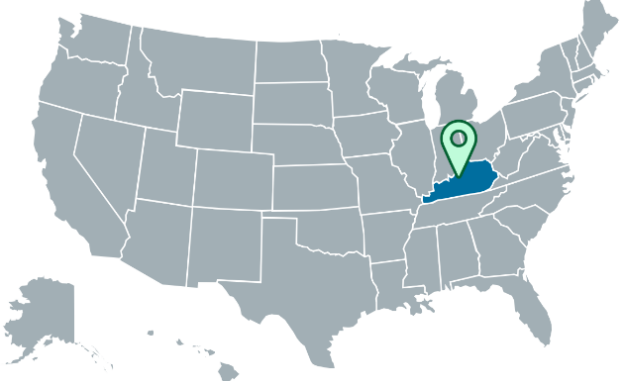
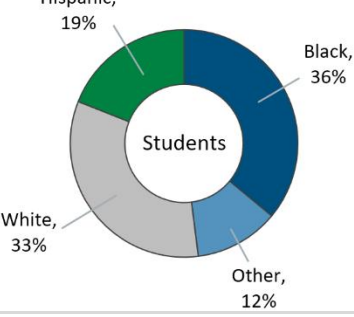




MEMBER PROFILE

JEFFERSON COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS



Organization Type: Public School District

<p>Location: Louisville, KY</p>	<p>Population</p>
	 <p> 21% are multilingual language learners. 63% qualify for free and reduced-price lunch. 3.5% of students experience homelessness. </p>
<p>Size</p>	<p>Year founded</p>
 <p>165 schools, 6,735 teachers, and 96,148 students (Pre-K–12)</p>	 <p>Pre-1840 (first official report on the schools published in 1840)</p>



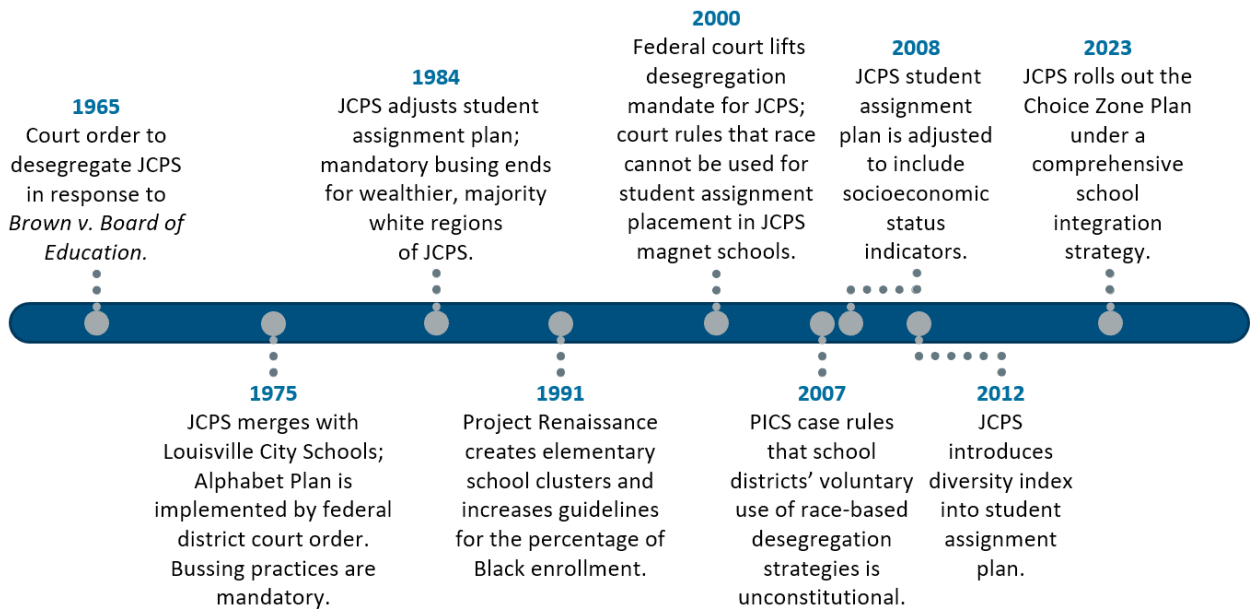
School Desegregation in Jefferson County Public Schools: An Overview

