

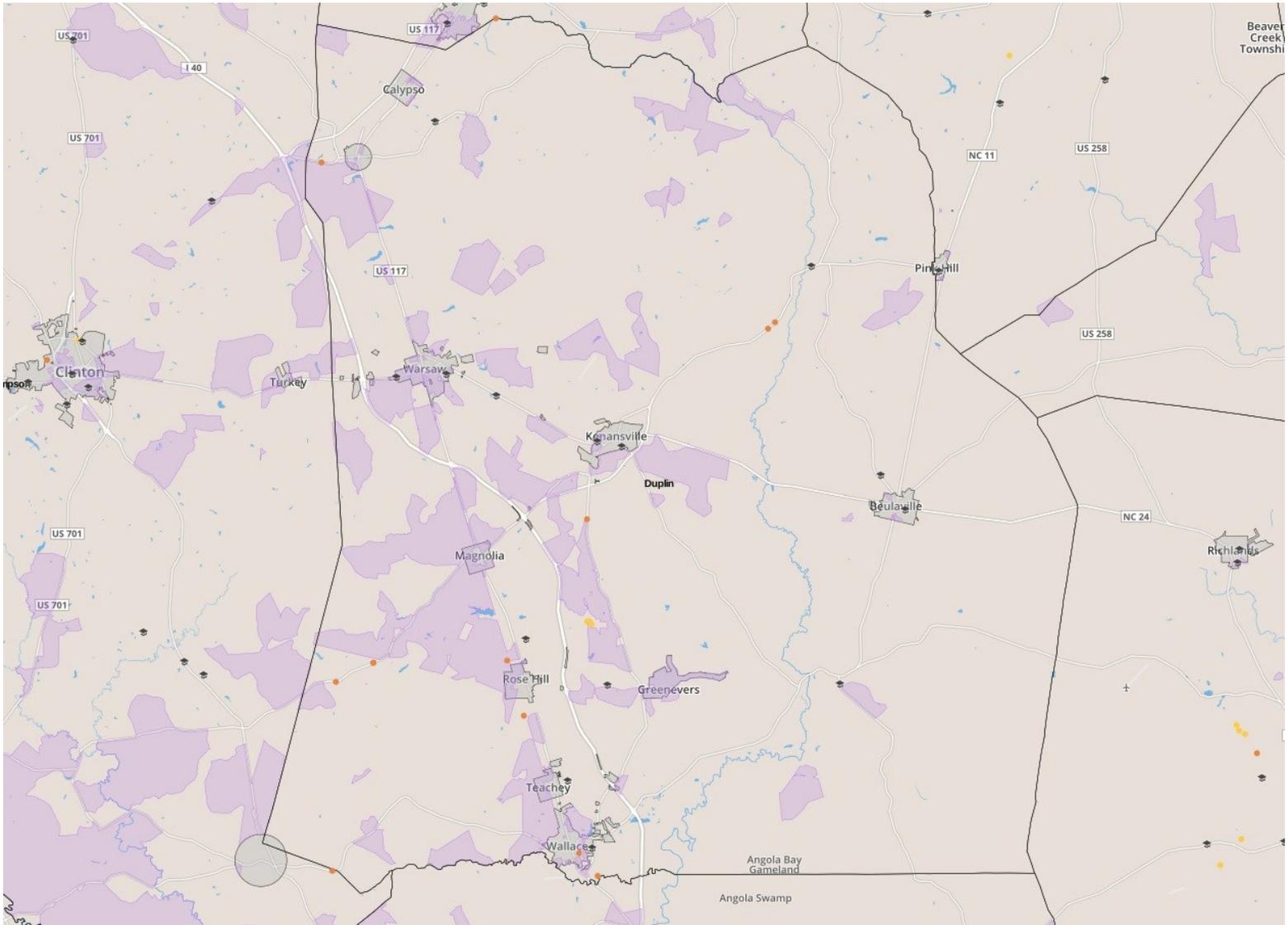


UNC  
CENTER FOR  
CIVIL RIGHTS

## The Inclusion Project

# Duplin County, N.C.

An In-depth Analysis of the Legacy  
of Segregated Communities



Located in eastern North Carolina, Duplin is a large, rural county that rests between Fayetteville and the coast. Historically an agricultural hub for North Carolina, Duplin County’s economic focus has shifted to industrial livestock operations in recent decades. The county houses the highest number of hogs, the second-highest number of turkeys, and the highest number of broiler chickens in the state,<sup>1</sup> and the livestock industry accounts for four of the county’s five largest employers.<sup>2</sup> While the very profitable pork and poultry industries are thriving in the county,<sup>3</sup> Duplin ranks near the bottom (17<sup>th</sup>) of lowest median household income in the state.<sup>4</sup>

In 1990, just 2.5% of county residents were Latino. Today, the county’s population of 59,453 is 61.9% white, 25% African American, and 21.2% Latino. The poverty rates for all three main racial groups exceed the comparable statewide rates: 20% to 13% for whites; 25% to 22% for African Americans; 21% to 9% for Latinos.<sup>5</sup>

JURISDICTION <sup>6</sup>	POPULATION <sup>7</sup>	MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME	WHITE POPULATION	AFRICAN AMERICAN POPULATION	LATINO POPULATION
NORTH CAROLINA	9,845,333	\$46,868	69.5%	21.5%	28.9%
DUPLIN COUNTY	59,453	\$35,035	61.9%	25.0%	48%
WARSAW	3,168	\$22,263	33.7%	57.8%	10.1%
KENANSVILLE	926	\$28,448	49.4%	41.1%	4.3%
BEULAVILLE	1,570	\$19,219	76.6%	18.5%	5.3%
TEACHEY	345	\$33,125	61.7%	38.3%	21.7%
MAGNOLIA	1,211	\$36,750	43.4%	33.8%	41.8%
CALYPSO	545	\$37,750	52.5%	15.2%	33.0%
GREENEVERS	847	\$26,042	10.5%	75.7%	16.8%
ROSE HILL	1,844	\$27,694	42.7%	36.2%	24.0%

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ncagr.gov/stats/2015AgStat/AgStat2015.pdf>, pp. 44-54.

<sup>2</sup> North Carolina Dep’t of Commerce, *Employer Profile: Duplin County 2015 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter*, available at [http://accessnc.commerce.state.nc.us/docs/topEmployers/topEmp\\_37061.pdf](http://accessnc.commerce.state.nc.us/docs/topEmployers/topEmp_37061.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.ncglobeconomy.com/hog/overview.shtml>, <http://markets.businessinsider.com/news/stocks/WH-Group-Announces-2016-Annual-Results-1001858554>, [https://www.nass.usda.gov/Quick\\_Stats/Ag\\_Overview/stateOverview.php?state=NORTH%20CAROLINA](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Quick_Stats/Ag_Overview/stateOverview.php?state=NORTH%20CAROLINA).

