of the students agreed that they had stronger relationships with their neighbors, they did note that they had built some friendships at school. One student noted that they had gone to elementary and middle school with the same group of friends both from within and outside of their neighborhood, likely a benefit of the district's feeder pattern planning

and ability to maintain consistency in student assignment plan for students coming from this assignment node.

**Table 6**

*Social Impact*

| Student | Impacts on social connections |
|---|---|
| Alfonso | "School is so big and it has so many people that you can meet a lot of friends." "Most of the people I hang out with are from my neighborhood." |
| Bobby | "A lot of the people in my neighborhood go here." "Can meet more friends if you play football or other things." |
| Carlos | "Mostly hanging out with the same people in our neighborhood that we ride the bus with." |
| Donti | "Doesn't impact me because most of my friends from the neighborhood go here." "Can't really hang out after school here or go to people's houses if I get invited because it is too far from my house." |
| Elle | "I have a smaller friend group because I can't hang out with the friends that live closer to the school." |
| Farrah | "Friend group is smaller because I can't hang out with them outside of school." |
| Gerardo | "Don't get many because they live closer to the school and I only get friends in school and don't get to talk to them much out of school." |
| Haley | "I have the same friends from my neighborhood, but it's harder to expand our friends when they live closer to the school. They get to stay and do things in their range." |

**Theme Five: Academics**

The students interviewed attend schools that feature among the highest EVAAS growth in the district, above average rates of grade level proficiency, and a less than average suspension rate. All students interviewed noted a positive view of their school's academic programming and had a positive perception of most staff based on their responses.

All eight students noted that their teachers were willing to help them in addition to their regular instructional time. Six out of eight respondents specifically mentioned that their schools and teachers had structures in place to ensure that academic support was available during lunch or other non-instructional times. Three students noted that their bus often arrived early to school and teachers were willing to assist them during that time.

**Table 7**

*Academic Supports*

| Student | Academic support statements |
|---|---|
| Alfonso | "Most of them are helpful. Will let you come to lunch or you could come afterschool or in the morning when you get off the bus." |
| Bobby | "Four long classes a day…study hall…SMART Lunch to get help with work when we need it. Teachers are pretty good and will stay to help you if you need it or give you time in class to work on work." |
| Carlos | "A lot of good electives here…teachers are pretty cool and they'll help you if you need it. Sometimes I get help in lunch or CA." |
| Donti | "Teachers here are really good…they help you when you need it and you can ask you questions." |
| Elle | "I get tutoring during lunch." |
| Farrah | "I can get tutoring at school." |
| Gerardo | "Can get help from my teacher in the morning when my bus gets here early." |
| Haley | "Most of the teachers will help you if your grade is failing. They'll do their grade to help boost your grade up and give you tips on how to do stuff and manage your times." |

**Theme Six: Improving the Student Experience**

When respondents were asked what the school or district leadership could do to improve their experience, two sub themes emerged: bus transportation and altering school assignments. Six out of eight students had commentary on buses. Alfonso noted that one improvement could be the timeliness of buses. He has a very early bus pick up time and then sometimes waits up to 45 minutes for the bus to run its second route for the school, called a "double-back", before heading home, meaning he gets home an hour and a half after the end of the school day. Five of the eight students mentioned that the school could support them with an activity bus afterschool that allowed them to stay at school for extracurricular activities and take them home after practices or club meetings. Some of the high school students noted that this after school activity bus structure was in place prior to the Covid-19 pandemic and enabled them to participate in more activities when they were in middle school. In addition to the provision of an after-school activity bus route, students noted that they would also appreciate transportation to attend any school-wide activities, including dances, open houses, etc. Yet another student mentioned that all schools should have a city bus stop so that public transportation could be used if school transportation was not available, an option that he currently has at the high school he attends.

In lieu of other areas of improvement, five out of the eight students also noted that they should be able to have the option to attend a school closer to their home. Bobby provided input that "elementary and middle school kids could go to school closer to their houses and their parents could be at the school", reiterating the idea that students in high school have the benefit of additional resources to mitigate the barriers of attending school farther from their home.

**Theme Seven: The Impact of School Administration and Staff**

While the themes were the products of deductive coding efforts and targeted questions, an additional theme came to light through the inductive coding process. It should be noted that at both schools, among all eight students, it was clear that the efforts made on the part of school leadership and staff made a great difference in providing students who are bused greater distances with equitable experiences in the realms of academics, extra-curricular activities, and family engagement as compared to peers. Among those were the offering of academic support during the instructional day, ensuring that club meetings took place during the school day, and concerted efforts on the school to provide access to school events for all families.

At the middle school level, all four students interviewed noted that they were able to get help with academics and homework both before school as their bus arrived and during the lunch period. Two of the middle school students also noted that teachers gave time to work on homework or complete other assignments during class time, which offered them space to ask questions and get support. The middle school has also worked to build in a weekly club schedule to ensure that all students could participate in enrichment activities including the student council, which historically met after school. The middle school has also made commendable efforts to engage families through outreach events including Meet the Teacher, Curriculum Nights, Registration Events and more at the remote node's community center, more than 15 miles away from the school. While the school must utilize limited resources to duplicate most events that are held at the school, student respondents noted positive feelings about the school's efforts to provide bus transportation to school dances, have Meet the Teacher events in their neighborhood, and a variety of other supports including dropping off school supplies or providing technology support closer to their homes.