Jefferson County (KY) Public Schools (JCPS) has a long history of desegregation and integration efforts that spans more than 50 years. Starting in 1965, JCPS was subject to a court order to desegregate in response to *Brown v. Board of Education*. In 1975, JCPS merged with Louisville City Schools, a neighboring district. As mandated by a federal district court order, the new merged district introduced the “Alphabet Plan.” This plan assigned students to schools based on their address, grade, race, and the first letter of the student’s last name. To ensure adherence with court guidelines, bussing practices were mandatory during this time. As a result, many Black students rode school buses to majority-white schools and many white students rode school buses to majority-Black schools, often in neighborhoods far from where they lived.¹ The first modifications to the district’s student assignment plan occurred in 1984; attendance boundaries for middle and high schools were redrawn and guidelines were adjusted to increase the percentage of Black enrollment. Facing pressure from white

¹ Kaur, H. (2019, June 30). *What you need to know about busing*. CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/2019/06/29/politics/what-is-busing-explainer-trnd/index.html>

families, JCPS ended, in 1984, mandatory busing for neighborhoods that were wealthier and majority white (East and South Ends); however, mandatory busing continued for students in Louisville’s majority Black West End as a way to maintain racial desegregation.²

Exhibit 1. Timeline of School Desegregation in Jefferson County Public Schools



The Alphabet Plan ended in 1991 in response to state education reform measures, and a new plan, called Project Renaissance, created opportunities for students to apply to specific schools or programs of their choice. Project Renaissance created elementary school clusters and made further adjustments to guidelines to increase the percentage of Black enrollment. In June 2000, a district court ruled that, because racial integration of schools was successful, JCPS no longer needed to be under court mandate to desegregate. The district then began voluntarily managing continued integration and student assignment plans. However, the same ruling from 2000 determined that race could not be used to place students in magnet schools.³

After school desegregation efforts were no longer court mandated, court proceedings continued to impact JCPS. In 2007, JCPS was part of the *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1* (PICS) case, which ruled that school districts’ voluntary use of race-based desegregation strategies was unconstitutional.⁴ This ruling effectively halted the desegregation method that the district had been using since 1975. In response to the PICS case, JCPS adjusted its student assignment

² Clark, J. (2022, April 12). *As JCPS moves forward with student assignment plan, critics worry about resegregation*. Louisville Public Media. <https://www.lpm.org/news/2022-04-12/as-jcps-moves-forward-with-student-assignment-plan-critics-worry-about-resegregation>

³ The language on the court ruling is as follows: “First, the Court concludes that Judge Gordon’s original Decree, as continued by Judge Ballantine, should be dissolved. This is appropriate because the Board has demonstrated extraordinary good faith and has accomplished all the purposes of the Decree. To the greatest extent practicable, the Decree has eliminated the vestiges associated with the former policy of segregation and its pernicious effects. Next, the Court concludes that the Board’s use of racial quotas in the Central High Magnet Career Academy would violate the Equal Protection Clause. The Board must admit to Central any students who applied for this coming school year and were denied enrollment due to race. The Board must do this for the 2000-2001 school year.” *Hampton v. Jefferson County Bd. of Educ.*, 102 F. Supp. 2d 358 (W.D. Ky. 2000). <https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/FSupp2/102/358/2419867/>

⁴ Anderson, C. R. (2011). What do you see? The Supreme Court decision in PICS and the resegregation of two southern school districts. *Teachers College Record*, 113(4), 755-786. <https://doi.org/10.1177/016146811111300407>

plan, including broadening the definition of diversity to include indicators of socioeconomic status. In 2008, the JCPS student assignment plan divided the district into two areas based on such population characteristics as percentage non-white, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment of adults. The assignment plan required schools to have 15–50% of students coming from the less affluent of the two areas and also relied on bussing to achieve these goals.

In 2012, the district further adjusted its definition of diversity by creating a school **diversity index**. The index used data from census block groups to assign students to three categories: median household income, percentage non-white, and average adult educational attainment within the census block where students reside. Using these categories, each student was classified as Category 1, Category 2, or Category 3. The [diversity index](#) of a school is calculated as a weighted average of the number of students in each category. JCPS uses the diversity index to establish district guidelines; for example, according to the district’s student assignment plan, the diversity index of a school should be within the range of 1.4–2.5. This supports JCPS’ goal of achieving school desegregation across the district. As of 2024, 84% of elementary schools, 92% of middle schools, and 100% of high schools were within the required range of the diversity index.⁵



Spotlight on: Balancing Diversity and Choice Through the Choice Zone Plan

JCPS implemented the Choice Zone Plan as part of a [comprehensive school integration strategy](#). The comprehensive strategy includes multiple elements:

- Creating opportunities for students in the Choice Zone to choose to attend a school close to home or at a distance,
- Adjusting boundaries and aligning feeder patterns to enhance predictability of school paths,
- Implementing a magnet strategy to increase diversity in magnet schools,
- Improving outreach to make participation in the school choice process more accessible for families, and
- Implementing the Choice Zone Plan.

