

BRIDGES COLLABORATIVE MEMBER PROFILE

Joint Profile: New York City and Charlotte, North Carolina



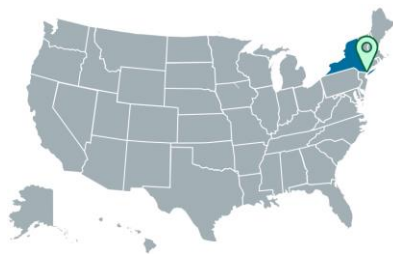

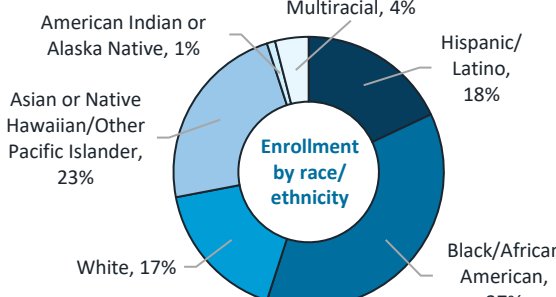
Organization type: Public School Districts



Introduction

Across the country, school districts mirror ongoing racial and socioeconomic segregation in the neighborhoods and communities they serve. Some school districts are exploring **school mergers** as a systemic solution to addressing school segregation. In a school merger, district administrators combine two or more schools with disparate demographics to create one school with a less segregated student population. In this member profile, we describe completed school mergers¹ and reflect on lessons learned in two districts: **District 13 in Brooklyn, New York**, and **Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District in Charlotte, North Carolina**. For this profile, we interviewed staff at the district and school levels in both cities.



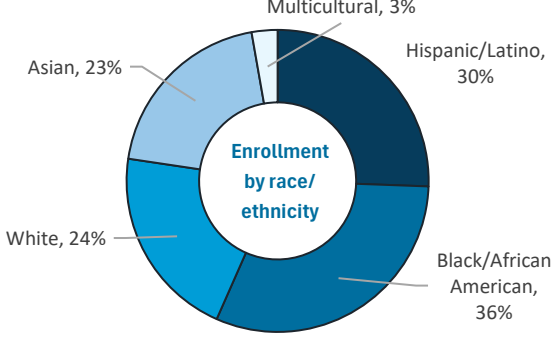
New York, New York: Public School 305 and Arts and Letters Merger

Where: Brooklyn’s District 13	When: 2019–2020 (planning year) and 2020–2021 (Implementation Year 1)	
	<p>District demographics:</p>  <p>41 schools 18,130 K–12 students</p>	 <p>Enrollment by race/ethnicity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> American Indian or Alaska Native, 1% Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, 23% Black/African American, 37% Hispanic/Latino, 18% Multiracial, 4% White, 17%
Enrollment by socioeconomic status: 63% economically disadvantaged ²		
Details to drive the merger:	<p>Public School (PS) 305 was a public K–5 elementary school serving a student population that was majority students of color (66% Black, 17% Hispanic/Latino, 10% White), with 95% qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch. PS 305 was also underenrolled (128 total students, representing 35% of seats filled in 2018). At Arts and Letters, a K–8 public school, the student population was more racially integrated (42% White, 29% Black, 15% Hispanic/Latino) but with only 22% of the students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch. Arts and Letters shared a building with another public school, a common strategy to address space constraints in NYC. Both schools were growing and needed more space.</p>	

¹ Charlotte-Mecklenburg refers to school mergers as “pairings” while New York uses the term “mergers.” For consistency and ease of understanding, in this profile we have chosen to use the term “merger” for both districts.