<sup>4</sup> North Carolina Dep’t of Commerce, *2017 North Carolina Development Tier Designations*, available at <https://www.nccommerce.com/Portals/0/Incentives/CountyTier/2017-Development-Tier-Rankings-Memo.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2011-2015 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates. The Census Bureau notes that “Hispanic origins are not races. People who identified their origin as Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish may be of any race,” which is why it would not be fitting to add the white, black, and Latino columns up and expect it to reach 100%.

<sup>6</sup> The towns of Faison, Harrells, Mount Olive, and Wallace are partially located in Duplin County as well.

<sup>7</sup> Data in this table is from the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2011-2015 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates.

Duplin County Schools (DCS) serves 9,760 students; 33.7% are white, 23.2% African American, and 40% Latino. DCS has the second-highest percentage of Latino students of North Carolina’s 115 public school districts. In 2015-16, DCS also had 77.7% of its students eligible for Free-or-Reduced Lunch (FRL), the seventh-highest percentage in the state. That same school year, just 41.6% of DCS students passed all their End-of-Grade (EOG) exams, the tenth-lowest EOG passage rate in the state.



**Figure 1 (L):** Purple clusters represent areas in which 75% or more of residents were non-white as of the 2010 Census. These supermajority non-white clusters are concentrated along the I-40 corridor in the western half of Duplin County. Despite the diverse districtwide student population, existing school attendance zones isolate students from this section of the county into heavily segregated schools. **Figure 1A (R):** The four attendance zones (clockwise from right/purple) East Duplin, Wallace-Rose Hill, James Kenan, North Duplin.

Through the 2016-17 school year, DCS operated fifteen schools, divided into four attendance areas.<sup>8</sup> The Kenan and Wallace-Rose Hill attendance areas serve the western and southwestern portions of the county respectively, and have long served the majority of DCS’s African American students. The North Duplin attendance area serves the northwestern portion of the county, while the East Duplin area stretches north-south across the rural, eastern third of the county. Although North and East Duplin serve most of DCS’s white students, a growing number of Latino students have also enrolled in these attendance areas in recent years.

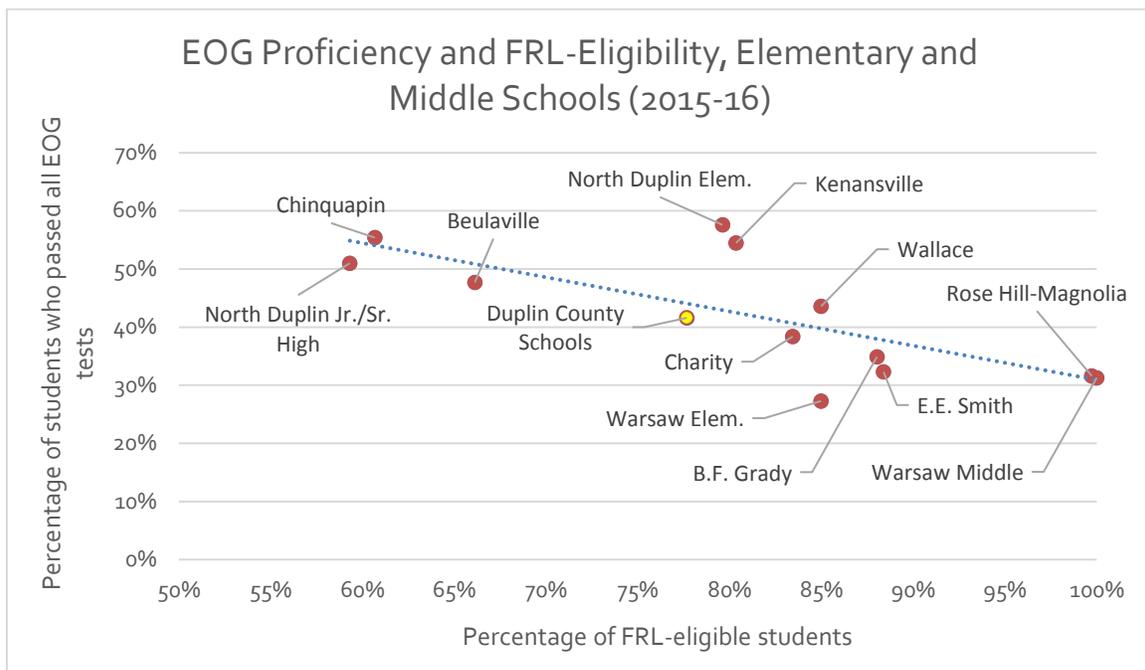
<sup>8</sup> DCS also operates a district-wide early college program, hosted at the James Sprunt Community College campus in Kenansville.

SCHOOL <sup>9</sup>	STUDENT POPULATION	PERCENTAGE OF WHITE NON-LATINO STUDENTS	PERCENTAGE OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS	PERCENTAGE OF LATINO STUDENTS
<b>KENAN ATTENDANCE AREA</b>				
JAMES KENAN HIGH (9-12)	724	16.9%	40.1%	39.8%
WARSAW MIDDLE (6-8)	239	10.5%	53.6%	34.7%
E.E. SMITH MIDDLE (6-8) <sup>10</sup>	354	21.8%	26.6%	50%
WARSAW ELEM. (K-5)	572	9.6%	48.8%	37.9%
KENANSVILLE ELEM (K-5)	389	37.3%	35.2%	23.9%
<b>WALLACE-ROSE HILL ATTENDANCE AREA</b>				
WALLACE-ROSE HILL HIGH (9-12)	678	29.5%	32.6%	35.4%
CHARITY MIDDLE (6-8)	478	24.1%	35.2%	37.7%
WALLACE ELEM. (K-5)	808	27%	27.7%	40.8%
ROSE HILL-MAGNOLIA ELEM. (K-5)	747	14.3%	26.2%	56.5%
<b>EAST DUPLIN ATTENDANCE AREA</b>				
EAST DUPLIN HIGH (9-12)	1,001	53%	12%	32.5%
B.F. GRADY ELEM. (K-8)	923	26.8%	5.5%	65.8%
BEULAVILLE ELEM. (K-8)	919	60.2%	14.3%	21.7%
CHINQUAPIN ELEM. (K-8)	541	68.2%	13.7%	15.2%
<b>NORTH DUPLIN ATTENDANCE AREA</b>				
NORTH DUPLIN HIGH (7-12)	523	45.1%	9.4%	42.8%
NORTH DUPLIN ELEM. (K-6)	682	33.7%	8.8%	54.4%

<sup>9</sup> Demographic data in this table is taken from the N.C. Dep't of Public Instruction, "Student Accounting: 2015-16 Grade, Race, Sex" available at <http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/fbs/accounting/data/>.