This profile takes a deeper dive into the Choice Zone plan because it was the most active component of the integration strategy during the study period.

The Choice Zone Plan was rolled out during the 2023–2024 school year as the first substantive change in decades to student assignment in JCPS. Interviews collected for this profile were conducted during the rollout phase, and any insights listed in the current profile are based on initial learnings from the district. The Choice Zone Plan offers school choice to families who reside in West Louisville, a selected historically marginalized geographic area, and provides resources to improve the quality of education in that same area. The main objectives of the Choice Zone Plan are to (a) provide more school options to marginalized families that were previously not prioritized and (b) improve the quality of historically under-resourced schools in West Louisville. Families residing in the Choice Zone can choose to send

⁵ <https://assessment.jefferson.kyschools.us/publicDatasets/PublicResources.aspx?id=511638>

their students to schools in a historically better-resourced area with a longer commute or to schools closer to home, which have historically been under resourced but are now receiving additional resources. JCPS officials expect the Choice Zone Plan to improve equitable access of West Louisville residents to high-quality education. Additionally, because it is designed to offer more families access to high-quality education closer to where they live, the Choice Zone Plan is intended to provide opportunities for increased participation in afterschool activities, improved attendance and sense of belonging, and increased parental engagement.⁶

The Choice Zone Support Plan provides \$12 million annually in resources for Choice Zone through the 2032–2033 school year. The funding can be spent at the discretion of the school principal and includes a stipend for staff and principals who work in those schools. Such incentives can help provide more funding to specific needs of students (e.g., English language learners) and attract more teachers to reduce class sizes. In the 2023–2024 school year, JCPS began implementing the Choice Zone Plan for three transition grades: kindergarten, sixth grade, and ninth grade. In total, the Choice Zone plan covers 13 schools: 11 elementary schools, 1 middle school, and 1 middle/high school (includes students grades 6-12). At least two of these schools (William H. Perry Elementary and Hudson Middle School) were newly opened. All of the schools in the Choice Zone Plan are located in West Louisville, a historically under resourced area.

In addition to helping improve the quality of schools in the Choice Zone area, the plan also provides increased choice to families that disproportionately endured long transportation times linked to previous desegregation efforts. As described previously, to maintain socioeconomic and racial diversity across the district, JCPS historically relied heavily on bussing as a strategy to transport West Louisville students – who are primarily African American—to schools farther South and East; whereas other communities had access to school options closer to home. For example, West Louisville was the only area of JCPS where middle and high school students did not have an option close to home and were assigned to schools that were sometimes 14 miles away.⁷ Lindsay Bale, Supervisor of School Choice at JCPS, noted,

“One of the biggest motivations [for the Choice Zone Plan] was the inequity in requiring students who live in certain areas to be on bus rides that are hours long and not requiring that of other students. [The students with long bus rides] have been bearing the brunt of maintaining segregation for so many years.”

JCPS learned that West Louisville families—and elementary school families in particular—wanted to have the option of sending their children to a school closer to home. When surveyed by JCPS in 2020, 59% of elementary school families who were living in West Louisville shared that they would prefer a school closer to home for sixth grade. In addition, parents wanted to ensure that their neighborhood schools were of high quality, which prompted district strategies to offer support for under-resourced schools in neighborhoods where many families have lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

⁶ Jefferson County Public Schools. (n.d.). *School choice proposal*. <https://sites.google.com/jefferson.kyschools.us/student-assignment-proposal/home>

⁷ Ibid.

Although the Choice Zone Plan addressed the priorities of families in West Louisville who were most impacted by bussing, given the existing residential segregation in Louisville and families' preferences for schools that are closer to home, JCPS staff recognized the plan could ultimately increase racial isolation in the 13 schools in the Choice Zone. Bale explained "[t]hat competition between diversity and choice, we talk about that a lot. And I think when it comes to that, that what we see from our families is that choice is really more important to them than diversity." JCPS community members and integration experts have also raised questions about the impact of the Choice Zone Plan on the district's historic desegregation efforts.^{8,9} However, district leaders share that their priorities are grounded in finding a plan that strikes the right balance between choice and integration.



