



E-PARCC

COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE INITIATIVE

Syracuse University

Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs

Program for the Advancement of Research on Conflict and Collaboration

The End of a Diversity Policy? Wake County Public Schools and Student Assignment TEACHING NOTE

Summary

This case is grounded in three overarching themes: the policymaking process, the role of different actors in policymaking, and education policy. It also provides a strong dose of the role of politics with regard to these three themes and provides students with windows onto a complex, controversial, and nationally-known set of circumstances concerning the issue of assigning students to schools. Students will learn about the multiple perspectives and factors that went into Wake County, North Carolina's school assignment process. In doing so, the case offers multiple opportunities for students to develop their own insight about and strategies for addressing the challenges faced in Wake County. The case highlights that, importantly, policymaking often happens with the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders, including but not limited to elected officials, the media, advocacy organizations, lobbyists, individual citizens, and others. It also raises the question of the use of research and other evidence in policymaking, important for students to understand, given the fast-growing evidence-based policy movement. Given the seemingly endless sources and quantity of information, a challenge for students will be to determine what information to consider in making recommendations and what information to set aside.

This case was a winner in E-PARCC's 2014-15 "Collaborative Public Management, Collaborative Governance, and Collaborative Problem Solving" teaching case and simulation competition. It was double-blind peer reviewed by a committee of academics and practitioners. It was written by Jenni Owen and Megan Kauffmann of the Sanford School of Public Policy and Center for Child and Family Policy at Duke University. This case is intended for classroom discussion and is not intended to suggest either effective or ineffective handling of the situation depicted. It is brought to you by E-PARCC, part of the Syracuse University Maxwell School's Collaborative Governance Initiative, a subset of the Program for the Advancement of Research on Conflict and Collaboration (PARCC). This material may be copied as many times as needed as long as the authors are given full credit for their work.

This teaching note accompanies the case, *The End of a Diversity Policy? Wake County Public Schools and Student Assignment*. The case and teaching note are applicable to a wide range of disciplines and education levels. They are particularly well-suited for upper level undergraduate or master's students in public administration, public policy and education courses and degree programs.

The case includes extensive appendices, which provide critical contextual information that significantly inform and affect the case dynamics and give students a nuanced look at what happened, why it happened, and why it matters.

Recommended student exercises/assignments.

The teaching note presents four assignment options. The first option is the most straightforward and serves to ensure that students understand and consider a wide range of case components, why they matter, and who the key players are. This assignment option lends itself well to courses in which a central goal is raising knowledge of policy actors and corresponding decision making processes and structures. It also has the potential to work particularly well with international (non-U.S.) students who are studying U.S. policymaking at the local level. The second assignment option asks students to consider how they would prioritize the primary issues of the case. The third option may appear to be the simplest but may in fact be the most challenging for students with regard to making a strong research-based argument, if learning to consider available evidence is a priority in terms of student learning.

The fourth assignment option asks students to read through possible courses of action and consider potential consequences. This assignment requires a more complex and nuanced understanding of the case. For all of the assignment options, students should use the online resources referenced throughout the case (including throughout the endnotes) to inform and bolster their assignment deliverables.

Assignment Type I – Understanding the Who, the What, and the So What?

Carefully read the case, *The End of a Diversity Policy? Wake County Public Schools and Student Assignment*. You will be assigned a question from the list below. Respond with a 250-300 word memo and a 5-7 minute PowerPoint (approximately 10 slides), which you will present to the class. After each presentation, there will be 3-5 minutes for questions and your replies.

This assignment works well as both an individual and small group assignment.

Recommended questions

1. What is the demographic makeup of Wake County? In your presentation, include the overall demographics of the county, the demographics of the school system, and any other demographics that you'd like to include. Explain why this is important to the case.
2. What was the diversity policy on which this case focuses and why was it controversial?

3. What is “free and reduced price lunch”, who receives it, and why does it matter for this case?
4. What key individuals or groups were in favor of the diversity policy and why?
5. What key individuals or groups were opposed to the diversity policy and why?
6. What is the community schools approach and who was promoting it?
7. What is the John Locke Foundation, what is the Great Schools in Wake Coalition, and how do their perspectives differ? What impact do you think their different perspectives had on the case?
8. What was the Wake County school board like before and after the 2009 election and how did this affect the diversity policy?

Assignment Option II

Carefully read the case, *The End of a Diversity Policy? Wake County Public Schools and Student Assignment*. If you were a member of the Wake County Board of Education, what would you do? Which goals for student assignment would be most important and how would you achieve these goals?

Respond to this assignment with a 250-300 word memo and a 5-7 minute oral presentation. You may use PowerPoint or other presentation tools.