At the high school level, the school has implemented a SMART (Students Maximizing Academic Resources & Time) Lunch schedule that offers students a longer lunch period with built in academic support on a schedule by subject area. This model offers students an opportunity to get assistance within the school day, eliminating some of the barriers of attending a school a greater distance from home. Within the SMART Lunch schedule, the school also provides opportunities for clubs, intramural activities, and other ways for students to engage in the school community without relying on school bus transportation to participate outside of school hours or afterschool.

At both the middle and high school level, seven out of eight students noted that at some point a school staff member had taken them home because they were sick, suspended, or needed a ride home from a practice or event. In one instance, a student noted that the school resource officer or coaches were the ride home for himself and three football teammates daily from practice. While students noted on a couple of occasions their hesitation in wanting to ask for a ride home if they were sick, all students at some point in the interview noted an appreciation for a teacher or staff member who went out of their way to support them regarding academics, transportation, or engagement in the school community.

## Conclusion

The subject school system has been successfully working to diversify schools through strategic student assignment planning for decades. The student respondents in this exploratory case study all hail from assignment nodes that are more than 10 miles from their home with bus rides sometimes exceeding 45 minutes each way daily to attend a school in a more affluent suburban area. Nearly all these students have a positive perception of the school that they are assigned to and there is very little evidence that suggests that they question their school

assignment or have a strong desire to attend the school closer to their home, almost as if that would be out of the realm of possibility.

Students were aligned in their acknowledgment surrounding challenges with transportation and the impact it has on engagement and daily logistics: getting to school if you miss the bus, getting a ride home if you are sick or suspended from school, getting a ride to or from a school event outside of school hours or from an after-school activity, and challenges posed by a bus driver shortage or bus mechanical malfunctions that sometimes leave them with absences outside of their control. They also acknowledged that distance often prevented their parents from engaging with the school and their ability to participate in extracurricular activities including athletics.

Students were also unified with all eight citing a positive remark regarding their school's academic offerings, caring teachers that were willing to assist whenever needed, school staff willing to mitigate barriers to living far from the school, and the willingness of school staff to adjust instructional schedules to provide academic support or access to enrichment activities including clubs and tutoring within the school day.

Most students noted that while they had acquaintances and familiar friends at their schools, most of their strongest social connections were those from other peers who also lived in their neighborhood and shared those long bus rides. Despite having access to a greater pool of peers they remained close, typically eating lunch, and socializing with those peers from their neighborhood.

Overall, the student responses indicate that while there are certainly challenges to the busing for diversity assignment policy, there are also several gains that align with research supporting diverse schools. Each of the students interviewed noted a high level of academic and

social-emotional support at their school. When asked about what could be done to improve their experience or mitigate challenges faced, nearly all requested additional transportation as the primary solution: an after-school activity bus, a connection to public transportation, or support with rides as needed when ill at school. As a secondary solution, most suggested an option to attend a school closer to home, with no students citing this potential reassignment as the end-all solution. For example, students noted "could go to the school near our house if we wanted to" or "give me an option for a school closer to my home". No student indicated that they would prefer to attend the school closer to their home if given the opportunity.

Given the satisfaction rate of the subject students with their school and experience, the high growth and academic proficiency of students at the subject school, and the level of balance and diversity attained by the subject district, there are many benefits to having an assignment policy that works to ensure that schools are diverse, of which busing for diversity should be only one component. However, it is also clear, that to provide an equitable academic and holistic school experience for students, district and school leadership must make concerted efforts through the allocation of time and resources to ensure that all students, especially those who are bused for diversity, do not experience any disadvantages or inequities in their experience at any school because of their school assignment.

# CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, INTERPRETATIONS, & RECOMMENDATIONS

American public schools are grappling with continuous resegregation following decades of judiciary rulings, legislation, and local policy efforts to diversify and integrate public schools (Hagins, 2022; Hinnant-Crawford, 2021; McNeal, 2009). Many public-school districts, including the subject district, have implemented student assignment plans that utilize busing, magnet programming, and intentionally drawn base assignment maps with the goal of ensuring that schools are diversified to reap the research-based benefits that affirm diverse schools lead to higher academic achievement rates for all students, with elevated rates of increased growth and proficiency for minority students (Kurlaender & Yun, 2007; Wells, Fox & Cordova-Cobo, 2016).

Numerous studies (Domina et al., 2021; Glazer, 2009; Ipka, 2003) over the past fifty years affirm the benefits of racially and socio-economically diverse schools. Such studies must be considered in assessing the research questions that seek to determine the academic and social experiences and perceptions of secondary students in the district who are bused for diversity away from their neighborhood school (Kozol, 2005; Ogletree, 2004). In doing so, any challenges and benefits that such policies present for students and families that might impact their formative middle and high school experience must be thoughtfully examined. In addition, the successes and consequences of diversity driven student assignment systems must be weighed to ensure the best outcomes for students when determining student assignment plans that offer strategies to increase the diversity of the student body.