What Factors Support Progress on the Choice Zone Plan?

Collaborative approach

One factor that supported progress on the Choice Zone Plan was the district's **collaborative approach** to co-creating the plan with the school board and community members. To support engagement, JCPS created a **Student Assignment Review Advisory Committee (SARAC)** that included various stakeholders (e.g., community members and teachers). SARAC also collected data to learn about parents' priorities to inform the revision of the student assignment plan. For example, SARAC conducted a community-wide survey to gather information about student, parent, and community understanding of the plan and their priorities, and the group specifically surveyed families in West Louisville in July 2020. In addition, JCPS' communication and outreach strategy included **listening sessions** with community members during the planning phase of the Choice Zone Plan. These listening sessions included presentations about the Choice Zone Plan and offered different options for community members to provide feedback and suggestions (e.g., via live question and answer after the presentation, feedback forms on a laptop at the presentation, and Google Forms).

When asked what other districts need to have in place before undertaking this work, Bale explained that it was important to elicit feedback from the community and have structures in place to integrate their feedback when developing the Choice Zone Plan:

"I think the other thing to me is co-creating the plan. And so really working with all stakeholders, students, families, community members, teachers, principals, having representatives from all of those groups on your planning team and really listening to them. I think we get in the habit sometimes of seeking feedback just to seek feedback, maybe not to utilize it. And so I think making sure that you have a process in place for actually seeking that feedback and then using the feedback you received to make changes."

The process of co-creation and soliciting feedback ensured that the design of the Choice Zone Plan responded to community priorities and that the plan helped build trust between the district and the local community. Amanda Averette-Bush, Director of School Choice, noted, "I think it's extremely important as you go on this journey that you have sort of a collaborative approach to the work with

⁸ Clark, J. (2020, November 30). *Once an integration model, Louisville's schools risk resegregating to offer choice*. Louisville Public Media. <https://www.lpm.org/news/2020-11-30/once-an-integration-model-louisvilles-schools-risk-resegregating-to-offer-choice>

⁹ Clark, J. (2022, April 12). *As JCPS moves forward with student assignment plan, critics worry about resegregation*. Louisville Public Media. <https://www.lpm.org/news/2022-04-12/as-jcps-moves-forward-with-student-assignment-plan-critics-worry-about-resegregation>

the community. I think that was huge as we moved the work forward because there was a lot of distrust.”

Ongoing communication and engagement

To ensure the success of the new student assignment plan in the Choice Zone, JCPS supported a dedicated team of new and existing staff to offer pre-implementation outreach to get families on board and to troubleshoot challenges after the new Choice Zone Plan was in place. This dedicated team worked to ensure that staff members at every school, including administrators and school secretaries, understood the basics of the new plan so that they could be available to help address questions from parents and guardians. The Choice Zone Plan also included resources for equitable staff compensation. For instance, teachers and principals in Choice Zone schools receive a stipend and bus drivers receive incentives for perfect attendance and driving “difficult routes.”

JCPS also hired **two outreach coordinators** to help build the capacities of families and students to understand their school options and make informed decisions, and the district established a **Choice Zone Director** to help facilitate communication between Choice Zone families and district leadership. In addition, JCPS established, in 2023, a **Community Council** to allow district leadership and parents/families to monitor outcomes of the implementation of the plan. The Community Council includes parents from the Choice Zone schools, principals of the Choice Zone schools, and community members from such community organizations as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). To support open communication, the Community Council meets monthly with the Choice Zone director but can also reach out to the director as needed. This approach—adding staff positions and creating the Community Council—helped the district remain accountable to community needs when implementing the Choice Zone Plan. This outreach strategy contributed to an increase in student enrollment applications from previous years.

Transparency and trust

According to JCPS staff, being **transparent with the community** is essential to overcoming existing distrust about desegregation initiatives. Transparent communication includes being open with community members about current happenings with plans and initiatives and about progress that still needs to be made to ensure the success of an initiative. As Averette-Bush explained,

“I think having those connections in the beginning is important to have [the community] along the journey to really understand the story. Because there are a lot of myths and misunderstandings that have led to that distrust [between the community and the district]. So I think having everyone on board as much as possible throughout, and being transparent as well, like owning where you are . . . because I think school districts . . . we're education, so we want to think that we're perfect and we have it all together, but we're all sort of in this journey together.”

