

**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
BUSINESS MEETING
BOARD MEMBER INITIATIVE**

SUBJECT: Study and Reconciliation for the Operation of Segregated Schools in Loudoun County

ELECTION DISTRICT: Countywide

CRITICAL ACTION DATE: At the pleasure of the Board

STAFF CONTACT: Rey Banks, Chief of Staff to Supervisor Briskman
Ellington Arnold, Legislative Aide to Supervisor Briskman

PURPOSE: To study the harm caused by Loudoun County’s discrimination of Black students and seek out ways to rectify disparities.

RECOMMENDATION: Supervisor Briskman recommends that the Board of Supervisors (Board) direct staff to forward this item to the Joint Board of Supervisors and School Board Committee (Joint Committee) for discussion and return to a future Board Business Meeting with recommendations.

BACKGROUND: At the Board of Supervisors (Board) Business Meeting on September 1, 2020, the Board voted (8-0-0-1: Kershner abstained) to join with the Loudoun County School Board in a formal statement of apology for the operation of segregated schools. The apology to the Black community was for “the negative impact, damage and disadvantages to Black students and families that were caused by decisions made by the Loudoun County School Board, Loudoun County Public Schools Administration, and the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors.”

The Board item documents multiple racist policies enacted by the Board to prevent Black residents from receiving the same level of education as white residents.

On January 3, 1956, the Board voted in favor of a proposed amendment to Virginia’s Constitution that allowed public funds to be used for private schools. The motivation behind this amendment was to reduce the cost of private education for white students trying to avoid integrated public school systems. Only 20 days later, both the Board and the School Board met to discuss possible additions to Douglass Elementary School and Douglass High School. According to the meeting minutes, both bodies agreed that no improvements should be made until “reasonable assurance was given by the parents of colored children of the County that they conform to the opinion that their education be promoted better by their continued school attendance on a segregated basis.”

The Board furthered its segregationist stance in August 1956 by approving a resolution to stop funding public schools “if the federal government forced integration.” The last racist action taken by the Board in 1956 was voting unanimously “to support the Governor’s plan that was designed to ensure racial segregation, including giving the Governor the power to close any schools facing a federal desegregation order.”

In addition to policy initiatives, Loudoun County was involved in several court battles over segregated schools. In 1963, a federal court ordered Loudoun County to comply with the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision and to approve all applications from Black children to attend all-white schools. Federal courts took further action in 1967 through ordering Loudoun County to establish school attendance zones without regard to race. The goal of this order was to fully integrate all schools before the 1968-1969 school year. Loudoun was one of the last school districts in the entire nation to finally desegregate.

The joint letter of apology adopted at the September 1, 2020 meeting also states that “in addition to the blatant disregard and disrespect of Black people and their education during the era of segregation, such as inequitable school calendars, teacher salaries, facilities, transportation, as well as instructional materials, supplies and equipment, there are many examples and instances in which systemic racism, inequitable treatment, and disproportionality began and have persisted since.”

Primary documents collected through the Edwin Washington Project starkly illustrate unfair school conditions. According to the project, “At Bull Run, every morning each boy brought a lump of coal to the classroom, because coal wasn’t provided by the school system and others walked to a nearby stream to bring buckets of water for the children to drink.” Several petitions demonstrate that schools for Black children faced perpetual coal shortages. In 1955, Ethel Stewart [petitioned the School Board](#) to request that they “send some kindling wood up right away” to the Willisville Colored School. Stewart continued by stating that “we are also low on coal, mostly all that is left is dirt.” In addition, [a document dated 1956](#) showed that the Ashburn Colored School had “only coal enough to last three weeks.”

On salaries, Black teachers regularly petitioned the School Board or Superintendent to request that they be compensated at the same level as their white counterparts. For example, [a March 1926 petition](#) expressed hope that its request for salary increases “meets with your [Superintendent’s] approval as Loudoun County is one of the foremost counties in this great state.” The petitioners received a curt reply from the Superintendent later in the month. “Your petition for more pay was received and laid before our board on March 9. The board was unable to find additional funds to grant the increase at this time.”

The residual impact of racist policies like school segregation and “massive resistance” created deep and lasting disparities in the Black community and inhibited the ability of Black Americans to achieve the same degree of academic, economic, and social success as white Americans. According to the Brookings Institution, the average white family has ten times the amount of wealth as the average Black family. In addition, the Pew Research Center found that Black college

graduates hold 33 percent less wealth than white high school dropouts. The Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis reports that the 2019 median wealth of a white household was \$184,000 compared to just \$23,000 for the average Black household.

Current racial disparities are not a result of individual moral failings on the part of Black Americans, but rather systemic racism and generational discrimination emanating from all three levels of government. Addressing these past wrongs is a moral imperative as well as an essential step in rectifying these unjust disparities now with precedents in education across the country.¹ Loudoun County has the opportunity today to create an initiative akin to a focused truth and reconciliation committee to study the harm caused by our discrimination of Black students and seek out ways to rectify this wrong.² The purpose of a truth and reconciliation committee is to hold public hearings to establish the scale and impact of a past injustice, typically involving wide-scale human rights abuses, and make it part of the permanent, unassailable public record.

FISCAL IMPACT: The fiscal impact is not known at this time. Any allocation of funds will require future Board approval.

DRAFT MOTIONS:

1. I move that the Board of Supervisors direct staff to forward this item to the Joint Board of Supervisors and School Board Committee for discussion and return to a future Board of Supervisors Business Meeting with recommendations.

OR

2. I move an alternate motion.

¹ Examples of educational disparities can be found here: <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/unequal-opportunity-race-and-education/>

² Examples of similar initiatives include:

- California: <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2021/06/19/reparations-slavery-pledged-11-us-mayors-pilot-program/7753319002/>
- Georgetown University: <https://www.aclu.org/news/racial-justice/georgetown-students-demonstrate-how-reparations-can-be-made-to-african-american-students/>
- Virginia (championed by Loudoun Del. David Reid): <https://www.wusa9.com/article/news/local/virginia/virginia-law-reparations-universities-profited-slave-labor/65-31ae2fd2-75a7-42b1-818b-e7bfaf0edf60>