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to gain a better understanding of the social and academic challenges and benefits that students experience when bused for diversity to a school that is more than ten miles from their home. Individual students were interviewed at the student's base school with questions focused on gaining a better understanding of the impacts of

busing for diversity on each student's experience regarding academics, social-emotional well-being, extra-curricular involvement, and overall connection to their school community.

The following primary research questions guided this study:

1. What are the academic and social experiences and perceptions of students who are bused for diversity in lieu of attending their neighborhood school?
2. What challenges and benefits does this policy present for students that impact their secondary school experience regarding academics, access to extracurricular activities, and family engagement?

Through the completion of eight interviews with secondary school students who are bused to a school more than ten miles from their home, numerous themes came to light that may provide stakeholders with pertinent information that may help policy makers, district leadership, school leadership, and teachers in continuing to ensure that schools are diverse while also ensuring that students are well supported and provided with equitable academic, social, family engagement, and enrichment experiences, including participation in extra-curricular activities. This study adds to limited studies that seek to understand the student experience regarding student assignment plans for diversity. Among those noteworthy studies are Brazwell's 2010 dissertation that offered counter stories of Rochester, New York's open enrollment process and its impact on minority student groups and Davila's 2010 article that shared the lived experiences of Puerto Rican students in Chicago Public Schools.

While a significant body of research exists affirming diverse schools and their impact on student success, there are few that utilize student subjects who are a part of a school assignment plan that buses students to provide first-hand accounts of the barriers and benefits to student assignment plans that utilize bussing to ensure diverse schools. A better understanding of the

lived first-hand student experience will be able to provide school and district leadership with information that may assist in ensuring that these students have equitable access to all aspects of the school experience despite the distance from school to home.

## Findings

The first research question sought to understand the academic and social experiences and perceptions of students who are bused for diversity in lieu of attending their neighborhood school. The interview protocol was structured with open-ended questions with the purpose of ascertaining the direct impact of bus ride and student perceptions regarding time/distance, as well as the challenges and benefits to a long bus ride of at least 45 minutes each way. The first eight interview questions also aimed at determining student perceptions and knowledge around school assignment and the challenges and benefits of the overall student experience at the assigned school.

### Student Knowledge of Assignment Plan

All eight of the student subjects had little understanding of the district's student assignment plan, accepting that the school they were bused to is their assigned school without question. Many of these students also reported being bused for the prior level (elementary or middle school) and noted a consistent feeder pattern for their neighborhood. In all cases, throughout their schooling career, their assigned schools were more than 10 miles from their home. As these more urban areas are typically consistent with student population numbers, there have been limited adjustments to these nodes regarding the student assignment plan as has been the case in other parts of the subject district experiencing high growth and development. While accepting of their school assignment, nearly all students noted that there was at least one school closer to their home than their assigned school.

**Experiences on the Bus**

All students interviewed reported a bus ride of at least 45 minutes each way, with some exceeding 60 minutes. They noted the difficulty in getting up early to ensure that they could get on their bus, sometimes an hour and a half to two hours before the school start time depending on the grade level. Students also reported getting home much later in the afternoon than peers, also having to navigate additional traffic in the afternoons. While most students noted no benefit to this long bus ride, three students noted that they were sometimes able to get their homework completed before arriving at home. However, all students had a negative view of the ride on the bus, and many noted that the bus ride allowed more time for "people to get in trouble" with instances of vaping, fighting, and loud disruption specifically mentioned by half of the student subjects.

**Perception of the Assigned School**

All student subjects had a positive perception of the school they attended, with many noting the perception that it was "better" than their neighborhood school in interviews. Students reported perceived lower levels of disciplinary incidents and physical altercations. They also noted perceived higher levels of academic achievement and indicated that high quality teachers were one of the best aspects of their school.

**Social Aspects**

When asked how attending a school far from home impacted them socially, 75% of students reported that their social circle did not extend much farther than their neighborhood and those students that they rode the bus to and from school with. Despite the district's commitment to consistent feeder patterns that would have these students at the same schools as those who live closer to the school for the duration of grade school, many students reported that it was difficult

to make connections to those peers outside of school. One student noted that they were unable to attend functions including birthday parties if invited due to the distance from their home to the local area surrounding the school. Others noted social connections only if able to participate in extra-curriculars including athletics due to the team environment, an additional argument for the provision of afterschool busing and transportation that allows students equitable access to after school programming which may also alleviate barriers to social capital for students who are bused for diversity.

The second research question sought to understand the challenges and benefits that a busing for diversity policy presents for students and how it impacts their secondary student experience regarding academics, access to extracurricular activities, and family engagement. The interview protocol was structured with specific questions that addressed academic supports, participation in extra-curricular and enrichment activities, and the student perception of family engagement efforts.

