

What factors should drive student assignment in public schools?



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Supporting Questions

1. What factors determined student assignment in Charlotte Mecklenburg schools in the past?
2. What do current stakeholders in Charlotte Mecklenburg schools value the most in determining student assignment?
3. How have current stakeholders supported their positions on student assignment?

What factors should drive student assignment in public schools?

Inquiry Standard	Global Competency 2: Capacity to analyze and evaluate global issues from multiple perspectives Global Competency 4: Capability to make ethical decisions and responsible choices that contribute to the development of a more just, peaceful, and sustainable world
Staging the Compelling Question	Examine various maps in order to make connections between social mobility and the importance of equal access to a quality education.

Supporting Question 1	Supporting Question 2	Supporting Question 3
What factors determined student assignment in Charlotte Mecklenburg schools in the past?	What do current stakeholders in Charlotte Mecklenburg schools value the most in determining student assignment?	How have current stakeholders supported their positions on student assignment?
Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task
Complete a chart to compare the benefits and drawbacks of mandatory busing in Charlotte.	Create a list ranking the factors that each group of stakeholders indicated was the most important in determining student assignment.	Identify the argument, claim(s), and evidence that the community member presents in each article.
Featured Sources	Featured Sources	Featured Sources
Source A: The Battle for Busing	Source A: 2017-18 Comprehensive Student Assignment Review	Source A: Diversity is no elixir, and how would you achieve it? Source B: Risk we took on a poor school was great choice Source C: Parent Group Offers a Three-Point Plan for CMS Assignment Source D: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Consultant: No Hit Out on CMS Neighborhood Schools

Summative Performance Task	ARGUMENT What factors should drive student assignment in public schools? Construct an argument (e.g., detailed outline, poster, or essay) that addresses the compelling question using specific claims and relevant evidence from historical sources while acknowledging competing views.
	EXTENSION Record an interview with a family or community member about what they value most in determining student assignment.
Taking Informed Action	<p>UNDERSTAND To understand, students will research the policy in place or proposed by their local public Board of Education to determine where students will be assigned to attend school.</p> <p>ASSESS To assess, students will evaluate whether the student assignment plan provides students with the best outcome for all students and stakeholders, according to their needs and wants.</p> <p>ACTION To act, students can write a letter to their local Board of Education or attend a meeting to voice their findings.</p>

Inquiry Description

This inquiry leads students through an investigation of the challenges that come with student assignment in our public schools. By investigating the compelling question “What factors should drive student assignment in public schools?” students evaluate which practices and policies will facilitate the most favorable outcome for all Charlotte Mecklenburg public school students.

This inquiry highlights the following Global Competencies:

- 2.Capacity to analyze and evaluate global issues from multiple perspectives
- 4.Capability to make ethical decisions and responsible choices that contribute to the development of a more just, peaceful, and sustainable world

NOTE: This inquiry is expected to take three to four 90 minute class periods. The inquiry time frame could expand if teachers think their students need additional instructional experiences (i.e., supporting questions, formative performance tasks, and featured sources). Teachers are encouraged to adapt the inquiries in order to meet the needs and interests of their particular students. Resources can also be modified as necessary to meet individualized education programs (IEPs) or Section 504 Plans for students with disabilities.

Structure

In addressing the compelling question “What factors should drive student assignment in public schools?” students work through a series of supporting questions, formative performance tasks, and featured sources in order to construct an argument supported by evidence while acknowledging competing perspectives.

Staging the Compelling Question

Compelling Question	What factors should drive student assignment in public schools?
Featured Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Source A: Quality of Life Explorer

Staging the compelling question

The compelling question could be staged by having students examine various maps in order to make connections between social mobility and the importance of equal access to a quality education. Students could use the maps to discover areas of the highest and lowest concentrations of poverty and how those correlate to testing proficiency.

In 2013, a study conducted by the Equality of Opportunity Project ranked the social mobility of residents in the country's largest 50 cities. Charlotte, the largest city in North Carolina, came in last. Students could have a conversation about the implications of having a city with neighborhoods and neighborhood schools in which great disparities exist.

Compelling Question

Featured Source A

Quality of Life Explorer

Excerpt

<https://mcmmap.org/qol/?m=m37&n=>

<https://mcmmap.org/qol/?m=m62&n=>

Source:

Quality of Life Explorer. Created by [Mecklenburg County](#), the [City of Charlotte](#), and [UNCC](#). <https://mcmmap.org/qol/>

Supporting Question 1

Supporting Question	What factors determined student assignment in Charlotte Mecklenburg schools in the past?
Formative Performance Task	Complete a chart to compare the benefits and drawbacks of mandatory busing in Charlotte.
Featured Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Source A: The Battle for Busing

The first supporting question - What factors determined student assignment in Charlotte Mecklenburg schools in the past? - helps students understand the events that helped shape the current school system, particularly the city's divisive relationship with mandatory busing.