<sup>10</sup> Note that E.E. Smith Middle feeds into both Kenan High and Wallace-Rose Hill High, as the middle school covers a portion of both high schools' attendance areas.

While high student poverty and low standardized testing results exist districtwide, there are significant disparities among DCS's four attendance areas. In 2016, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (DPI) identified eight DCS schools as low-performing. Seven of the eight low-performing schools are in the Kenan and Wallace-Rose Hill areas. As Figure 2 (below) shows, four of these schools—Warsaw Elementary, Warsaw Middle, E.E. Smith Middle, and Rose Hill-Magnolia Elementary—saw fewer than one-third of students pass all their EOG exams during the 2015-16 school year. Similar disparities exist at the high school level, as Kenan High and Wallace-Rose Hill High students are less likely to pass End-of-Course (EOC) tests. These schools also post lower SAT scores and ACT proficiency rates when compared to North Duplin High and East Duplin High.



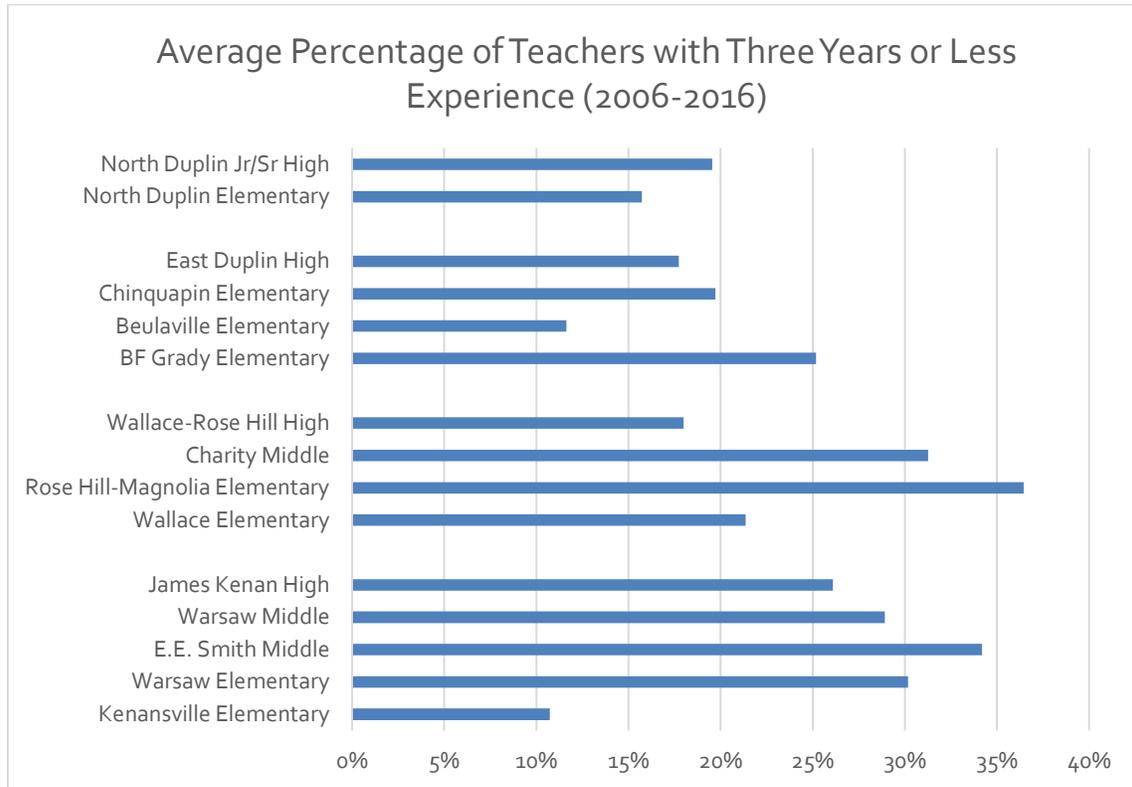
**Figure 2:** The above graph shows the correlation between student eligibility for Free-and-Reduced Lunch (FRL) and composite EOG passage rates in DCS. During the 2015-16 school year, schools in the North and East Duplin attendance areas generally saw higher EOG passage rates and lower FRL-eligibility than Kenan and Wallace-Rose Hill area schools.

These achievement disparities reflect the unequal access to educational resources that exists in DCS. Over the past decade, Kenan and Wallace-Rose Hill area schools have consistently been staffed by less experienced teachers and struggled with significantly higher teacher turnover rates.<sup>11</sup> Figure 3 shows the average percentage of teachers with three years or less experience at each school in the district since 2006. Annually, Kenan and Wallace-Rose Hill schools have been staffed by the highest percentages of such teachers.<sup>12</sup> B.F. Grady is the only school outside of these attendance areas where inexperienced teachers have accounted for more than 20% of all teachers. Kenan and Wallace-Rose

<sup>11</sup> N.C. Dep't of Public Instruction, "N.C. School Report Cards," available at <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/src/>.

<sup>12</sup> *Id.* By attendance area, teachers with three years or less experience have accounted for 26% of teachers in the Kenan area, 26.8% in the Wallace-Rose Hill area, 18.6% in East Duplin and 17.6% in North Duplin.

Hill area schools have also consistently experienced the highest teacher turnover rates in the district, and have accounted for the highest teacher turnover rates in eight of the last eleven school years.<sup>13</sup>



**Figure 3:** This graph shows the average percentage of teachers with three years or less experience between the 2005-2006 and 2015-2016 school years. These experienced teachers represented more than 25% of all teachers at six of nine schools in the Kenan and Wallace-Rose Hill attendance areas.

The need to renovate, update, or replace many of the schools in DCS has been a nearly 40-year discussion, riddled with decisions that resulted in new facilities for schools serving more white students, while leaving students in the majority non-white schools waiting for new facilities. Despite decades of recommendations from DPI that sub-par buildings be replaced with new, consolidated schools, the Board of Education has instead repeatedly pursued policies that not only fail to remedy issues of facilities and equity, but often increase existing disparities.