² In New York State education enrollment reporting, the term “economically disadvantaged” refers to students who participate in or whose family participates in economic assistance programs, such as free or reduced-price lunch programs, Social Security Insurance (SSI), food stamps, foster care, refugee assistance (cash or medical assistance), Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP), Safety Net Assistance (SNA), Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Financial Assistance and Social Services (FASS), and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). If one student in a household is identified as low income, all students from that household (economic unit) may be identified as low income. Data source: <https://data.nysed.gov/profile.php?instid=800000045563>

Charlotte, North Carolina: Cotswold and Billingsville Merger and Sedgefield and Dilworth Merger

<p>Where: Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District</p>	<p>When: In 2017, the assignment plan proposes changes to 75 schools, including three proposed elementary school “pairings” (hereafter described as mergers for consistency). In 2018–2019, school mergers are enacted. Two of the three CMS mergers are described in this profile.</p>	
	<p>District demographics:</p>  <p>181 schools 141,217 K–12 students</p>	 <p>Source: 2022-2023 Year End Report</p>
<p>Enrollment by socioeconomic status:</p>	<p>13.4% families with income below the poverty level, 15.7% families with food stamp/SNAP benefits³</p>	
<p>Details to drive the merger:</p>	<p>Charlotte-Mecklenburg County implemented two separate school mergers. Billingsville served an almost entirely Black student population, and two miles away, Cotswold’s student enrollment was 55% White. Cotswold, at more than 145% capacity, was overenrolled, whereas Billingsville, at only 74% capacity, was underenrolled.</p> <p>Dilworth Elementary served a majority White student population, while Sedgefield Elementary served a majority Black student population. Dilworth was nearly 20% over capacity, while Sedgefield was at 90% capacity.</p> <p>In both mergers, the district combined the schools by grouping students based on grade levels. The district placed kindergarten through second-grade students from both schools in one building and third- through fifth-grade students from both schools in the second building.</p>	



What is a school merger?

Combining student populations from two or more schools can be a beneficial district enrollment and resource management strategy. In some municipalities, school mergers are used to address persistent segregation between schools within the same district. Districts implementing school mergers must make a series of facilities and resource management decisions, including how to rearrange classroom seats, address building infrastructure, manage geographic siting for the schools, and assess funding needs.



School desegregation. The removal of barriers to allow students of different races and/or socioeconomic backgrounds to attend the same school. Indicators of school desegregation focus on the demographic makeup of the school and its corresponding neighborhoods.



School integration. The creation of educational communities where students and adults of different races not only teach and learn but also collaborate to advance the educational experience of the entire student body. Indicators of integration include diverse school staff, inclusive curricula, and incorporation of student voices.

³ <https://nces.ed.gov/Programs/Edge/ACSDashboard/3702970>

Beyond resourcing considerations, districts must also consider and plan for the immediate and long-term implications for students, families, and staff of merging two or more separate school communities into one.

In the sections that follow, we describe how New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) and Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) planned and implemented their school merger projects. We also share key considerations and lessons learned that can inform merger projects in other districts.



Two approaches to school mergers

New York City. NYCPS officials manage enrollment and resourcing for school facilities across the city’s 32 community school districts. Because the city population is never static, each year this administrative team takes steps to balance classroom seats, staffing, and other resources across neighborhoods and school buildings. NYCPS is using mergers as one strategy for resource management, and desegregation is not always an explicit goal. However, in the case of PS 305 and Arts and Letters, city and district leaders hoped the merger would accomplish three goals: (a) manage enrollment space needs across the district; (b) bring more middle school seats into Bedford Stuyvesant, the neighborhood in District 13 where PS 305 was located; and (c) try out a purposeful desegregation approach to merging two schools with disparate demographics.

For the merger of PS 305 and Arts and Letters, NYCPS knew that there were complex community dynamics that would impact the merger’s success. New York City has a long history of community redlining that segregated Black residents within certain district neighborhoods. More recently, neighborhood gentrification has led to rapidly rising housing costs and significant displacement of Black families. PS 305 served a majority Black student population in Brooklyn’s Bedford Stuyvesant neighborhood and had been experiencing declines in enrollment each year. Arts and Letters, a public school in the bordering neighborhood of Fort Greene, had a higher percentage of White students and students from high socioeconomic backgrounds than the neighborhood average. Arts and Letters shared a building with another school, and both these schools were growing.