**Academics**

The student subjects attend schools that feature among the highest EVAAS growth in the district, above average rates of grade level proficiency when compared to district and state level data, and a less than average suspension rate when compared to district data. All students interviewed noted a positive view of their school's academic programming and had a positive perception of staff based on their responses.

All eight students noted that their teachers were willing to help them in addition to their regular instructional time, making themselves available before school at arrival, during lunch, and sometimes afterschool while students were waiting on "double-back" buses that run a route before coming back to pick up the next round of students.

Students also mentioned intentional instructional schedule structures that allowed them designated time in each subject area to get help with lunch (SMART Lunch) or an advisory period aimed at getting support in a variety of areas, both academic and enrichment.

Overall, students indicated that they felt well-supported by their teachers and felt comfortable asking questions when needed.

**Extra-curricular & Enrichment Activities**

All students reported some level of barriers to participating in extra-curricular activities when attending school farther from home. They noted challenges around transportation: "no bus to take me home from practice or to school on track-outs", "too hard in middle school to get rides", and that in many cases they were not able to participate in these opportunities at all, citing that they "don't have a ride". While the transportation challenges faced were clear, half of the students interviewed did participate in a sport or afterschool activity and had to invoke their resourcefulness to do so. Some students were able to get rides from school staff, peers, or were able to get on a city bus stop after practices to get home.

The year-round calendar school students also reported the calendar to be a barrier as they had to find not only a way home from school, but a way to get to practice during times that they were "tracked-out".

Even when able to participate in athletics or afterschool activities, all four of these participants noted that their parents were rarely able to make it to their games due to transportation, work, or childcare barriers due to the distance from their home to the school.

**Family Engagement**

One finding of this study was the great impact that busing for diversity has on family engagement efforts. Throughout the interviews all students noted challenges to attending school-

wide functions including curriculum nights, awards days, meet the teacher nights, etc. Students also noted repeatedly that parents were often unable to pick them up when they were sick or suspended and that school staff often had to take them home. At times, students mentioned their parents paying for rideshare services to get to and from school, a costly expenditure for low-income families.

However, students also spoke of the work being done by their schools to better engage their communities, despite the distance from their home. One subject school partners with the city to lease the community center within their remote attendance node to replicate events that are hosted at the school. The same school also sent an activity bus to pick up students for the eighth-grade dance to ensure that all students could attend, due to likely transportation barriers.

Students also noted that it was difficult for their parents to come in for conferences or business (enrollments/withdrawals) that had to be done in person, but that virtual meeting software, especially the ability to participate with a cell phone, was as welcome accommodation in recent years for many of their parents.

These findings affirm and support research and recent legislation efforts including *H.R. 2639, the Strength in Diversity Act* (2020), that affirm the need to utilize socio-economic status as an indicator to ensure that schools remain diverse at a time when schools are experiencing re-segregation across the country (Diem, 2021, p. 1-3). Through the voice of students impacted by such student assignment plans, they also add to the body of research and indicate the need for policy driven supports to ensure that students who are bused for diversity have equitable access to school programming.

Additionally, the findings offer student perceptions and a humanizing voice to a growing body of research that looks closely at the why and how behind re-segregation in subject state of

North Carolina, who was once recognized as a trailblazer in policy implementation to desegregate schools (Ayscue et al., 2014).

## Limitations

This study is limited in that the data collected relies on the secondary student participants providing thoughtful and honest data in their interviews. It should be noted that the study is limited to only eight students, four in high school and four in middle school, who are bused for diversity out of a population of nearly 20,000 students as a part of this student assignment plan. Approximately 50 schools in the district receive students from nodes that are more than 10 miles from the school's base population area. This study is limited to two of those schools in which principals and area superintendents were willing to assist in identifying and providing access to students subjects with student and parent consent. Twelve students were originally identified for the study, six from each school. The first four from each school to turn in assent forms were selected for participation and scheduled for interviews at the base school.

Through the interviews, student responses indicated that they had little understanding of their school assignment, noting that "this is just the school I'm supposed to go to" and "this is the school for my neighborhood."

While students were asked questions from a set interview protocol, it became necessary to ask questions for further understanding or for clarification at time based upon student responses. Middle school students typically gave shorter, succinct responses, with high school students being willing to provide anecdotes or additional historical information about their history with attending schools farther from home.

While the study focused on eight students at two schools in a very large district, the results of the study have high generalizability and capture many of the benefits and challenges to

being bused more than ten miles from home to school that could be applied widely to students in other districts who are working to ensure diverse schools through targeted student assignment plans. All students who are bused likely face challenges to transportation to and from school, family engagement barriers, participation in extracurricular activities yet also reap the benefits of a diverse school with higher academic performance and lower teacher retention rates. However, it is important to note that geographic variance, including whether busing is taking place in urban or suburban areas, may greatly impact the level of challenges and barriers to families. Additionally, funding levels within districts and states, alternative strategies for diversification, and school staffing issues might also provide some variability from district to district. While this study ultimately offers rare insight into the lived experiences of secondary students who are bused as part of a student assignment policy that seeks to ensure socio-economic diversity, it is but a small glimpse into the benefits and challenges that students face not only in the subject district, but nationwide, across school systems in the United States.