## A History of Refusing to Address School Segregation in Duplin County

Duplin County operated racially segregated schools prior to the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. A 1941 statistical survey showed that per pupil spending for white students was almost double that for African Americans (\$22.98 to \$12.77); the average value of school facilities that served white students was \$22,460, while those for African American students was

<sup>13</sup> *Id.* Since 2006, there has been an average teacher turnover rate of 19.4% in the Kenan area, 16.2% in the Wallace-Rose Hill area, 11% in East Duplin, and 15.1% in North Duplin.

\$1,435.<sup>14</sup> In 1947, seven years before *Brown*, twenty schools served African American students across the county, including nine elementary schools staffed by only one or two teachers.<sup>15</sup> While these African American teachers were often experienced educators,<sup>16</sup> they taught in aged facilities with unsanitary water supplies and outdoor restrooms. Many of the schools also lacked libraries and first-aid care for students.<sup>17</sup>

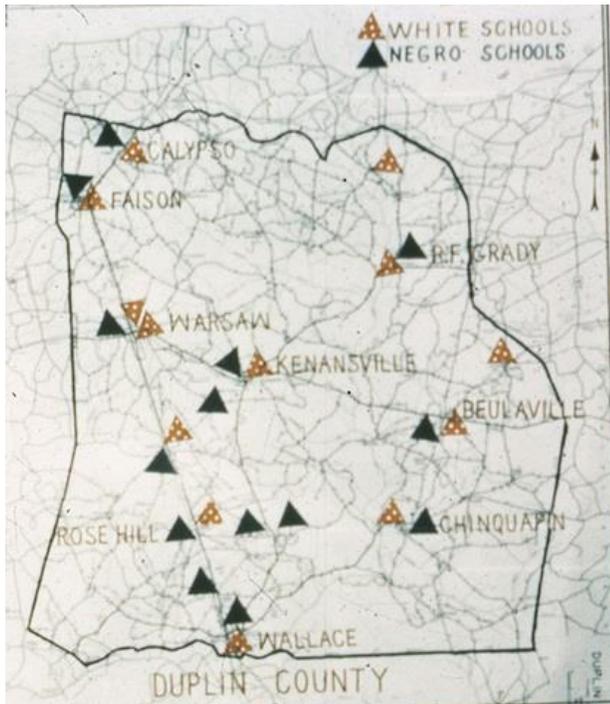


Figure 4 (left): This map of the location of the segregated schools in Duplin in 1953, and reflects the higher concentration of African American students in the Southwest and West Central portions of the county (now the Kenan and Wallace-Rose attendance areas). Above: students and staff at one of the one-room African American schools in the county.<sup>18</sup>

Like many districts in the South, segregation in DCS continued late into the 1960s. In the summer of 1968, the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare financed a series of meetings among white and African American education officials from across Duplin County to discuss the challenges of desegregation.<sup>19</sup> DCS began voluntary desegregation the following school year.

Over the last fifty years however, the school board has consistently balked at opportunities to better integrate its schools. Since the 1970s, deteriorating facilities in the predominantly non-white Kenan and Wallace-Rose Hill attendance areas and periods of declining enrollment have required the school board to make numerous decisions related to facilities and student assignment. At each turn, DCS has chosen to maintain attendance boundaries that isolate African American and, more recently, Latino

<sup>14</sup> Charles S. Johnson, et al, *Statistical Analysis of Southern Counties* (UNC Press, Chapel Hill, NC, 1941), p. 182.

<sup>15</sup> Floyd Vance Spence, *A Survey of the Negro Schools of Duplin County, North Carolina 29* (1948) (M.A. thesis, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill).

<sup>16</sup> *Id.* at 34.

<sup>17</sup> *Id.* at 78-80.

<sup>18</sup> Duplin County Schools, PhC.188. State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh, NC. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/north-carolina-state-archives/albums/72157634070792622/page1>.

<sup>19</sup> U.S. Dep't of Health, Education & Welfare, "Report of Duplin Teacher Institute" 1968.

students in the western portion of the county. The school board's segregative student assignment and facilities decisions have continued for decades, despite not only the expressed concerns of African American community members and racially disparate educational outcomes, but also a series of expert recommendations from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (DPI).

#### 40 YEARS OF REJECTED RECOMMENDATIONS

- **In its 1979-1980 "School Survey Report"** for Duplin County, DPI offered two strategic planning alternatives for DCS. Both options recommended the consolidation of North Duplin and James Kenan High School attendance areas, the construction of a new high school, the conversion of James Kenan and North Duplin High Schools to middle schools, and the closure of Warsaw Junior High (now Warsaw Middle), E.E. Smith Junior High (now E.E. Smith Middle), and North Duplin Junior High. The school board refused to adopt any of these recommendations.
- **A 1982-1983 update from DPI** again emphasized the need to consolidate James Kenan and North Duplin High, close Warsaw and North Duplin Junior High, and convert James Kenan and North Duplin high schools into middle schools. The report also recommended E.E. Smith Middle School be converted into a special programs facility following necessary upgrades.

These proposed reorganizations would not only more effectively use educational facilities and resources, but would also create more racially integrated schools. DCS rejected them all. Although the school board purchased a parcel of land adjacent to Kenan High and signaled its intention to expand the school in 1981, that land remains vacant nearly forty years later.

Throughout the mid-1980s, the school board discussed consolidating Kenan High and North Duplin High in a new facility.<sup>20</sup> However, many white parents from the North Duplin area opposed consolidating the high schools.<sup>21</sup> In 1985, the school board abandoned the idea of consolidating the Kenan and North Duplin attendance areas, and instead chose to maintain the segregating attendance area lines, and address declining enrollment in the North Duplin area by consolidating North Duplin High and Junior High.<sup>22</sup>

- **DPI's 1989-1990 School Survey Report** echoed its decade-old recommendations: consolidate all high school students in the James Kenan and North Duplin attendance areas, convert North Duplin High to a middle school, and end the use of E.E. Smith as a middle school. The school board refused to adopt these recommendations, which recognized the need to address resistance to racial integration in the northern, whiter part of the county. The school board did agree with DPI's recommendation to convert Rose Hill-Magnolia and Wallace Elementary from K-6 to K-5 schools, but ignored a similar recommendation for North Duplin Elementary.

---

<sup>20</sup> See "Duplin School Budgets Given to Board," *Duplin Times*, May 2, 1985.

<sup>21</sup> "Lack of Funds Blocks 9<sup>th</sup> Grade at JK," *Duplin Times*, Jan. 13, 1983.

<sup>22</sup> "Duplin Board Votes to Close a School," *Duplin Times*, June 27, 1985.