Formative Performance Task

This ten minute video will broadly take students through events from Brown vs. Board of Education and the case Swann v. Charlotte Mecklenburg Board of Education that began busing in Charlotte to the 1999 Federal District Court judge that ended it. Students should complete their benefit/drawback charts as they watch. Students could then have a discussion of their findings.

Supporting Question 1

Featured Source A

The Battle for Busing

Excerpt

www.nytimes.com/video/us/100000002427912/the-battle-for-busing.html

Source:

Retro Report. *The Battle for Busing*. New York Times, www.nytimes.com/video/us/100000002427912/the-battle-for-busing.html.

Supporting Question 2

Supporting Question	What do current stakeholders in Charlotte Mecklenburg schools value the most in determining student assignment?
Formative Performance Task	Create a list ranking the factors that each group of stakeholders indicated was the most important in determining student assignment.
Featured Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Source A: 2017-18 Comprehensive Student Assignment Review

At the start of 2016, the Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools Board of Education gave community members an opportunity to weigh in through a survey on what factors matter the most to them when considering public education. The results of this survey were published in the **2017-18 Comprehensive Student Assignment Review**. For the second supporting question - "What do current stakeholders in Charlotte Mecklenburg schools value the most in determining student assignment?" - students will be able to gain deeper insight into the needs and wants of a range of community members.

Formative Performance Task

Please note that the 2017-18 Comprehensive Student Assignment Review contains a vast collection of data that may be overwhelming for students. Teachers (or teachers and students together) should decide which data points to focus on and work together in groups to break down the information into manageable parts. For example, one group could compare the Value of School Experiences between parents, students, and the community while another focuses on the section regarding Bus Rides. Alternatively, the class could be broken into groups to deeper analyze the data from each of the six districts.

Supporting Question 2

Featured Source A

2017-18 Comprehensive Student Assignment Review

Excerpt

<http://www.cms.k12.nc.us/cmsdepartments/StudentPla..>

Source:

Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools Board of Education. "2017-18 Comprehensive Student Assignment Review". Survey. 10 March 2016.

Supporting Question 3

Supporting Question	How have current stakeholders supported their positions on student assignment?
Formative Performance Task	Identify the argument, claim(s), and evidence that the community member presents in each article.
Featured Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Source A: Diversity is no elixir, and how would you achieve it?● Source B: Risk we took on a poor school was great choice● Source C: Parent Group Offers a Three-Point Plan for CMS Assignment● Source D: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Consultant: No Hit Out on CMS Neighborhood Schools

The third supporting question - "How have current stakeholders supported their positions on student assignment?" helps students understand the reasons behind the competing points of view of various community members.

Formative Performance Task

Each of the sources featured highlights a specific point of view from a community member. Featured Sources A and B provide a point and counterpoint, as do Featured Sources C and D.

Supporting Question 3

Featured Source A

Diversity is no elixir, and how would you achieve it?

Excerpt

Do they truly plan to tell parents of Elizabeth Lane Elementary, at 98 percent student proficiency, that their kids would be better off elsewhere, dispersed into diversity? The CMS mission is “academic achievement,” but Justin Perry, co-chair of OneMeck, said the purpose of school is not merely test scores or proficiency, but to experience life’s rich tapestry. University admissions officers, employers and most parents do not agree.

Volunteering as a pro bono attorney with the Council for Children’s Rights for eight years, I see children in poverty experiencing truancy and attendance problems, as well as changing residences, shifting school assignments, even complex custody arrangements. How does a student assignment plan focused on breaking concentrations of poverty address those significant issues?

The push to use student assignment to break concentrations of poverty never once honestly asks why such children are underperforming academically, parochially judging there to be nobody within those communities able to educate such children. The only solution offered is to separate them from their peers. Ironically, the loudest advocates for diversity are not themselves working parents of potentially affected children, whose voices matter most.

Some suggest teacher quality and expectations drop in high-poverty schools. I have met many CMS teachers from our poorest schools. They face enormous challenges, and are bright, talented and highly motivated. We must not accept any argument blaming teachers. They deserve our complete support.