NYCPS staff knew that they would need full buy-in from both school communities – Arts and Letters and PS 305 – to support the long-term success of the merged school. To prioritize holistic community engagement and community endorsement in the merger planning process, NYCPS staff modified their standard action planning and implementation process (**Exhibit 1**). Instead of creating a plan at the district level and then bringing it to the community for input, district staff began the process with a series of community-level “working group” conversations to allow school leaders and staff from all affected schools to present their own solutions. The working group included equal numbers of staff



While we had ideas about the universe of the things that might be possible, we focused on putting planning in the hands of the folks who are going to be impacted who experience this every day. And I think starting the process with that baseline of – let’s get people in a room, let’s have collaborative conversations, let’s see what ideas people have, let’s see what experience people have, let’s build relationships – was a really good foundation.

—NYCPS Administrator

and community representatives from both schools. Together, they drafted a merger proposal and a unified vision for the new school guided by three central priorities: student voice, compassion and curiosity, and equity and anti-racism. District and school leaders brought this merger proposal to a series of open community meetings and feedback sessions, which resulted in responsive adaptations to the proposal, followed by final approval of the merger in June 2020.

Exhibit 1. Modified Action Plan: NYCPS Phased Merger Proposal Design, Review, and Approval Process for PS 305 and Arts and Letters (November 2019–June 2020)



To support implementation of the new merged school plan, district leaders approved funding to maintain a 2-year co-principalship and retained all staff members from the two merged schools for the first year of the combined school. After the 2 years of joint leadership between the two separate building’s principals, the District 13 Superintendent appointed PS 305 Principal Pilar Ramos as the leader of the new merged school. Today, the merged school is named Arts & Letters 305 United, or “United” for short.

Prior to the merger, PS 305 and Arts and Letters had different enrollment policy structures: PS 305 was a zoned public school that gave priority enrollment to students within the geographic school zone, while Arts and Letters was an un-zoned public school with a lottery enrollment process. For the first 2 years after the merger, the PS 305 public school zone priority continued to be honored at United, but that ended in 2022. United is now managed as a choice-based enrollment school. Today, the school accepts students from around the city and uses a lottery and a series of enrollment priority points to balance school diversity, including a weighted priority for previously zoned neighborhood residents.

Four years after the school merger, United is fully enrolled and manages a waitlist for new students. School leaders at United remain committed to a unified and integrated community with a focus on sustaining an integrated and equitable student experience at the school. They have prioritized literacy and “strategic reading” as key equity levers and plan to expand equity-focused instructional practices to other subjects. School leaders regularly lead classroom observations with a focus on equitable engagement and practices. Principal Ramos emphasized that after observations she engages teaching staff in critical reflections about race and equity and how those dynamics manifest in each classroom. At the administrative level, Principal Ramos shared that managing an integrated enrollment balance at United is a continuous project that requires sustained attention and a willingness to grapple with difficult questions about who benefits from integration, who holds power within school decisions, and how the school can ensure that every student is able to thrive.

Charlotte, North Carolina. In the CMS district, the CMS board assesses enrollment and resourcing needs by completing a [comprehensive student assignment plan](#) every 6 years. During the 2017 planning process, district data and an external report from the Urban Studies Institute at UNC Charlotte showed that CMS’s schools and neighborhoods were continuing a 15+ year trend of resegregation⁴ and disparate student outcomes. To reverse this trend, school administrators and board members recommended a variety of approaches to further desegregating schools, including merging elementary schools with significant differences in student socioeconomic status (SES). We describe two school mergers implemented as part of CMS’s 2017 assignment plan, the merger of Cotswold and Billingsville Elementary Schools and the merger of Sedgefield and Dilworth Elementary Schools. Each pair of schools included one school sited in a predominantly Black and low-income neighborhood (Billingsville and Sedgefield) and one school sited in a predominantly White and higher income neighborhood (Cotswold and Dilworth). Participating schools were selected based on SES demographics and proximity to the paired school (see **Exhibit 2** for CMS student assignment policy context). The schools in each pair were about 2 miles from each other in bordering neighborhood zones.