Averette-Bush further noted that while “showing your mess” may create uncertainty in the short term, the district can end up in a better place when being transparent and establishing trust with community members. Ensuring multiple pathways for community engagement—as JCPS has done through listening sessions, outreach coordinators, and the Community Council—also helps build transparency and trust.

Support from leadership

JCPS staff noted that no matter how effective the communication and outreach strategy is, not everyone will agree on the direction of the desegregation initiative. Further, people may question the purpose and reasoning behind the initiative. Therefore, it is important to have support from district leadership to help sustain and maintain improvement efforts over time. The JCPS school board voted unanimously to approve the Choice Zone Plan. JCPS staff explained that leadership support can help the initiative team stay focused and “keep their eyes on the North Star,” even if certain sectors of the district and community are not on the same page.

Key partnerships

JCPS partnered with several organizations while co-creating the Choice Zone Plan. For instance, the NAACP and the Coalition of Black Retired Teachers and Administrators gave input about the development of the Choice Zone Plan. In addition, JCPS worked with a series of partners to communicate about the Choice Zone Plan, including Ready for Kindergarten (a group that includes pediatricians and child-care agencies), Louisville Urban League, Kentucky Refugee Ministries, Catholic Charities, La Casita, and multilingual agencies. In some cases, JCPS co-hosted events with community-based organizations, which JCPS staff noted helped build trust with the community.



What Are the Challenges to Making Progress on the Choice Zone Plan?

Winning hearts and minds

According to JCPS staff, overcoming the community’s resistance to changes associated with desegregation or integration initiatives can be challenging. In the experience of JCPS staff members, although most people agree with the general idea of creating more equitable opportunities and access for all students, when their daily lives are affected by the implementation of the initiative, it can dissipate the level of support and willingness to make accommodations. Averette-Bush explained that desegregation and integration initiatives require a “mind shift” and “heart shift” from community members, getting them in the mind set of “we over me.” In turn, this requires collaborative leadership and transparency from district leadership, as explained previously.

Transportation

JCPS has faced significant challenges related to bus transportation. School board members recently voted to [end magnet busing](#) for all but two magnet high schools. The change comes after a tumultuous year during which the district's transportation system encountered challenges related to limited availability of drivers, late bus arrivals, and lost instructional time for students. This ongoing issue impacts the district's efforts to ensure equitable access to education for all students.

Implementation challenges

JCPS implemented the Choice Zone Plan in fall 2023, despite facing numerous logistical challenges. First, there was no default choice for Choice Zone students, and during the first day of school, many families had not yet enrolled their students. This meant that when some students arrived at school,

the district had to work with the schools to officially enroll students. Further, the ability to choose schools within the Choice Zone resulted in larger-than-expected class sizes in the Choice Zone. For example, many families chose elementary schools closer to home, resulting in large increases in enrollment and even overcrowding in certain schools. Lastly, transportation proved challenging for the implementation of the Choice Zone Plan. The fact that Choice Zone families could choose schools closer to home or further away meant that more transportation routes were needed to accommodate students. In conjunction with a shortage in bus drivers, the increase in routes caused extensive bus delays during the first days of school, prompting JCPS to cancel school for several days as it addressed the issue. Despite these challenges, JCPS continues to refine the Choice Zone Plan in hopes of providing a more equitable and efficient experience for all students and families.



Lessons Learned

- A collaborative approach and transparency are essential to earn the trust of the community and overcome resistance to integration and desegregation initiatives. It is important to continue to prioritize sustained trust with community members as implementation challenges arise. Ongoing internal and external collaboration is key.
- When rolling out a new initiative, it is important to have extensive communication systems in place for answering questions, troubleshooting, and engaging community members.
- When designing student assignment plans, it is important to consider families' access to parent engagement activities, students' access to after school activities, and transportation challenges.
- Districts need to be prepared for growth and to prioritize staffing, including having a backup plan in case more students than expected choose schools close to home. The plan should address enrollment capacity, staffing, and professional development.
- Support from leadership is crucial to help sustain and maintain these initiatives over time.
- An all-hands-on-deck approach can foster success for new initiatives, but specific staff must be dedicated to leading and managing the initiative.
- When designing school choice initiatives, it is important to ensure that resources are available to provide quality school choices, especially in historically under-resourced schools.
- Districts must be committed to implementing the initiative with fidelity and doing so without introducing other new major districtwide initiatives at the same time.
- Continued efforts to maintain integrated school districts must go beyond the local school district by incorporating such relevant sectors as housing, transportation, and city government.