## Implications for Future Research

While this study aimed to add the firsthand accounts and lived experiences of students who are bused for diversity to the body of research, many additional studies, both qualitative and quantitative, could be conducted to provide a greater understanding of the benefits and challenges that students and families experience when they are a part of a student assignment plan that buses them to a school more than ten miles from their home. Many students relayed some of their parents' beliefs about their school assignment, noting that they thought it was a "better school than the one in the neighborhood" or "My mom thinks this is a good school". This study may have been enhanced by also interviewing parents of these students to get their perspective on their student's school experience and some of the challenges and barriers that they

face, including whether they would rather their student attend the school closest to home in lieu of a school farther away with better academic data, yet with the burdens of distance.

Additionally, students often mentioned the various supports that school administrators and teachers provided to them to ensure that they had equitable access to academic supports (tutoring, SMART lunch, before-school help, assistance at lunch) and extra-curricular activities (staff offering transport, etc.). Students frequently noted the efforts of administrators to host events in their local community to engage families or ensure that they were able to make it back to the school for dances and other school-wide events. As there are no mandates to provide these services to students, one can assume that these efforts vary widely among schools and are dependent on individual personnel and leadership within this district and in other districts. Interviewing and/or surveying school administrators and staff who have remote nodes of students regarding the actions they take to support students per the student assignment plan may offer district leadership and policy makers information on best practices to ensure that these students and families are integrated into the school community and that base expectations are established to support bused students and families.

## Implications for Practitioners

The results of this exploratory, qualitative case study have much to offer education practitioners and policy makers regarding student assignment planning, academic and extra-curricular considerations, and family engagement efforts. The findings of this study are especially important to district, school leadership, and teachers.

### District Leadership

Across the nation, as well as within the subject district, leaders are grappling with how to effectively diversify school populations to ensure that schools are not inundated with students in

poverty and have stable academic proficiency numbers. To achieve this balance, leadership approves student assignment plans that feature busing, magnet programming, and other efforts to set schools and students up for success (Mordechay & Ayscue, 2018, p. 5-6). In doing so, they achieve higher academic gains, lower rates of disciplinary infractions, lower teacher turnover, and more Domina et al., 2021). This study is of value to district leadership as it identifies barriers that students face due to student assignment policies that in many cases can be mitigated with the provision of additional resources, staff, and the establishment of baseline expectations for school leadership who have node of students outside of their proximal attendance zone.

District leadership must also work to ensure that afterschool transportation is provided for students, especially in grades 7-12 so that they have equitable access to participate in athletics, arts, and other extracurricular activities. Despite nationwide bus driver shortages, this must be a priority if busing is to remain a part of the student assignment plan.

District leadership must also work to ensure that the student assignment plan, especially for a district as large as the subject district, is well balanced and includes multiple strategies to ensure that schools are desegregated. While busing has been an effective practice in districts across the country since *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), Magnet programming efforts and other school choice initiatives that draw those families with the most resources to lower income areas are of great importance to ensure that diversification efforts do not fall on the most vulnerable populations (Mordechay & Ayscue, 2018, p. 5).

**School Leaders**

School leaders can benefit from the results of this study by addressing the challenges that students and families face who are identified to be bused to schools far from home as part of

student assignment plans. Major themes identified in the findings included barriers to academic support, enrichment and extracurricular activities, transportation, and family engagement.

Like many of the school administrators of the students in the study, it is important to structure instructional schedules to include time built in during the school day for academic support for those students who are unable to stay before or afterschool due to the reliance on busing and the distance to a student's home. Some noted mitigations in the study included tutoring supports during lunch and the implementation of SMART lunch programs that offer comprehensive academic support plans with time scheduled for each class period and subject. Schedules should also seek to provide time for enrichment activities including clubs such as student council, etc. to ensure that bused students have equitable access to enrichment programming.

Additionally, study findings suggest that school administrators must look for ways to extend family engagement opportunities far beyond the normal expectation. It is pertinent to look for ways to build community partnerships, host school events, and reach out to families in remote attendance nodes to ensure that they are an integral part of their school communities despite distance. Often the students bused live in lower-income areas and are among the most vulnerable populations, requiring assistance on the part of school staff with not only academic support, but social services as well. To serve these students effectively, extra time and effort is needed on the part of school staff.

**Teachers**

According to data provided by the subject district's Office of Student Assignment, bused students are more likely to be multi-lingual learners and students with disabilities. This is important information for the teachers who serve these students who face not only the challenges

of being bused but may also have other barriers that impact academic growth and proficiency. Teachers must be cognizant of transportation barriers so that any additional needed support or tutoring can be provided during school hours, perhaps at lunch or a scheduled advisory time, which is a popular scheduling structure in the subject district.

Subject students also note in interviews that their parents were not likely to attend some school functions including curriculum nights, in-person conferences, and meet the teacher nights. For this reason, it is important that teachers exercise flexibility in the ways they reach parents, including utilizing virtual meeting platforms for families that have cellular or internet service. Teachers can also take advantage of numerous communication platforms that may utilize translation services that will send messages to families in their home language.