Exhibit 2. CMS Student Assignment Policy Context

CMS district policy guarantees students a seat in an assigned “home” school based on their address and limits school enrollment boundary changes to “contiguous” or geographically neighboring, schools. For CMS officials, this policy means that they are limited in the extent to which they can use cross-neighborhood student enrollment assignments to desegregate schools. District officials shared that this presents a significant challenge to ongoing desegregation efforts, as the diversity of student populations within schools is limited by Charlotte’s citywide patterns of residential segregation. The contiguous assignments policy has its roots in an initial round of school desegregation efforts from the 1970s to late 1990s. During this period, CMS implemented enrollment plans that relied on busing to desegregate schools across segregated city neighborhoods. The 1997 court case *Capacchione v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools* challenged CMS’s desegregation-focused enrollment policies and ended cross-neighborhood desegregation efforts.

The merger plan was recommended and approved as part of the May 2017 school assignment plan. CMS officials decided to structure the mergers so that all school buildings would still be in use. One school from each merged pair would serve students in kindergarten through second grade and the other would serve students in third through fifth grade. Despite the separation between grade-levels and facilities, the school buildings would be managed by one principal as one unified school. During the 2017–18 school year, district and school staff engaged in a cross-school planning process to make decisions about how the merger would be implemented and to intentionally build a sense of unified community between the schools.

During the planning year, CMS district staff began planning to ensure community buy-in, taking each building’s local context into account. In both mergers, significant perceived disparities in resources, family participation, and power were considered in the district decision-making process. To build understanding and buy-in for the merger process at Cotswold and Billingsville, CMS officials engaged

⁴ The Charlotte-Mecklenburg district has a 50-year history of desegregation efforts that have been shaped by two federal court cases: the 1971 decision in *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* that forced Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools to create a student assignment plan that explicitly integrated schools and complied with *Brown v. Board of Education* and the 1997 ruling in *Capacchione v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools* that stated that CMS had met the previous mandate of desegregation and lifted Swann’s court order. This 1997 ruling includes a provision that stops Charlotte from using race to determine student enrollment assignments, which has resulted in Charlotte’s use of socioeconomic status (SES) as a deciding factor in enrollment placements.

an outside consultant to manage community meetings and offered a series of professional development sessions for school staff and ‘parent ambassadors’ representing both affected schools. In addition, school staff included bilingual teachers and translations of the community learning sessions were made to ensure that the significant Spanish-speaking population at Billingsville had equal access to information about the merger. With the Dilworth and Sedgefield merger, CMS officials faced similar challenges balancing the resource and engagement levels of the two communities. Dilworth was both a larger and more affluent school, and school and district leaders heard complaints from Sedgefield staff and families during the planning process that the Dilworth community voice dominated in decision-making. School leaders implemented a variety of strategies to ensure more equal participation and power, including a joint PTA, a merged school leadership team, and joint training and planning sessions for the staff from both schools.

After a year of planning and community-building, the merged schools opened in August 2018. In each case, the two original school buildings were included in the new school. The decision to use both school buildings from each merger, coupled with the total combined student enrollment numbers, meant that although some staff were relocated, most were retained in their positions. The exception to this rule was the principal. In each merger, the district appointed one principal to lead the united K–5 school, now split between two buildings. This decision required the principal to divide time between the two buildings. In interviews, district staff shared that although principals did experience some challenges splitting time between buildings, they prioritized practices that consistently reinforced that students in the two buildings made up a unified school (e.g., hosting cross-building staff meetings and professional development days and structuring the PTA as one K–5 body).