Ultimately, such advocates offer no suggestion of how diversity could be accomplished, ending the call to the faithful with “hire a consultant.” Recently Board of Education members acknowledge that “Swann” styled busing is not practical or affordable, and would likely push away the very parents it most needs to entice back into its schools. How, then, can this be done? Until and unless that is articulated, the public will be rightfully concerned.

Worst of all, such advocates ignore best practices that are already working. Judge Howard Manning in the *Leandro* case referred to Olympic High School, among others, as committing “educational genocide.” Last year, Olympic reached almost 90 percent proficiency scores through enthusiastic public-private partnerships. This week Olympic’s “Career Readiness Speed Networking” connected 200 students with 100 area professionals, where students learned about education and career paths, and the professionals learned about the prepared, articulate, impressive students with bright futures ahead. CMS graduation rates rose from 69 percent in 2010 to 88 percent in 2015, the biggest gains in the poorest schools. Things quickly are getting better, an inconvenient truth for some.

CMS needs all the credibility and goodwill it can muster, for teacher pay increases, construction bonds, calendar flexibility and a permanent superintendent. This highly divisive student assignment review, with a publicly divided board and poorly handled outreach, once again leaves us shaking our heads trying not to lose confidence. Our children deserve better. Our children deserve the very best.

Source:

Stephenson, Jeremy. “Diversity Is No Elixir, and How Would You Achieve It?” *Charlotte Observer*, 26 Feb. 2016, www.charlotteobserver.com/opinion/article62733627.html.

Supporting Question 3

Featured Source B

Risk we took on a poor school was great choice

Excerpt

“Pamela Grundy is taking a risk with her son.”

Thus opened the 2006 Charlotte Observer article on our family’s decision to send our son Parker to Shamrock Gardens Elementary, a high-poverty, low-performing school that families in our well-off Plaza-Midwood neighborhood routinely avoided.

Ten years later, thanks to dedicated efforts by staff, parents and partners – and to strategic investments by CMS – that “risk” has paid off handsomely. Shamrock has become a thriving school with a far more balanced population. Its success has boosted its students and the neighborhoods around it.

As this community faces the problem of separate and unequal schools, my husband Peter and I believe that Shamrock’s story highlights what all children can gain from an economically and racially integrated education. Our own schooling followed a standard trajectory from middle-class, predominantly white suburban schools to the Ivy League. Shamrock was different. It was better.

In his six years at Shamrock, Parker had excellent teachers who taught a high-level curriculum. He also moved beyond the comforts and assumptions of his sheltered, middle-class neighborhood into a community made up of the many different people who inhabit the rapidly changing county where he lives.

Some Shamrock families had deep roots in Charlotte. Others had recently arrived from places such as Atlanta, Philadelphia and New York. Some had immigrated or come as refugees from Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Liberia. Parents’ jobs included house painter, professor, janitor, IT specialist, lunch truck owner, gardener, bank teller, grocery store clerk, airport security officer, hospital orderly and nursing home attendant.

This cultural and economic variety meant that Shamrock’s students learned about life in many layers of the city’s social structure. Visits and sleepovers introduced Parker, an only child, to the joys and complications of large, extended families. Friends who came to our house marveled at the hundreds of books that line our shelves. We all shared and sampled new foods – sushi, pico de gallo, pound cake.

Perhaps most important, students navigated the ups and downs of school and life together: struggles with schoolwork, with health, with life at home – or life without a home – and with other challenges of growing up. Since no one group dominated, everyone belonged. While they had their share of disputes and disagreements, they came to care about each other across many of the boundaries that might have divided them.

We parents worked together in our own ways – building gardens, scheduling events, supporting teachers, raising funds. Differences in language, manners, work schedules and communication styles meant that we faced plenty of challenges. But we wanted our children and their school to thrive, and many of us made the effort year after year. In the process, we expanded our own worlds.

Our Shamrock experience also highlighted the often-untapped potential at high-poverty schools. When we first looked at the school, we worried about academics. We knew high-poverty schools were rarely able to provide the academic and enrichment opportunities offered by wealthier schools. Shamrock needed a significant academic jolt.

Sometimes, a school-within-a-school simply creates another form of segregation. Not for us. The magnet drew few takers in its early years, and Shamrock’s staff filled the advanced classes with the highest-performing students from the school’s regular population. Parker’s classes always reflected the school’s racial, ethnic and economic mix. Some years, he was the only student who paid for lunch. Every year, he was surrounded by remarkable classmates who thrived on challenging work.