This assignment is best suited for students to do individually.

Assignment Option III – Diversity Policy, Yes or No?

Carefully read the case, *The End of a Diversity Policy? Wake County Public Schools and Student Assignment*. Write a 250-300 word memo and prepare and deliver a 5-7 minute oral presentation advocating **either for or against** the diversity policy. You may role play and you may use PowerPoint or other presentation tools. After each presentation, there will be 3-5 minutes for questions and your replies.

This assignment works well as both an individual and small group assignment.

Assignment Type IV -- Possible Courses of Action and Potential Consequences

Carefully read the case, *The End of a Diversity Policy? Wake County Public Schools and Student Assignment*. Read the four possible courses of action below and then respond to the questions about consequences that follow by writing a 250-300 word memo for each of the two questions and a 5-7 minute oral presentation. You may use PowerPoint or other presentation tools.

This assignment works well as both an individual and small group assignment.

Possible Course of Action #1: Continue to Assign Students with No Diversity Requirement

One course of action the school board could take would be to continue drawing up the community schools assignment plan without a diversity policy. In drawing up the school assignment zones and regions during the August 31, 2010 school board meeting, Tedesco announced that the primary goals of the assignment plan were to increase choice for parents and students and to increase the proximity of schools to home.¹ If the school board continued to proceed with school assignment plans with only these two goals in mind, they would likely finish the assignment plan within the allotted 9-15 month time frame that they had set for the assignment process.

Possible Course of Action #2: Follow Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Family Choice Model

Another course the school board could take would be to follow the school choice model implemented by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) Board of Education in 2002. In that year, CMS transitioned from a diversity busing model to a school choice model, called the "Family Choice Model," whereby the county was divided into four zones and families were given the option of choosing a school within their zone.² Families could also choose schools and magnet schools outside of their assigned zone, but transportation would not be provided.³ Families selected their top three school choices and were guaranteed attendance at one of the three.⁴

CMS knew of the possibilities that high poverty schools could have negative effects on the academic performance of students, and that doing away with interracial busing might result in pockets of high poverty schools.

The district hoped to counteract these potential effects by investing extra financial resources in schools with large proportions of students in poverty.⁵ CMS board members argue that the school system's investment in high quality teachers at these schools has resulted in higher test scores for minority students in Charlotte-Mecklenburg County than in Wake County.⁶ However, the choice model implemented by CMS did not prevent racial segregation from occurring. By 2003, 52 of the 141 schools in the district had a non-white population of 75% or more, and 17 of the 141 schools had a white population of 75% or more.⁷ The county also saw a movement of students out of the inner city schools into the suburban schools, which resulted in overcrowding in the suburbs and under-enrollment in the inner city schools.

Accommodating the influx of students by providing temporary classrooms and designing longer bus routes cost the county more than \$224 million dollars, which it raised through a bond in 2001 in preparation for the choice plan.⁸ The overcrowding became so unwieldy that the school board changed its policy in 2003-2004 so that not all families would get one of their top three choices.⁹

As the example of the Family Choice Plan in CMS shows, dividing school attendance into zones and opening assignment up to family choice without enacting a diversity requirement does not ensure racial and economic diversity. If the Wake County school board adopted Charlotte-Mecklenburg's school choice model, it is unlikely that they could maintain socio-economic diversity in Wake County schools.

Possible Course of Action #3: Work Collaboratively with Pro-Diversity Groups to Reach Compromise

A third course of action that the school board could take would be to work collaboratively with supporters of the diversity policy to reach a compromise. The school board and the supporters could work together to define what an acceptable level of diversity would be. Any compromise would need to balance the goals of improving school choice, increasing home-to-school proximity, and achieving diversity.

Possible Course of Action #4: Reinstate the Diversity Policy

A fourth course of action the school board could take would be to reinstate the diversity policy and continue to require that no single school has more than 40 percent of students eligible for free and reduced price lunch and no more than 25 percent of students perform below grade level. In this course of action, no major changes would be made to the school assignment plan from the previous year's plan.

I. Decisions and Consequences

1. *Look at each of the three possible courses of action. Why would you or would you not recommend each approach?*

2. *What might happen if the school board followed Course 1 and Course 2, neither of which includes a diversity requirement?*

[Sample response.] If there is no diversity requirement, the plan could result in pockets of high poverty schools in the district, especially in zones within the Central and Eastern region that have more than 40% of students on free or reduced price lunch. A student body comprised of more than 40% of students on free or reduced price lunch status can be classified as a high poverty school.¹⁰ If there are high poverty schools, research suggests that students in these schools will perform poorly. One argument for why students perform poorly in high-poverty schools is that experienced teachers and teachers with higher degrees are less likely to be working in high poverty schools.¹¹ The more experienced a teacher is, the more likely her students are to perform well in school.¹² Thus, high poverty schools can lead to low performance of students.