---

*"Consolidate North Duplin and James Kenan High School attendance areas"*  
School Survey Report, Duplin County 1979-1980

*"Construct a new high school ... conveniently located to serve the James Kenan and North Duplin attendance areas."*

Duplin County: An Update 1982-83

*"Improve & modify James Kenan High School in order to serve all students...in the North Duplin and James Kenan High School attendance areas."*

School Survey Report, Duplin County 1989-1990

*"Determine which two high schools are in the best locations to serve the most students and... accommodate all the students of the county."*

Facility Survey for Duplin County Schools, 2011

---

- **In 2011, DCS received the most recent report from the School Planning Division at DPI.** In addition to the repeated refrain about consolidating the high school attendance areas, the 2011 report included "Priority Recommendations" for the district's middle schools that included combining E.E. Smith, Warsaw Middle and the middle school students from North Duplin Senior High into a new middle school building, and removing all middle school students from the existing K-8 elementary schools. The DPI report also highlighted overcrowding at B.F. Grady and the urgent need for redistricting, stating that the school "is suffering most from over utilization. Middle school students should be removed from B.F. Grady and Beulaville to bring them back to student levels that can be supported by the facilities." B.F. Grady was identified as being overcapacity for both classrooms and core facilities, and Beulaville for classrooms and cafeteria space.

### **ACCOMMODATING WHITE STUDENTS**

While DPI's integrative recommendations went unanswered throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, the school board pursued nearly all of DPI's recommendations that would allow DCS to maintain existing, segregated school attendance areas. By the mid-1990s, DCS completed a range of projects in the majority-white East Duplin attendance area, including the construction of brand new schools in Beulaville and at B.F. Grady, and substantial expansion and enhancement of Chinquapin Elementary.

But the school board went even further than creating disparities among school facilities, creating racial isolation within schools. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Warsaw Elementary concentrated all its white students in particular classrooms in the school. This practice, which resulted in nearly one-fourth of the school's classrooms being occupied only by African American students, was the school board's purported answer to the growing problem of "white flight" from the school. In 1993, the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR) put an end to the policy.<sup>23</sup> Many white parents expressed concerns and considered removing their children from the school.<sup>24</sup>

Over the next decade, members of the African American community continued to push for new schools to replace aging facilities in the Kenan and Wallace-Rose Hill areas, as well as consolidation and student reassignment to promote diversity across DCS. By 2004, with these concerns still unaddressed, a Warsaw community group advocated for a consolidated high school to stop white flight from the James Kenan area, claiming that the school board's open transfer policy was exacerbating the racial isolation of non-white students at Kenan High.<sup>25</sup>

### A REACTIONARY REVERSAL

In 2004, the school board hired SFL+A architects to design a master plan for DCS. The district's Facilities Study Steering Committee identified racial imbalance and "inequities between schools" as a "con" of DCS's organizational plan, and repeatedly identified "racial balance" as a "pro." In 2005, following SFL+A's report, the school board took its most significant step toward promoting diversity when it voted to build a new high school that would include students from the Kenansville, Warsaw, and B.F. Grady attendance areas.<sup>26</sup> The proposed high school would be the most racially balanced school in DCS.<sup>27</sup> The plan also proposed to use the James Kenan campus as a middle school to serve Warsaw and E.E. Smith Middle students. Although the Duplin County Board of Commissioners approved the consolidated high school in October 2005, no further action was taken.<sup>28</sup>

As with earlier proposals that would better integrate schools, the plan to consolidate Kenan and East Duplin students soon collapsed under pressure from white parents. After the 2006 county election, a newly-elected county commissioner from the East Duplin area echoed these parents' opposition to consolidation based on academic and disciplinary problems at Kenan High.<sup>29</sup> By the summer of 2007, the county commissioners rescinded their support for the consolidated high school.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> "Warsaw School Will No Longer Group Whites." *Duplin Times*, 5 August 1993.

<sup>24</sup> "Duplin School Board Halts Student Moves Tied to Race." *Duplin Times*, 26 August 1993.

<sup>25</sup> "Warsaw Group Seeks High School Consolidation to Stop White Flight from JK District." *Duplin Times*, 22 April 2004.

<sup>26</sup> "School Board Votes to Build New High School," *Duplin Times*, May 12, 2005.

<sup>27</sup> "Meeting on School Facilities Plan Marked with Contentious Debate," *Duplin Times*, July 28, 2005.

<sup>28</sup> "Commissioners Vote to Seek Funds for School Facilities Plan," *Duplin Times*, Oct. 13, 2005.

<sup>29</sup> "School Board Nixes Outlaw Again," *Duplin Times*, June 28, 2007.

<sup>30</sup> *Duplin Times*, June 12, 2007.

After the commissioners revoked their support for a consolidated high school, the school board considered other plans aimed at better integrating DCS's high schools and addressing low student enrollment. In 2008, the board proposed combining Kenan, North Duplin, and portions of East Duplin High. North Duplin parents quickly moved to oppose the plan, calling for the Superintendent's resignation and asserting that the school board "blatantly displayed prejudices toward certain schools."<sup>31</sup> As yet another plan for improved and integrated schools was falling by the wayside, parents and residents from the Kenansville and Warsaw area also expressed their frustrations. School board member Willie Gillespie summarized their feelings: "I want to improve schools in the James Kenan district. We have been waiting for four years [since the board's vote to consolidate high schools], we are now going on five."<sup>32</sup>

---

### DCS's 2014 K-8 Facilities Plan

---

After decades of refusing to consider redistricting students or adopting the state's recommendations regarding the efficient use of facilities (both of which would have addressed the increasing racial isolation and educational inequities in Duplin County schools), and faced with severely aging and inadequate middle schools primarily serving African American students, the school board was forced to act. On April 29, 2014, Hite Associates presented a facilities proposal to the board which included: expanding B.F. Grady; building a new gym in North Duplin Junior/Senior High School; closing E.E. Smith, Warsaw and Charity Middle Schools; and converting Kenansville, Warsaw, Rose Hill-Magnolia, and Wallace Elementary schools from K-5 to K-8. The estimated cost was over \$56 million dollars. Although the Board claimed there would be cost savings under "the K-8 plan" (through the reduction in operational and personnel costs, including the layoff of a principal, school nurse or counselor), it never presented any consistent cost estimates to support that claim. In fact, according to the Hite Report, the new middle school alternative represented substantially lower costs for the district.<sup>33</sup>

In response, African American residents and parents organized The Concerned Citizens of Duplin County (CCDC), and spoke out against the proposal at public meetings in April, May and June 2014. In addition to what CCDC saw as the school board's discriminatory refusal to build the long promised new middle school in the Kenan Rose-Hill attendance area, they also questioned spending so much money to retrofit already dilapidated elementary buildings. CCDC also raised issues not contemplated by the school board, including existing traffic flow problems at Warsaw Elementary, which would be exacerbated by expanding the school to K-8.