Notably, in final interviews for this profile CMS district leaders shared that enrollment in two of the three merged schools has declined to suboptimal levels for the buildings they are now sited in, and the district has struggled to identify clear and visible metrics of success for school mergers beyond enrollment totals. While these challenges with declining public school enrollment are shared by many districts around the country and are not limited to schools who have participated in merger projects, the district shows limited interest in continuing desegregation efforts through more school mergers. Interview participants shared that this may be due to enrollment concerns as well as additional complex factors including transitions in leadership, the limitations of the contiguous enrollment boundary policy, and the significant levels of community engagement that this work requires. CMS is launching a new six-year student assignment plan without including new school mergers as part of the plan.



Considerations for desegregation-focused school mergers

School merger projects vary in their design and implementation, depending on local needs and contexts. However, key considerations that surfaced from both the mergers in Brooklyn and Charlotte include a need for committed attention to initiative funding, leadership and staff, early engagement, a focus on bridging vision to action, and recognition that desegregation is ongoing work.

Funding. District leaders often propose school mergers at least in part to identify efficiencies related to facilities and staffing or other opportunities for cost savings. During the initial planning and implementation phase, however, these projects may require additional funds, time, and materials.

In NYCPS’s District 13, the negotiated school merger proposal included \$200,000 to support the formation of United in the first 2 years of implementation. Looking back, school leaders at United highlighted some resourcing blind spots. For example, district leaders assumed that the two existing schools together would have sufficient and appropriate materials to launch the new school in fall 2020, but the combination of effects from COVID-19 school closures, staffing shortages, and PS 305’s historic underenrollment (and related under-resourcing) meant that they struggled to meet material and staffing needs (e.g., classroom projectors, working office equipment, staffing support during the physical move) during the first 2 years. Leaders stressed that a comprehensive inventory and needs assessment prior to any merger would be helpful to ensure that new schools are adequately resourced.

Leadership. One of the essential considerations NYCPS and CMS staff both stressed is the continuity in leadership (superintendent and key management staff). Maintaining consistent high-level leadership is critical for sustaining the necessary attention and prioritization of school desegregation projects at the district and community level.

From the launch of the 2017 school assignment plan to 2024, CMS has cycled through three full time superintendents and 2 interim superintendents, a turnover rate that has made it challenging to maintain sustainable progress on school desegregation goals. NYC also experienced a superintendent and mayoral transition during the merger timeline outlined in this profile, but in district 13 the existing deputy superintendent moved into the lead role and has continued to support integration as a central priority in the district. Retaining district leaders and creating clear leadership transition plans are essential to ensuring that desegregation and integration of the merged schools remain a priority in the long term.



We don't have a permanent superintendent [currently]. ... And in the past seven, eight years, there's been a lot of turnover in the superintendent role. As you know, that impacts the overall strategy and sustainability, because every superintendent comes in with their new plans.

—Claire Schuch, Former Director of Planning for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

Trust in relationships and vision. District and school leaders from both cities emphasized that enacting a successful school merger requires representative and trusted leaders with a collective vision for the project. In Charlotte, district leaders were champions for the school mergers, advocating for these pilot projects as a central SES desegregation strategy for the district. In interviews, district staff emphasized that leaders “understood the why” of the mergers. Further, through their commitment to the desegregation goals and process the leaders of the merger process helped sustain momentum through the planning and implementation stages. Although district leaders stated that the school board was largely in favor of advancing socioeconomic diversity through school mergers, board seats are political positions. As a result, district staff felt that some board members were hesitant to

enact large “bold” changes, especially in cases like the school mergers, during which differing levels of community buy-in and pushback can occur.

In New York City, NYCPS staff members had positive relationships with the district superintendent and the Community Education Council⁵ members. Interview participants shared that they felt the existing trust meant that key stakeholders from the city, district, school, and community were willing to engage in a merger proposal planning process. During the planning and initial implementation years, NYCPS’ and D13’s decision to fund a co-principalship built connections between staff and families from both schools and ensured a smooth handoff at the end of the second pilot year. In addition to her work helping plan and implement the merger, Principal Ramos drew on her personal history as a student in a District 13 school and as a teacher at Arts and Letters. When she moved forward as the principal of United in Year 3, she was seen as a trusted leader with the skills and relationships to unify the merged school communities.

