

Paper Summary

Educational Injustice and Possibility in Post-Milliken Metropolitan Detroit Schools

In Event: *Milliken at 50: Looking Back to Imagine Forward*

Sat, April 13, 3:05 to 4:35pm, Pennsylvania Convention Center, Floor: Level 100, Room 113C
Abstract

AERA 2024 invites us to consider “dismantling racial injustice and constructing educational possibilities.” This question aptly describes what has occurred in metropolitan Detroit over the last 50 years with respect to the education of minoritized students generally, and within the context of school desegregation specifically. We examine this shifting policy landscape through the lens of the 1974 Supreme Court decision in *Milliken v. Bradley*, which remains critically important to the racial composition of schools today (Orfield & Eaton, 1996; Patterson, J. T., 2001). The story of dramatically shifting racial demographics in Detroit and the surrounding suburbs during this period is multifaceted and includes the introduction of school choice (and the funding that follows students) as well as the questionable viability of these small suburban districts.

The result of this combination of factors is that many of the districts that actively resisted the desegregation of their schools under *Milliken* now actively recruit Black students from Detroit and surrounding districts, resulting in greater exposure between white and Black students, the very outcome targeted by the overturned metropolitan desegregation plan. Districts faced with the challenge of falling enrollments may have the opportunity to recruit students from outside the district to keep enrollment numbers high enough to maintain the district’s financial viability (Reardon, Yun, & Chmielewski, 2012; Lewis, 2015).

To address these complex issues, this paper takes up the following research questions:

- + How did the racial composition of the districts involved in the *Milliken* decision change over time?
- + To what degree does inter-district choice play a role in these changes? What factors may explain districts’ engagement in the inter-district choice program?

We present descriptive analyses from the quantitative phase of the project. Data sources included NCES Common Core of Data (1987-2013), OCR data from 1968-1974 (ICPSR versions – Ann Arbor, MI), and Michigan MI Data 2013. We looked at the share of the districts where students were racially isolated (90-100% white), dissimilarity/exposure White and non-White students over time, and enrollment changes associated with levels of transfer in the former *Milliken* districts outside Detroit, MI. Our analysis is ongoing, but

- + Desegregation after 1968 increased precipitously after Prop A in 1995; enrollment of white students fell during the study period but stabilized somewhat after Prop A passed.
- + Most significant suburban non-White/White exposure (desegregation) was seen after 1995 (around the time larger numbers of students were taking advantage of Prop A).
- + Looking at districts by breakdown of transfer rate shows that some former Milliken districts rely heavily on student transfers from Detroit to sustain their enrollments.

We analyze our findings through a critical policy analysis framework (Diem et al., 2014) and conceptualize them using Harris’ (1993) whiteness as property and Bell’s (1980) interest convergence. These tools help us consider how racism is embedded in this complex environment of overlapping educational policies. We also leverage these frameworks to consider to implications of unintended racial desegregation in the Milliken districts coupled with intensified racial segregation in Detroit itself.

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