In addition, if there are high poverty schools, it is likely that these schools will also be mostly minority.¹³ If the county has schools with an overrepresentation of one race, then students lose out on the cultural and intellectual benefits of associating with those of a different race. The NAACP, in particular, fears that isolating races from one another could destroy the understanding and interaction among families, individuals, and students of different races that they and others had been working so hard to build for decades.¹⁴ Another possible consequence for the school board of continuing to draft a school assignment plan without a diversity policy is that the NAACP could file a lawsuit against the school board, claiming that the school board was denying a high quality education to all students.

Yet a key consideration is that perhaps without a diversity policy, the school assignment plan would achieve stability and home-to-school proximity, which is what many parents in the county want most.

3. What might happen if the school board followed Course 3 and worked with collaborative groups to reach a compromise on the diversity policy?

[Sample response.] Requiring diversity in the schools, a “diversity standard”, could compromise some parents' ability to send their children to their top choice of schools. Such a standard could also compromise some parents' ability to send their students to a school close to their home.

Moreover, a rigid diversity policy could result in frequent reassignments if the population in the school zones and broader county were to fluctuate significantly in terms of race.

In addition, trying to work collaboratively and take into account the input of pro- diversity groups could slow the process of drafting school assignment zones, which would dissatisfy parents. Finally, the four board members were elected promising to act on the explicit goals of more stability and proximity. If they do not deliver on these promises, voters may elect the board members out of office in the next election.

4. What might happen if the school board followed Course 4 and reinstated the diversity policy?

[Sample response.] If the school board reinstated the diversity policy and adopted a school assignment plan similar to the plans of previous years, the school board would likely lose the support of their electorate, who clearly wanted reform of the school assignment plan.

Furthermore, if the school board reversed their vote to end the diversity policy, the credibility of the democratic system of school board elections could be damaged. At the same time, if the school board made no significant changes to the 2012-2013 school assignment plan by May 2011, the new board members might lose their momentum to make changes and run out of time before their terms expired. Finally, making no significant changes to the school assignment plan could result in major challenges unaddressed, such as frequent reassignment and parent dissatisfaction.

Concluding guidance

The Wake County School assignment case is challenging and important in that it not only features many common components and aspects of policymaking but also highlights aspects that are highly sensitive, often less well-known by the general public, and often not the subject of discussion among students of policy, government, education, and other disciplines. For optimal learning, encourage students of the case to take full advantage of the array of discussion and decision points that it offers.

¹ Student Assignment Committee Meeting, "Wake committee discusses maps for neighborhood schools." WRAL Television News, August 31, 2010. Accessed September 10, 2010.

http://www.wral.com/news/education/wake_county_schools/video/8219264/#/vid8216212.

² Wake Education Partnership. "Making Choices: Diversity, Student Assignment and Quality in Wake's Public Schools." April, 2003. http://www.wakeedpartnership.org/publications/d/Making_Choices_report.pdf.

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Goldsmith, Thomas, Ann Doss Helms, and T. Keung Hui. "Wake Schools Simply Can't Copy Charlotte's Answers." News and Observer, August 11, 2010. Accessed September 20, 2010.

<http://www.northraleighnews.com/2010/08/11/3680/wake-schools-cant-simply-copy.html>.

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Wake Education Partnership. "Making Choices: Diversity, Student Assignment and Quality in Wake's Public Schools." April, 2003. http://www.wakeedpartnership.org/publications/d/Making_Choices_report.pdf.

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Wake Education Partnership. "Making Choices: Diversity, Student Assignment and Quality in Wake's Public Schools." April, 2003. http://www.wakeedpartnership.org/publications/d/Making_Choices_report.pdf.

¹⁰ Clotfelter, Charles T.; Ladd, Helen F.; Vigdor, Jacob L.; and Wheeler, Justin, "High Poverty Schools and the Distribution of Teachers and Principals" (2007). *Duke Law Faculty Scholarship*. Paper 1915.

¹¹ Ladd, Helen F. "Comments to the Wake School Board." Duke University professor Helen Ladd presented comments at the Wake County School Board meeting on March 23, 2010.

¹² Ibid

¹³ School assignment data in the appendix show that zones with a higher percentage of free and reduced price lunch students also have higher populations of minority students.

¹⁴ "Our Position on Diversity in Public Education in Wake County," <http://www.revwilliambarber.com/>