---

<sup>31</sup> Michael Connolly, "Fired Up and Furious: North Duplin Parents Prepare to Fight Back Against School Plan, Call for Superintendent's Resignation," Sampson Independent, July 12, 2008.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Connolly, "More Questions than Answers: Although Plans are Still Up in the Air About a New Duplin High School, Talk Turns to Who Might Fill the School if, and When, it is Built," Sampson Independent, Apr. 17, 2009.

<sup>33</sup> See "Facility Survey and Recommendations Report for Duplin County Schools," Duplin, North Carolina, October 2011 (accessible at: [http://www.duplinschools.net/cms/lib01/NC01001360/Centricity/Domain/6/board\\_meeting\\_files/DuplinCountySchoolsFacilityStudy.pdf](http://www.duplinschools.net/cms/lib01/NC01001360/Centricity/Domain/6/board_meeting_files/DuplinCountySchoolsFacilityStudy.pdf)).

The plan also fails to address critical issues of overcrowding highlighted in DPI's 2011 report, particularly in the K-8 schools in the disproportionately white East Duplin attendance area. CCDC and other speakers at the public meetings urged that overcrowding issues could be effectively addressed through a consolidated middle school plan by moving all or some 6-8 graders into the new middle schools. They also explained that this would also reduce racial segregation within the district.

Despite this information and opposition by community members, on July 1, 2014, by a vote of 4-2, with the two African American members dissenting, the school board adopted the facilities plan.

In response, the CCDC filed a federal administrative complaint with the U.S. Department of Education, under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The CCDC's complaint alleged that the facilities plan will have a discriminatory effect on African American students by denying them access to high quality facilities and further concentrating them in racially segregated and under-performing schools. In 2015-16, eight of DCS's fifteen schools were low-performing; seven of those are in the Kenan and Wallace-Rose Hill attendance areas.<sup>34</sup> CCDC highlighted that the plan maintains attendance areas that have entrenched segregation and significant educational disparities for decades, and that the retrofitted K-8 facilities will disproportionately serve students of color. This increased racial isolation will impact non-white students' ability to access quality educational resources, and deprive all students of a diverse and integrated educational experience. The Title VI complaint also highlighted overt discriminatory treatment of African American students, noting new school facilities were constructed in majority white areas during the 1990s,<sup>35</sup> while the school board opted to retrofit sub-par facilities when a similar need for new facilities required action in the majority non-white student communities.

---

*In June 2105, the U.S. Department of Education accepted jurisdiction over the CCDC civil rights complaint, agreeing to investigate two issues in DCS:*

- 1. Whether DCS has failed to provide its elementary and middle schools consisting of predominantly African American, Latino, and mixed-race students with equal access to education resources; and*
- 2. whether the facilities plan deprives African American, Latino, and mixed-race students of equal access to educational resources.*

---

<sup>34</sup> NC Dep't of Public Instruction, "2015-16 Low-Performing Schools, Low-Performing Districts and Recurring Low-Performance Schools", available at <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/accountability/reporting/>.

<sup>35</sup> BF Grady Elementary (1995), Beulaville Elementary (1996), and substantial renovation and expansion at Chinquapin Elementary (1995). Both Beulaville and Chinquapin serve hypersegregated (> 20% deviation from district baseline) white populations.

## FUNDING THE PLAN

On March 16, 2015, by a vote of 3-2, with the two African American members dissenting, the county commissioners approved funding the facilities plan. The majority chose to pursue a higher-interest "Limited Obligation Loan" (LOB) in order to push the project through more quickly and avoid the public referendum requirement that attaches to a General Obligation Loan (GOB), even though the GOB offers lower interest rates and better terms. Commissioner Jessie Dowe, who opposed the motion, stated that because the need for new schools was a "deeply rooted issue" in the community, there should be a public referendum.<sup>36</sup> No such referendum ever occurred.

On March 26, 2015, county budget documents showed that the cost of the facilities plan was \$57,202,000, a million dollars higher than announced just a month earlier. By March 2016, County Manager Mike Aldridge reported that bids for the facilities plan were \$2.7 million over budget. The county agreed to provide \$1.2 million, with the school board providing the additional \$1.5 million to cover the excess. Over the next year, the county had to spend an additional \$1,235,054 on the facilities plan, and was forced to move \$222,986 from funds originally budgeted for Rose Hill Magnolia (\$110,00), B.F. Grady (\$15,000), and North Duplin (\$97,986) to the Warsaw Elementary retrofit project. At the time of this report, North Duplin Junior/Senior High's new gymnasium was completed, and the remaining construction was scheduled to be completed in time for the 2017-18 school year.

## COMMUNITY ADVOCACY SINCE 2014

CCDC, the Duplin County NAACP, parents, and current and former students of DCS have continued to speak out about racial disparities in the district. In April 2016, community advocates filed a complaint against the school board with AdvancED, the accreditation agency for all of North Carolina's school districts. The complaint alleged that the school board was violating AdvancED standards that require accredited districts to "operate under governance and leadership that promotes and supports student performance and system effectiveness." With less than two weeks of consideration, the agency declined to investigate the complaint.

In July 2016, James Kenan High School's valedictorian submitted a sworn statement in the federal Title VI complaint recounting her experience of substandard facilities, curriculum, and teacher quality in the racially isolated schools she attended in Duplin County, and the harm caused by the discriminatory culture in DCS as well as the inferior educational resources. Although the statement was read publicly during a school board meeting, and African American parents addressed the board with similar concerns, there has been no response from the school board.

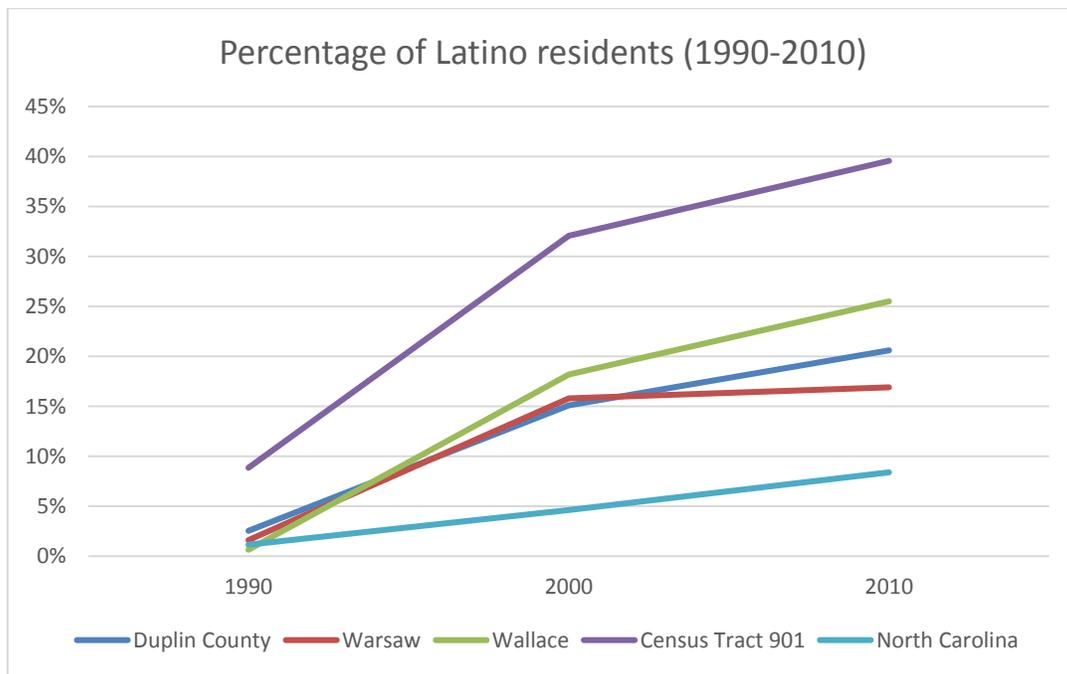
---

<sup>36</sup> See audio recording of March 16, 2015 BOC meeting, at <http://www.duplincountync.com/mp3/2015/03-16-2015%20Board%20Meeting.mp3>.

In September 2016, DCS Superintendent Austin Obasahan met with the CCDC to review concerns raised by families within the James Kenan attendance area on a range of issues, all relating to the district’s disparities in access to quality educational resources. The CCDC specifically requested further information about how students would be assigned to the renovated schools, and whether the racial disparities would be addressed. Further communications with the Superintendent’s office in January 2017 and subsequent school board meetings indicate that there has been no change in course, and that the schools are scheduled to open for the 2017-18 school year with the imbalanced student demographics predicted by the Title VI complaint.

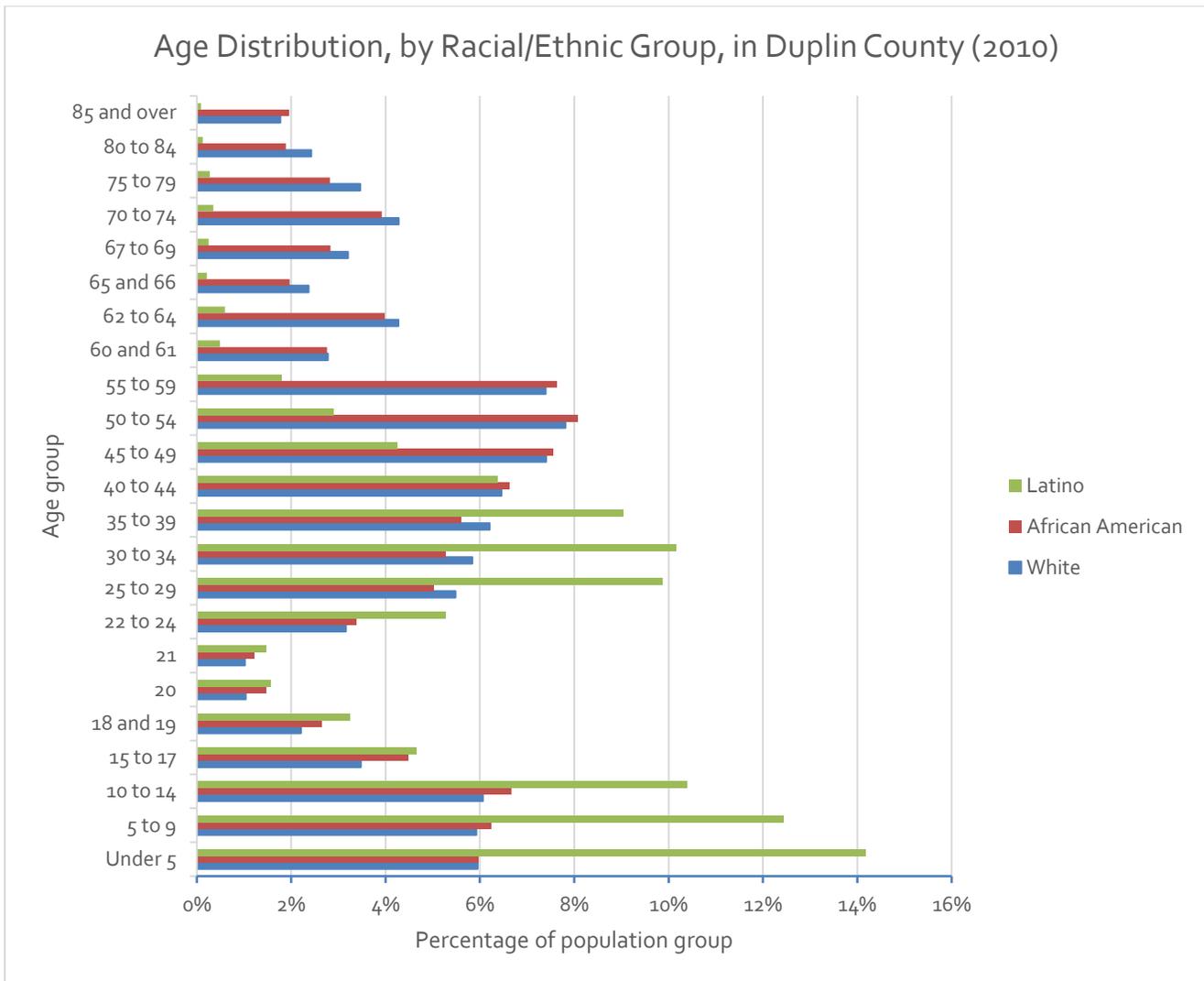
## New Challenges: DCS’s Growing Latino Student Population

While the DCS school board has moved forward with a K-8 facilities plan that maintains segregated attendance zones, Duplin County’s rising Latino population is changing the nature of school segregation. As with many school districts across the South, the historical separation of African American and white students in DCS has given way to the maintenance of white enclaves in an increasingly “tri-racial” district. In 2015-16, DCS had 40% Latino students, the second highest percentage in the state. Although the school district’s growing Latino student population raises additional questions about segregation in Duplin County, it also highlights DCS’s potential to embrace integration and afford all of its students equal access to educational resources.