Early engagement. A school merger brings together two or more school communities, which means there are significant changes for both groups. Both cities emphasized that a broad range of school staff, families, students, and community members need to be engaged in authentic ways in both the planning and implementation phases of the project to ensure a successful launch and long-term sustainability.

In Charlotte, leaders started the merger planning process by recommending family engagement strategies and identifying specific community leaders with strong social capital in their neighborhoods and schools to include in the process. The family engagement strategies included forming a cross-school parent group that met weekly to identify concerns and select supports and personnel essential for making the school mergers a success. District and school leaders also adapted engagement strategies to meet specific needs of each school merger, especially where there were concerns about unequal power dynamics and community voice.

In New York City, Max Familian, Senior Director of Strategy, Office of District Planning at the NYCPS, shared that effective community engagement in merger projects requires approaching conversations authentically, bringing community members into the conversation early before decisions are made, and prioritizing relationships and efforts to build trust and increase efficiency. School and district leaders offered that participants had a variety of ways of sharing their thinking and a “long runway” to understand the process and decide how to participate. Importantly, leaders at the city, district, and school levels all spoke about giving active attention to the power dynamics of the two school communities. Arts and Letters was a significantly larger school, with more staff, families, and students, and leaders at all levels emphasized that they



In this process, I think it's important to think about who has power, who has privilege, and who are you hearing from?

—NYCPS Administrator

⁵ Community Education Councils (CECs) are education policy advisory bodies in NYC responsible for, among other things, reviewing and evaluating their district’s educational programs, approving zoning lines, and holding public hearings on certain matters. Each CEC includes 11 voting members—10 parents of students in district schools (must include one parent of an ELL student, one parent of a student with an IEP, and one parent of a student in a District 75 alternative school) and at least two community residents—along with two non-voting high school students. CECs must hold at least one public meeting per month with the community superintendent.

did not want this project to feel like a “takeover.” They were mindful to include equal representation of implementation partners from each school in planning conversations and to ensure that those with more power or privilege were not dominating in group conversations or decision-making.

Bridging vision to action. To ensure that a school merger goes beyond a simple demographic change (diverse students in the same building) and results in authentic integration of student experience school and district leaders needed to work with the full school community to build shared buy-in and an action-oriented commitment to a collective vision for school success.

In New York City, Principal Ramos shared that ongoing opportunities and challenges at the United merged school include managing the differences in cultural understanding and expectations across a diverse community of participating families as well as the ongoing balance of power and privilege within different groups at the school. Within the school, there were also some differences in understanding and vision around the merged school’s priorities. Principal Ramos emphasized that during planning, the two communities had set a very clear and concrete vision for the school and its classroom learning priorities. This clarity of vision around an integrated school community was essential—while the merger did result in some staff transitioning out of the school, Principal Ramos emphasized that many more staff chose to stay. Today, the United school continues to set staff hiring practices based on the collaborative vision and educational priorities set during the merger’s planning phase.

CMS school and district leaders emphasized the need for a shared feeling of community and mechanisms that promote school unification (such as a joint PTA). District staff noted that addressing segregation “at scale” within the district would require broader changes to student assignment but that generating family and community support for these changes would be a significant challenge. Interview participants from both districts shared that another challenge to implementation is the gap between what individual community members or parents value in theory versus what they are willing to agree to if the change directly affects their family.



Overall, Charlotte, and particularly Mecklenburg County, is mostly progressive. So I think there's a lot of endorsement for diverse schools conceptually. However, as we attempt to change specific school boundaries, or specific approaches to school choice to support that concept, we are often met with resistance from individuals who do not want to see their own school assignment changed.

—Akeshia Craven-Howell, former Director of Student Assignment and School Choice for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

Desegregation is ongoing. School enrollment demographics will continue to shift as communities change and as families make decisions about their children’s enrollment. To maintain desegregation, district and school leaders need to continuously monitor these community-level shifts and adjust boundaries or enrollment policies accordingly.