## Implications for Policy

More than 100 school districts across the United States have created integration plans in the last decade that utilize socio-economic status as a factor in their student assignment policies to ensure diverse schools (Kahlenberg, 2016; Louthen, 2001). As demand across the country grows to focus on an increase in proficiency rates, policy makers must ensure that there is a simultaneous focus on diversification efforts, especially in an America that is pre-dominantly non-white, making alternative approaches to school diversification necessary, and often reliant on socioeconomic status as an indicator (Frankenberg et al., 2017).

Busing students to ensure balanced diverse schools is likely to remain a key component of student assignment plans, especially in larger districts in the nation with both urban and suburban populations. Policymakers must ensure that they take a holistic approach that factors in student experience and equitable access to all components of schooling (academics, family engagement, social-emotional, and extra-curricular participation) when mandating that students

are transferred to schools farther from their homes. These families should also be offered some input in student assignment planning and potentially the choice to remain at a school closer to their home if it presents major hardships to attend a school farther from home due to a lack of transportation, childcare, and other factors (Grooms, 2016, p. 4-6).

Additionally, policymakers must look to all other avenues that lead to diverse schools without burdening vulnerable populations. One such strategy would be an increase in Magnet Schools that draw higher income students to lower-income areas through the offering of specialized programming (Mordechay & Ayscue, 2018, p. 5).

While policies to ensure diverse populations among schools are at the foundation of successful public schooling, districts must also consider school-level policies that support students, an area in which research is currently lacking. Through this study and the voices of students directly impacted by busing as a strategy, local policies that provide access to bus transportation for extra-curricular activities, instructional schedule adjustments to accommodate all students, and a requirement to make additional efforts to include families in aspects of school family engagement efforts should be undertaken by district and school leadership. In this way, supports for students that provide equitable access are not personnel and school dependent, but required and implemented by all schools who hold populations of bused students.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to gain a better understanding of the social and academic challenges and benefits that students experience when bused for diversity to a school that is more than ten miles from their home through interviews that captured the lived experiences of students regarding academics, social well-being, extra-curricular, and family engagement.

Student interviews affirmed the argument and large body of research supporting diverse schools and the positive impacts that a diverse school can have on academic achievement, increased proficiency, increased growth, and lower rates of disciplinary infractions (Domina et al., 2021; Glazer, 2009; Ipka, 2003). However, these interviews also brought to light the many barriers that students who are bused for socio-economic diversity face in accessing equitable academic, extra-curricular, and family engagement programming that must be addressed by district and school leadership to ensure that all students reap the benefits of diverse schools and that vulnerable populations do not carry undue burdens of student assignment plans.

The study offers policy makers, district and school administrators, and classroom educators' insight from the voice of bused students into the avenues that they may work to mitigate the burden placed on these students, while protecting schools from re-segregation and ensuring that schools are balanced and diverse. This information could also provide the public with a greater perspective around the benefits and challenges of student assignment plans that feature busing as a strategy, especially in large, predominantly suburban school districts that have become more and more segregated in recent years (Hagins, 2022; Hinnant-Crawford, 2021; McNeal, 2009). Educational stakeholders and policy-makers must recognize that is more important than ever to ensure that schools are diverse, and that students and families are engaged and assured agency and equitable access in public education efforts.

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# APPENDICES

# Appendix A: IRB Approval

**Date:** December 14, 2023
**Study Title:** An Exploratory Case Study on the Impacts of Busing for Diversity on the Secondary Student Experience
**NC State eIRB #:** 26570
**Funding Source:** N/A

Dear Lisa Bass,

The project listed above has been reviewed and approved by the NC State Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human Subjects in Research.

This protocol was approved on: December 14, 2023
This protocol's approval will expire on: none

Information Regarding Study Approval:

1. This board complies with requirements found in Title 45 part 46 of The Code of Federal Regulations.
2. 
    a. NC State Federal wide Assurance: FWA00003429.
    b. NC State IRB Registration: 00000330
    c. NC State I-ORG Number: 0000200
3. Any changes to the protocol and supporting documents must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.
4. If any unanticipated problems occur, they must be reported to the IRB office within 5 business days by completing and submitting the unanticipated problem/adverse event form on the IRB website.
5. For information regarding study closure or post approval monitoring activities, please refer to the NC State University IRB website.
6. Your approval for this study lasts for one year from the review date. If your study extends beyond that time, including data analysis, you must obtain continuing review from the IRB.