Shamrock was not a paradise. It was real life. Building a program and expanding parent involvement took a lot of work. The gap between the school’s top performers and its most struggling students remained stubbornly large. The school had its share of would-be bullies, conflicts arose and the occasional punch was

thrown. The majority of cross-cultural interaction took place on school grounds. When the bell rang, students generally scattered back to their own communities.

But we would not trade anything for the years our family spent at the school. We took a risk, and helped to build a marvelous community that nurtured and taught our son in ways we never could have done. Choosing Shamrock is one of the best decisions that we have ever made.

Source:

Grundy, Pamela. "Risk We Took on a Poor School Was Great Choice." *Charlotte Observer*, 26 Feb. 2016, www.charlotteobserver.com/opinion/article62734257.html.

Supporting Question 3

Featured Source C

Parent Group Offers a Three-Point Plan for CMS Assignment

Excerpt

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg school board plans to hire a consultant to help craft a new student assignment plan, but a group of parents has submitted their own report at no charge.

A newly minted crew called CMS Families United for Public Education sent board members a 21-page report this week outlining research findings and recommendations. They suggest a three-pronged approach:

- Strengthen neighborhood schools through measures such as strong principals, neighborhood partnerships and recruitment efforts in areas where many families are opting out.
- Improve the magnet program by adding locations, emphasizing academic specialties and simplifying the application process.
- Build on current turnaround programs for low-performing schools and explore new ones.

The report includes mini-bios of 13 people involved in the effort. Several have been involved in the south suburban push to protect neighborhood schools and resist busing for diversity.

Melanie Baron, a Providence Spring Elementary parent who is one of the authors, says the group is working to broaden its membership, perspectives and knowledge.

“We all started out thinking my kid, my school,” said Baron, a former teacher who has been on staff at *ImaginOn*. Now, she said, “we’ve been listening to other parents.”

The report includes analysis of test scores and demographics in CMS. It suggests that the district “recognize the diversity that already exists in our classrooms, and use the even greater diversity that exists systemwide as an opportunity for shared learning.”

One suggestion is pairing neighborhood schools with different populations to share lessons, field trips, research assignments and “crosstown team projects.”

“We believe this approach is one step toward developing meaningful relationships between students from different areas of Charlotte while preserving the school assignments close to home that families throughout the county value,” the report says.

Source:

Doss Helms, Ann. “Parent Group Offers a Three-Point Plan for CMS Assignment.” *Charlotte Observer*, 11 Mar. 2016, www.charlotteobserver.com/news/local/education/your-schools-blog/article65434112.html.

Supporting Question 3

Featured Source D

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Consultant: No Hit Out on CMS Neighborhood Schools

Excerpt

A week ago the name Michael Alves meant nothing to most Charlotteans. Since Tuesday night, when the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school board hired his firm to help revise student assignment, he's become the buzz of the region.

The Massachusetts-based Alves Educational Consultants Group brings a trio of nationally renowned experts – Alves, Richard Kahlenberg and John Brittain – to the task that has obsessed much of Mecklenburg County for the past year: Figuring out whether changes in school boundaries and magnet options can boost poor students' chances of success without driving off middle-class families.

Their emphasis on plans that emphasize socioeconomic diversity sparked alarm in some circles and celebration in others. Some say the \$135,000 contract with CMS signals a secret school board agenda to break up neighborhoods and shuffle students based on demographics. Opponents picked up on a media label for Alves, "the godfather of controlled choice," as a sign that he'll arrive with an agenda for Mecklenburg county.

Alves, who regularly visits family members in Huntersville and follows news coverage of CMS, is aware of his new status here. He spent almost 90 minutes on the phone with the Observer Thursday talking about what his group will – and won't – do in the coming months.

"We don't have a plan in our back pocket," Alves insisted. "Believe me, there is no plan, no big conspiracy against neighborhood schools. That's not real."

Here are answers to six questions on the minds of people who care about the future of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools.

1. What is controlled choice?

It emerged in the 1970s as an alternative to busing for desegregation, and Alves pioneered the approach in Massachusetts schools. Under controlled choice, magnet schools are used to attract a diverse mix of students – originally based on race, more recently on socioeconomic status. All schools become "schools of choice" in such plans.

Magnets are a familiar concept in CMS, which opened a raft of them for racial desegregation in the 1990s. Race-based magnet seating ended after a long legal battle, but the magnet schools endure, with a lottery determining who gets in when applicants outnumber seats. And choice remains a central – and popular – part of the current board's strategy.

What's fueling concerns among some Mecklenburg residents is that Alves' approach doesn't guarantee students a school assignment based on where they live. And the emphasis on socioeconomic balance raises hackles with some.

2. What is the Alves firm's mission in CMS?

Recommendations will be shaped by the CMS board's [guiding principles](#), which include enhancing choices and using socioeconomic status to shape some magnet admissions and boundary decisions. But those principles state that students will continue to have schools assigned by where they live, which differs from the standard Alves approach.

"The school board didn't ask us to come down with a controlled choice plan," Alves said.

He said there are three essential elements of any plan he works on: It has to be fair, it has to be practical and it has to improve struggling schools. In a sprawling urban/suburban district like CMS, that means a combination of strategies, he said.

"What's fairness? That's what has to be worked out," he said.

3. What are the biggest challenges in CMS?

Crowded schools, urban concentrations of poverty and controversy over the assignment review, Alves said.

Alves, who repeatedly marveled at the popularity of Lake Norman Charter School, says CMS helped fuel the boom in charter schools catering to middle-class students by falling behind on construction, leading to huge suburban schools with students spilling into mobiles. That, in turn, led to an unusual surge in charter schools for suburban students.

"I work all over the country. This is not happening elsewhere," Alves said.

Extremely high poverty levels and the academic challenges that brings pose another challenge, and CMS must find ways to help those schools excel and entice more affluent families to send their students, he said.

And leaders must reassure families that are up in arms that they're not out to destroy good schools. "It's understandable that some parents get upset," Alves said, "because they love their school."

4. Does breaking up school poverty really help disadvantaged students?

Some parents have argued that the best hope for students of poverty comes from providing intensive support in schools that cater to large numbers of disadvantaged kids, rather than scattering them to other schools. It's an approach exemplified by Project LIFT, a \$55 million public-private support system for West Charlotte High and its eight feeder schools.

Alves says such support is helpful, but not enough. Those students need a chance to attend schools with more affluent classmates, he said.

"In all my years of doing this, I've never seen any real benefit of children having to attend high-poverty segregated schools," he said. "Separate but equal has never worked in this country."

5. What are the biggest opportunities?

Alves says he's impressed with the school board's leadership in laying out principles that take community views into account and emphasize choice: "Young families today, they like choice."

He said many districts wait to tackle assignment when they're in crisis.

"The time is now to do this. This is all about the future," Alves said. "It doesn't happen by itself. Things only get changed right when you pay attention."

Source:

Doss Helms, Ann. "Parent Group Offers a Three-Point Plan for CMS Assignment." *Charlotte Observer*, 29 Apr. 2016, www.charlotteobserver.com/news/local/education/your-schools-blog/article74632922.html.

Summative Performance Task

Compelling Question	What factors should drive student assignment in public schools?
Argument	What factors should drive student assignment in public schools? Construct an argument (e.g., detailed outline, poster, or essay) that addresses the compelling question using specific claims and relevant evidence from historical sources while acknowledging competing views.
Extension	Record an interview with a family or community member about what they value most in determining student assignment.

Argument

Students should be expected to demonstrate the breadth of their understandings and their abilities to use evidence from multiple sources to support their claims. In this task, students construct an evidence-based argument using multiple sources to answer the compelling question “What factors should drive student assignment in public schools?” It is important to note that students’ arguments could take a variety of forms, including a detailed outline, poster, or essay.

Students’ arguments will likely vary, but could include any of the following:

- While students should have the option of attending their public neighborhood school, the most important factor in student assignment should be providing a menu of options for families to choose from.
- The top priority of student assignment should be creating diverse, mixed-income schools to ensure that all children have equal opportunities to be successful.
- Proximity to the child's home should be the single biggest factor when considering student assignment in our public schools.

Extension

Students can have a dialogue with their family and community members to see where they fall on the spectrum of perspectives. Their conversations can be recorded and uploaded to the Library of Congress by using the StoryCorps app (<https://storycorps.org/participate/>). Alternatively, students could use a tape recorder or write a transcript of their conversation. Students could have a listening party of the different conversations and reflect on how they compare to the student's argument.

Taking Informed Action

Understand	To understand, students will research the policy in place or proposed by their local public Board of Education to determine where students will be assigned to attend school.
Assess	To assess, students will evaluate whether the student assignment plan provides students with the best outcome for all students and stakeholders, according to their needs and wants.
Action	To act, students can write a letter to their local Board of Education or attend a meeting to voice their findings.

Students can use what they have learned from Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools to apply to their own public school system. Students can find out how and why students are currently assigned, and evaluate whether those practices reflect the needs and wants of local stakeholders. Using their findings, students can plan and participate in future student assignment policies.