**Figure 5:** The above graph shows that Duplin County’s Latino population has risen at a much higher rate than the statewide average since 1990. While towns across western Duplin County have gained many Latino residents, the Latino population has grown most dramatically in the rural, northeastern part of the county during this period. Census Tract 901 encompasses this rural area, which is also home to B.F. Grady Elementary and the unincorporated community of Albertson.

The East Duplin attendance area serves as a powerful example of how shifting demographics have altered school segregation in DCS. Northeast Duplin has experienced the highest growth in Latino residents in the county however, and B.F. Grady serves the highest percentage of Latino students in the district (65.8%). It is also the only DCS school identified by DPI as low-performing that is not located in the Kenan or Wallace-Rose Hill areas. Meanwhile, the two other elementary schools in East Duplin—Beulaville and Chinquapin—continue to serve the highest percentages of white students in DCS, some of the lowest percentages of FRL-eligible students, and have higher standardized testing results than nearly all schools in the Kenan and Wallace-Rose Hill areas.



**Figure 6:** This graph shows the age distribution of Duplin County’s white, African American, and Latino residents as of the 2010 Census. Whereas the largest group of both Duplin County’s white and African American residents are ages 50-54, the largest group of the county’s Latino residents (14.2%) are five years of age or younger. This age breakdown means that the already changing pattern of school demographics will increase rapidly over the next decade

As the percentage of Latino students attending DCS has increased, the district faces the challenge of providing necessary educational resources to Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students, who account for 17.2% of DCS’s student population, over three-times their representation statewide (5.3%).

DCS’s effort to educate its LEP students has been undercut by the district’s serious problem attracting English as Second Language (ESL) teachers. The district’s ESL policy manual states that the ratio of ESL teachers to LEP students should not exceed 1:25,<sup>37</sup> but they range as high as 1:76 in DCS’s elementary schools, 1:60 in middle schools, and 1:80 in high schools.<sup>38</sup>

Standardized testing data reflects DCS’s struggle to provide necessary resources to its LEP students, as the district’s 17.8% EOG passage rate among LEP students is the twelfth-lowest in the state.<sup>39</sup> At the high school level, just 10.8% of DCS’s LEP students pass all their EOC tests.<sup>40</sup>

SCHOOL	PERCENTAGE OF LEP STUDENTS	LEP STUDENT EOG/EOC PROFICIENCY	RATIO OF LEP STUDENTS TO ESL TEACHERS
WARSAW MIDDLE	15.3%	8.1%	28:1 (1 ESL teacher)
E.E. SMITH MIDDLE	16.9%	7.4%	32.5:1 (2 ESL teachers)
WARSAW ELEMENTARY	23.2%	25.2%	125:1 (1 ESL teacher)
KENANSVILLE ELEMENTARY	8.6%	28.6%	27.5:1 (2 ESL teachers)
CHARITY MIDDLE	12%	14%	60:1 (1 ESL teacher)
WALLACE ELEMENTARY	14.2%	14.5%	53.3:1 (3 ESL teachers)
ROSE HILL-MAGNOLIA ELEMENTARY	32.7%	17.8%	76:1 (3 ESL teachers)
B.F. GRADY ELEMENTARY	30%	10%	58.6:1 (6 ESL teachers)
BEULAVILLE ELEMENTARY	8.1%	22.4%	76:1 (1 ESL teacher)
CHINQUAPIN ELEMENTARY	5%	30.2%	9:1 (2 ESL teachers)
NORTH DUPLIN ELEMENTARY	21.2%	35.4%	34.5:1 (4 ESL teachers)

<sup>37</sup> Duplin County Schools, *English as a Second Language (ESL Plan) Revised*, August 2016.

<sup>38</sup> Duplin County Schools, *Language Instruction Education Program (LIEP) Services 2016-2017*.

<sup>39</sup> N.C. Dep’t of Public Instruction, “2015-16 State, District, and School Level Drilldown Performance Data,” available at <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/accountability/reporting/>. 112 of North Carolina’s 115 public school districts report a districtwide EOG passage rate for LEP students, as three districts have too few LEP students to report this data.

<sup>40</sup> *Id.*

## Conclusions and Recommendations:

Repeated and continuing decisions by the Duplin County school board regarding school locations, feeder patterns, grade alignments, and attendance area boundaries have foreseeably produced racially isolated schools, reflecting historic and deeply entrenched patterns of residential racial segregation. Those schools, predictably, suffer from inferior facilities, fewer experienced teachers, higher teacher turnover rates, and lower student achievement. Since students are resources to each other, segregated learning environments deprive all students of invaluable opportunities to engage with peers from different backgrounds, experiences and perspectives, and ill-prepares them to live and work in our increasingly diverse society.

For decades, the school board has received recommendations from the state Department of Public Instruction, and from numerous parents and community advocates on both the need and the means to address these inequities. At each decision point, the school board not only rejected critical positive steps, but made deliberate and often costly choices that have aggravated disparities and made change even more difficult. These regressive measures, combined with declining overall enrollment and growing numbers of Latino and Limited English Proficiency students, urgently require the school board to adopt forward looking policies that will improve educational outcomes for all students.

The rejection of consolidated, diverse middle schools in favor of retrofitted K-8 programs necessitates district-wide student reassignment that emphasizes diversity. In addition, a district-wide K-8 magnet program can help reduce racial isolation, provided that the school board make student diversity a top priority in implementing any magnet plan. The school board must also now move on combining attendance areas, both to address diversity as well as end the inefficient and inequitable allocation of resources. It is long past time to consolidate the district's five high schools, and demography and equity demand that any new facilities be located in the long-overlooked western half of the county.

DCS must consider the issues of diversity, equity, and achievement in the context of the district's rapidly growing Latino and LEP student population. Given that this demographic skews younger than both the African American and white population (children under the age of 18 account for 41.7% of Duplin County's Latino residents, but just 3.4% and 21.4% of the county's African American and white residents, respectively), the school board faces additional challenges in ensuring that Latino and LEP students receive the opportunity to a sound basic education. While addressing racial isolation through student assignment and consolidation will help to some degree, both the school board and the county commissioners must make this a priority and provide sufficient funds to recruit and retain high qualified ESL teachers, instructional materials, and other educational resources and programs necessary to effectively educate these students. Finally, community advocates must continue to work together to hold the school board accountable on demands for racial inclusion and educational equity.