To request an official, signed approval letter on NC State letterhead, please submit a request on our website under "Request a Letter"

Sincerely,

Jennie Ofstein, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board (IRB) Director
North Carolina State University
irb-director@ncsu.edu
919.515.8754

## Appendix B: Parental Consent Form

Informed Consent Form
Participation in Research

Title of Study: An Exploratory Case Study on the Impacts of Busing for Diversity on the Secondary Student Experience
IRB Protocol 26570
Principal Investigator(s): Amanda Boshoff, North Carolina State University, alhobbs@ncsu.edu, 919-239-9451
Funding Source: None
NC State Faculty Point of Contact: Dr. Lisa Bass, North Carolina State University, lrbass@ncsu.edu, 919-515-6291

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Your child is invited to take part in a research study. Here are some important things to know:

- Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. You can choose not to have your child participate without penalty. If you decide to allow your child to participate and then change your mind, they can stop participating at any time without penalty.
- The purpose of this research study is to gain a better understanding of the secondary student experience of students who are assigned to a school more than 10 miles from their home regarding academics, social engagement, extra-curricular activities, and family engagement.
- Your child will be asked to answer a series of questions about their school experience through a semi-structured protocol that is expected to take approximately 30 minutes to complete.
- You or your child are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in this study. Research studies may pose risks to those who participate.
- You may want your child to participate in this research because having a better understanding of the student perspective regarding student assignment may positively inform policy and research. You may not want your child to participate in this research because it will take approximately 30 minutes' worth of time from the school day. However, students will not be pulled from core instruction to participate.
- If you have questions about your child's participation in this research at any time, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above or the NC State IRB office via email at IRB-Director@ncsu.edu or via phone at 1-919-515-8754

Please read the rest of this consent form for more specific details of this research. If you do not understand something, please ask the researcher for clarification or more information.

What is the purpose of this study?
The purpose of the study is to gain a better understanding of the secondary school experience as related to academics, social engagement, extra-curricular activities, and family engagement of

students who attend a non-neighborhood school assignment that is more than 10 miles from the student's home.

How many people will be in the study?
There will be approximately 8 student participants in this study.

Is my child eligible to be a participant in this study?
To be a participant in this study, you must agree for your child to be in the study, your child must be assigned to a school more than 10 miles from their home and be in one of the following grades: 7, 8, 10, 11, or 12 with at least one full year of experience at the school.

What will happen if your child takes part in the study?
If you agree to allow your child to participate in this study, they will be asked to do all the following:

1. Complete a brief demographic survey to verify grade level, birth year, and street address.
2. Answer a semi-structured interview protocol that will last approximately 30 minutes to be conducted at their school.

The total amount of time that your child will be participating in this study is 30-40 minutes.
Recording in research
Participants will be audio recorded. If you do not want this information collected, your child cannot participate in this research.

We would like to use these audio recordings for transcription only. We will keep these for recordings until transcriptions have been verified.

Benefits to participating in this research:
There are no direct benefits to you or your child's participation in the research. The indirect benefits are the ability for your child to provide student voice as a part of the research study that aims to bring to light the challenges and benefits of attending a non-neighborhood school.

Risks to participating in this research:
There is minimal risk associated with your child's participation in this research.

Researcher Obligations
Due to my role as a school administrator, I have an obligation to report child neglect and abuse, harassment of students, etc. This means that if I observe instances of, or your child tells me about anything that indicates that they are in any danger, I am obligated to report that.

What data will be collected about my child and are there risks associated with that?
The data that are collected about your child include street address, birth year, gender, and grade level. These data are not connected to your child's name or other information that could easily identify them. Any potential risks will be mitigated through implementing data protections in accordance with NC State data protection standards.

How will my child's identity and the data about them be stored and protected?

After all data is collected, the researchers will go through the data and remove all direct and indirect identifiers so that the dataset can no longer be connected to your child's identity.

This list will be stored separately from the data. After the study is over, we will permanently delete the master list. It is unlikely your child's identity could be deduced from their responses in the dataset without the master list.

We will go through the transcripts and do our best to remove or replace any information that can identify your child directly. Examples of the information we will remove are names and sensitive information. After we do this, it is unlikely your child's identity could be deduced from their responses.

Your child's data will not be used or shared for future research studies. We will delete your child's data after 3 years.

How will the data about my child be reported to the public and are there risks as a result?
We may quote your child or share specific responses from them in our publications and presentations, but we will not include their name or any other information that could easily identify them. As a result, there are minimal risks to your child as a result of how we report the data.

Right to withdraw your participation
Your child's participation is voluntary. Even if you agree initially, consent is an ongoing process. Your child can stop participating at any time for any reason. To do so, you can e-mail or call the researcher using the provided contact information for the researcher or faculty advisor. Your student can also opt out of participation at any time during the interview process.

If you withdraw permission for your child, we will stop any procedures or data collection that may be happening. We will also delete any data that's already been collected from them whenever possible. We will not be able to delete their data if we cannot identify which responses are theirs or if the data has already been published.

Compensation
There is no compensation for participating in this study.

What if you are a student?
Your child's participation in this study is not a course requirement. Their participation or lack thereof will not affect their class standing, grades, or relationship with their instructors or advisors.

What if you are an employee?
Your child's participation in this study is not a requirement of your employment. Your child's participation or lack thereof will not affect your job.

What if you have questions about this study?

If you have questions at any time about the study itself or the procedures implemented in this study, you may contact the student researcher, Amanda Boshoff, at alhobbs@ncsu.edu and 919-239-9451. You can also contact the faculty advisor for this research, Dr. Lisa Bass, at lrbass@ncsu.edu and 919-515-6291.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?
If you feel you or your child have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your child's rights as a participant in research have been violated during this project, you may contact the NC State IRB (Institutional Review Board) office. An IRB office helps participants if they have any issues regarding research activities. You can contact the NC State University IRB office at IRB-Director@ncsu.edu, 919-515-8754, or fill out a confidential form online at https://research.ncsu.edu/administration/participant-concern-and-complaint-form/

Consent to participate
By signing this parental/guardian permission form, I am affirming that I have read the above information. All the questions that I had about this research have been answered. If I consent to allow my child to participate, I understand that they can stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which they are otherwise entitled. I am aware that I may revoke my consent at any time.

Yes, I want to be in this research study.

Name_____ Today's Date _____

No, I do not want to be in this research study.

Thank you for your consideration.

## Appendix C

### Recruitment Script for Students

Recruitment Script for Students (following confirmed parent permission)

Dear Student,

My name is Amanda Boshoff, and I am a graduate student researcher at North Carolina State University and a professional educator. I am currently conducting a study to gain a better understanding of the secondary school experience as related to academics, social engagement, extra-curricular activities, and family engagement of students who attend a non-neighborhood school assignment that is more than 10 miles from the home. My hope is that this study will provide students the opportunity to share ways that school leaders can improve the overall student experience, especially for those who attend school farther from their home.

Based upon preliminary information, you meet the criteria for this research project: bus ridership, distance traveled to school, in grades 7, 8, 10, 11, or 12, and you have been enrolled at your school for more than one year.

If you choose to participate in this research project, you will answer a brief demographic survey and will be interviewed using a common protocol of questions regarding your school experience. The interview should last no longer than 30-45 minutes, will be conducted at the school, and will not interrupt your instructional time. Your names, addresses, and other demographic information will be kept anonymous, and any information gathered will be utilized only for the purposes of this study. The interview will be audio-recorded so that I can accurately quote and review the interview during the analysis process.

Do you have any questions regarding the study or your participation?

Do you agree to participate in the study? At any time during the study, you can opt to end your participation by letting me know.

## Appendix D

## Student Demographic Survey

| | |
|---|---|
| Age | |
| Gender | |
| Race | |
| Hispanic/Not Hispanic | |
| Grade Level | |
| # Years Attending Current School | |
| Street Name/City Name/Zip Code | |
| Mode of Transportation to and from School | |
| School Calendar (Traditional/Modified/Year-round) | |

## Appendix E

## Interview Protocol

*Interview Questions and Purpose*

| Questions | Purpose |
|---|---|
| **1.** How long have you attended your current school?<br>**2.** Are you a bus rider, walker, or car pooler? How long is your commute? | Ensure credibility of study by noting longevity at the school (1+ years of attendance) & confirming bus ridership. |
| **0.** What are the challenges to a long bus ride?<br>**0.** Are there any benefits to a long bus ride? | Note the direct impact of bus ride and student perceptions regarding time/distance, as well as challenges and benefits. |
| **0.** Is the school you attend the closest school to your house?<br>**0.** Were you assigned to attend this school, or did you apply to attend this school?<br>**0.** What are some of the challenges to attending a school that is far from your home?<br>**0.** What is the best thing about attending your current school? | Determine student perceptions and knowledge around school assignment & the challenges and benefits of the student experience at assigned school. |
| **0.** How do you think your parents or guardians feel about you going to a school that is a little farther from your home? | Determine student perception of parents' views on challenges/benefits/satisfaction of attending assigned school. |
| **0.** Do you participate in any extracurricular activities or sports, why or why not?<br>**0.** How do you think attending a school far from home impacts you socially?<br>**0.** Describe academics and support that you have at your current school?<br>**0.** Are there any actions that the school system or school leaders could take to make your school experience better or easier to attend a school farther from your home? | Notes level of participation in extracurricular activities.<br><br>Notes student perception of need or level of support in place for students who attend school a longer distance from home.<br>Notes social and academic impacts of attending assigned school. |

## Appendix F

## Subject Demographic Data

| Participant | Grade | Age | Race/Sex | Distance to School | Estimated time to school | Extra-Curricular Participation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Alfonso | 11 | 17 | Black/Male | 12 miles | 45 min. | Football<br>Track |
| Bobby | 10 | 16 | Latino/Male | 14 miles | 60 min. | Football<br>Track |
| Carlos | 8 | 13 | Latino/Male | 15 miles | 60 min. | None |
| Donti | 8 | 14 | Black/Male | 12 miles | 45 min. | Football |
| Elle | 7 | 13 | Black/Female | 13 miles | 50-60 min. | Basketball |
| Farrah | 8 | 13 | Latina/Female | 13 miles | 50-60 min. | None |
| Gerardo | 11 | 17 | Latino/Male | 12 miles | 45 min. | None |
| Haley | 10 | 16 | Black/Female | 12 miles | 50 min. | None |