Principal Ramos shared that United now has a wait list of families hoping to enroll their children. However, because United is managed as a choice-based enrollment school, the school must have someone actively working in collaboration with the office of enrollment to ensure that socio-economic priorities relating to socio-economic diversity in admissions are met and maintained. Around the

country, White families and families with more economic resources are more likely to access choice-based schools, often leading to increased segregation even within diverse neighborhoods.⁶ Principal Ramos shared that she would like to see districts provide coordinated funding to support district or school level “diversity coordinators”⁷ dedicated to diverse recruitment and enrollment in schools and across districts that are actively working on integration. These positions would support diverse enrollment management so that school desegregation continues to be prioritized.

In CMS, district leaders note that there is limited interest in continuing desegregation efforts through additional school mergers due to a decline in enrollment at the two merged schools. However, district staff emphasize that there are limited ways to redraw school boundaries to include a more diverse pool of students owing to deepening neighborhood segregation, thereby underscoring the need for continued learning to identify approaches to desegregation in various contexts. The uncertainty related to continuing school mergers as a desegregation strategy may also speak to the limitations of using enrollment as a primary success measure for integration-focused initiatives in public districts. Without comprehensive measures that relate to both desegregation (student presence) and integration (student experience), it is difficult for districts to continue to maintain strong buy-in for this work beyond the initial implementation stages.



Lessons learned

Staff interviewed for this profile at the district and school levels in both cities shared lessons learned from these completed school mergers. When reflecting on the school merger process, participants emphasized the following cross-cutting themes.

- **Stability and buy-in at decision-making levels of a school and district are necessary to sustain the work.** School mergers are long-term projects that require sustained attention, resourcing, and buy-in. Ensuring that leaders can complete their intended terms or effectively transition the work to new leaders is critical. This stability and thoughtful attention to leadership transitions supports projects from ideas, to planning, to implementation, to sustainability.
- **Relationships are critical.** School communities are deeply relational, and the ways that staff, families, and students feel they belong and are valued in a school community are tied to trusting relationships within the school. This is especially true during times of significant change, such as during a school merger. District officials need to build trusting relationships with the school leaders, teachers, and community members; and those relationships must be leveraged to build success.
- **A shared vision for the merged school community is the foundation of future success.** When the full school community understands the purpose of the merger, has contributed to the planning process, and sees themselves reflected in the vision for the new merged school, these factors can provide a foundation for successful implementation.

⁶ Frankenberg, E., Siegel-Hawley, G., & Wang, J. (2010). *Choice without equity: Charter school segregation and the need for civil rights standards*. Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles at UCLA. www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu

⁷ To read more about a district pursuing an intentional enrollment management strategy and partnership, see the Enroll Indy Bridges Collaborative member profile at https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Bridges-Collaborative-Member-Profile-Enroll-Indy-TCF-Feb-2023_0.pdf

- **School merger projects move at the speed of trust (and trust takes time to build).** In NYCPS, multiple leaders at different levels of the education system emphasized the importance of long timelines for both the planning and early implementation phases. In CMS, the 6-year cycle for enrollment and school assignment planning provided a long on-ramp for strategic planning and communication in advance of any significant changes to school assignments.
- **Each merger is unique, and flexibility is necessary.** Context is key for these projects. Individual group interests, district or community politics, and power dynamics all have the potential to influence how a given project will be received. Project leaders stressed that while a planned approach is necessary, rules and processes should remain flexible to better meet emerging needs and achieve merger goals. Additionally, leaders in both districts emphasized that these projects can be helped or harmed by local politics and contexts. Ongoing attention to these dynamics is critical for implementing and sustaining desegregation and integration priorities.



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Claire Schuch, *former Director of Planning for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools*

Akeshia Craven-Howell, *former Director of Student Assignment and School Choice for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools*