MEDIA FRAMING OF PUBLIC SCHOOL DIVERSITY POLICY CHANGES, WAKE COUNTY, N.C., 1975-2010

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I dedicate this thesis to Julius L. Chambers and John T. Tedesco,
respectable men who have fought
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INTRODUCTION
American public education commands a workforce of millions of people, a budget in the trillions of dollars, and a significant share of one’s childhood. It is a vast, complex system run simultaneously by local, state, and federal government, each of which has different goals from the others. The media have an amazing number of topics to explore but limited time and space to do so. This giant educational system—one that affects anyone with a child, a teaching degree, a taxable home, a niece, a competing interest, an innovative idea—is not easily pushed in one direction. To the extent that the acquisition of knowledge changes an individual’s mind, and that change affects a group of citizens, and that group affects the status quo, the news media occupy an important slice of the educational system in America. Which educational issues the news media choose to cover, and with which “slant,” “angle,” or “frame,” can have an important influence on political decision-makers and the general public.

This undergraduate thesis seeks to show how local coverage of public school diversity policies in Wake County, North Carolina, was framed during three times of great policy change. *The (Raleigh, N.C.) News & Observer*, a regional newspaper that primarily covers the city of Raleigh, Wake County, and state politics, is the news source of interest for this project. Three specific changes—all covered in detail by the *News & Observer*—are used to focus the study.

The first significant point is the 1975 merger of Raleigh City Schools and Wake County Schools into the unified Wake County Public School System, which came about in part as a way to help mitigate the effects of the area’s increasingly racially segregated educational structure. This represented the beginning of Wake County’s special interest in diversity and its evolving policies came to be known nationally as the gold standard.

The second focal point, in late 1999 and early 2000, is the district’s switch from race-based to socioeconomic-based diversity, the result of increasing legal pressure to move away
from using race in school assignments. The district’s goal of and commitment to diversity remained, but was accomplished by mixing poor, middle class, and rich students instead of black and white ones—a switch that, practically, did not change much, as black students tended to be poorer than their white counterparts.

The third and final focal point in this study is the district’s move in 2009 and 2010 to dismantle its diversity policy in favor of neighborhood schools, where students would attend schools closer to their homes and diversity would no longer be a goal in school assignments.

Understanding how the news media couched their coverage of each of these three pivotal periods in the history of Wake County public schools has the potential to generate insights into both why decisions were made to change the system and how the news media might have played a role.

The research question that guides the review of literature, collection of data, and subsequent analysis in this study is:

• How has the News & Observer, the area’s preeminent news source, framed the issue of diversity in Wake County public schools during three major changes to its diversity policy over the last 35 years?
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE
PART I: FRAMING IN NEWS MEDIA

A. Definition and Description of Media Frames

News is always filtered. A careful listen to a friend’s delivery of a news item may lead one to believe he is fully representing the issue, but a friend brings with him his own background knowledge of a subject, his political views, his mood, his assumptions, and his selective memory.

The same goes for professional news media, from television to newspapers to radio. Reporters have limited time, favorite sources, different skill levels, and editors who rewrite their words. Newsmakers themselves have agendas with goals and roadmaps, and they have distinct levels of influence in their own spheres of influence, which themselves can vary in size. Controlling all of these factors is impossible; there will always be constraints in time, space, expertise, technology, and cost that force news to be necessarily subjective. The existence of these inescapable natural constraints, according to Delli Carpini (2005), has led to the development and understanding of media “frames.”

There are various ways to define media framing. To properly account for the theoretical variations in media framing, and to provide ample background for the five media frames ultimately used in this project, multiple methods of describing media framing are presented.

Political players—including the media—“use linguistic cues to define and give meaning to issues and connect them to a larger political environment,” and this process is called “framing” (Callaghan and Schnell 2005). Entman (2004) describes the concept of media framing as “selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution.” Framing in a
media environment involves thematic representations of issues. The public ingests frames as suggestions to view an issue in a certain way, but people also bring with them background knowledge and personal experience to alter their opinions. News is reported from a certain perspective, and as a result, “some aspects of the situation come into close focus and others fade into the background” (Delli Carpini 2005).

Frames get passed down from those trusted most in a system (for national issues in America, this is the federal government) to other “elites,” or people connected closely with top decision-makers in any system (Entman 2004; Callaghan and Schnell 2005). The media access these top sources, and combined with on-the-ground reporting involving regular sources, the media releases news framed in a certain way, which consumers of news use as part of their decision-making and opinion-forming processes.

Crigler et al. describe five frames that both the media and public use when synthesizing information about political events, issues, and actors: economics, conflict, powerlessness, human impact, and morality. Coverage of diverse issues—from AIDS to the federal government’s Star Wars space program, for example—can generally fit into the five different frames (Crigler et al. 1992), and can lean toward either conceptual or procedural types of framing. The former includes deeper study of an issue (the inherent value in public school diversity, for example) and the latter focuses on the development of events (protests of a school board’s decision).

While Crigler et al. provide a clear and thorough picture of framing with the above structure, it is not the only way to assess the different frames media use in covering an issue. It is possible that a frame may be housed within a larger umbrella frame or that a news item contains one, two, or more frames. The ease with which Crigler et al.’s theory of framing describes political issues makes it a guide to the concept of media framing. However, the five general
frames represent no more than a starting point for a researcher embarking on a study of media framing. Particular aspects of an issue—such as time period, geographical location, or subject matter—are the final determinants for what, and how many, frames are ultimately used. Issues falling outside the realm of politics or policy may be framed in entirely different ways from the method delineated by Crigler et al. So long as a media source is “selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues” over other facets of that event or issue, and there is a way to categorize the different ways in which the source selects and highlights certain facets over others, a study of media framing is possible.

B. Relevance and Importance of Media Frames

Frames become relevant—and very important to those vying for media attention—because they differ in quality as well as visibility, based on a number of factors. The more congruent a frame is with people’s existing background knowledge, experiences, and opinions (i.e. that person’s “schemas” around an issue), the more easily the frame will find success among citizens. This is one of the reasons President George W. Bush, after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, recorded record approval ratings and was able to pass legislation quickly and without much scrutiny from either party. He framed the response from his administration in a way that both invited fear and sought to get revenge on those who made the country fearful, and used the success of that emotional frame to his political advantage (Entman 2004). If Bush had couched the event in terms of its mathematical odds of happening again—a “logic” or “risk levels” frame—he may have had a harder time gaining public support for the actions he took in response.
Frames are important to society for four reasons. The first is that successful framing may have some influence on policy attitudes. Second, frames help identify those responsible for outcomes, whether good or bad. Third, frames can influence people’s priorities and stances by shifting the importance they assign to certain issues. Lastly, frames affect how people interpret political events (Callaghan and Schnell 2005).

Though frames in media can influence public perceptions and opinions by virtue of their very existence—it is “impossible to talk about an unframed media portrayal” of an issue (Delli Carpini 2005)—there is little evidence that frames have the categorical ability to sway the public. Even though there is interplay between media frames and public opinion, it is important to recognize that frames and public opinion have not been universally causally linked (Callaghan and Schnell 2005; Crigler et al. 1992). Instead of “slavishly” following the media’s frames, people tend to use frames as a guide—albeit an accidental or invisible one—that helps them link issues, rank their importance, and form opinions on them (Crigler et al. 1992). The often indirect, immeasurable, or invisible effects of framing certainly play a role in formation of individual and group opinions and preferences, but a direct link between media frames and thoughts is elusive.

To determine if framing can have an influence on a reader, imagine the following scenario: In a society with a population of 100,000, you are presented with two articles about the same governmental health proposal. One article talks about the proposal’s goal of saving the lives of 50 percent of the population with a new technology and the other talks about avoiding the deaths of 50 percent of the population. If the reader is like the research subjects in Kahneman and Tversky’s experiment, these equal outcomes did not produce in you equal reactions. The researchers found that people prefer to read about the percent of lives saved versus the percent of deaths avoided, a preference which stems only from use of different frames, not a change in data.
(Entman 2004). Framing the same issue two ways produces two different responses; when compounded across thousands of issues and news sources, framing in news media plays an important role in society.

*Media frames, no matter how they are identified, represent how different aspects of an issue are portrayed in the press. People use frames, along with their own feelings and everyday observations, to build opinions on issues.*

**PART II: MEDIA COVERAGE OF EDUCATION**

*New York Times* columnist Bob Herbert asserts that media coverage of education issues tends to focus on the negative aspects of American public education (Anderson 2008). Over the past 50 years, American newspapers, from small town publications to national dailies, have tended to cover education at relatively low levels (DeRiemer 1988; Dionne, Jr. et al. 2009; Gordon 1968; Hynds 1981), and coverage has tended to favor bad news—such as school corruption, low test scores, and constrained budgets—over good news (Dionne, Jr. et al. 2009). This has been the case not only in the United States, but has also been documented in Venezuela, Canada, (Brownlie et al. 1986) and Great Britain (Baker 1994).

**A. What Gets Reported, and How**

**i. Frames in Education News Coverage**

To explore more specifically how framing exists in education coverage, consider a situation where of around 150 schools in a district, fewer than six have experienced problems with desegregation efforts. In their study on just this situation, Jain and Wong (1978) ask, “is it
accurate reporting to devote virtually your entire coverage of desegregation [in that district] to
the four or five schools that have severe problems?” A headline could read “School District X
Sees Overall Stability in Move Toward Desegregation,” or it could read “Major Problems at Five
District X Schools at Ground Zero of Desegregation Movement.” History shows the latter type to
be more reflective of general reporting, where just as many subjective terms are used as
descriptive, objective ones (Stevens 1998).

A more current example is violence in schools, a subject that occupied about 5 percent of
high school education coverage in 2009—the same percentage that school test results did, and
more than both curricular reform and minorities/immigration (Dionne, Jr. et al. 2009). Despite a
less than one-in-two-million chance of getting killed at an American school (as measured in
1999), nearly three-fourths of surveyed persons in 1999 felt a school shooting in their area was
likely (Snell et al. 2002). While there is still debate over the extent to which media coverage
affects popular sentiment, it is accepted that news media generally disproportionately report on
crimes, and usually on the most out-of-the-ordinary ones (Bailey et al. 2002). Thus, framing of
education issues becomes a matter of import, given the potential effects on attitudes toward
schools.

**ii. Topics in Education News Coverage**

One study found that educators strongly agreed that reporters cover education according
to what will sell in the marketplace and that reporters “unfairly dwell” on conflicts or failures
(Berliner and Biddle 1998). *New York Times* columnist Bob Herbert places the blame partly on
consumers, who have repeatedly shown they want to read about “personality and process,” but
also implores the media to focus on what the public needs to know, which in his estimation is
“what’s happening, and why” (Anderson 2008). In 2009, of the 1.4 percent of nationwide news
coverage education issues garnered, the most frequently reported topics included: budgets and stimulus money (17.5 percent), politics (7.4), and swine flu (7.3) (Dionne, Jr. et al. 2009). The issue of hugging in schools received over two times as much coverage as truancy, which most might consider inconsistent with public educational priorities. For the entire breakdown of 2009 coverage, please see **Appendix A.** In general, little education coverage includes great detail around policy issues and how to improve curriculum or the learning process (Dionne, Jr. et al. 2009).

### iii. The Nature of Education News Reporting

Bowler (1988) breaks down education reporting into five categories. The first category is trend stories, or stories that highlight a specific aspect of the educational apparatus that has been changing. A fictional example of an educational trend is, “over the past twenty years, home schooling has been chosen by proportionally more Republicans than it ever had been before.” A second category is a comparison one, where local schools are juxtaposed with other schools in some way—by test scores, budgets, or amount of violence, for example. A third category includes stories based on or highlighting new reports or research in the education field. A fourth category is “strange news,” the contents of which could include stories of violence, some human interest, a local phenomena, or drug use. Finally, a fifth category relates to routine coverage of local school happenings, mainly in the contexts of the school board and local district and school administrators. These are not all-encompassing categories, but rather represent what Bowler asserts education reporters tend to look for and eventually write about.

In a study of *New York Times* education coverage in the 1950s and 1980s—two periods that saw crises in the educational system—the authors make special mention of the overall small number of “attributed causes” (emphasis supplied) of the crises. *The New York Times*
consistently pursued angles that included the problems with and potential solutions to the contemporary crises, but did not give similar play to the root causes of those problems (Lee and Salwen 1994). Richard Lee Colvin, Director of the Hechinger Institute on Education & Media, says that “journalists never get out in front of reform,” but instead are reactive to changes and events (Petrilli 2009).

None of the above says anything about the quality of reporting—only the nature. DeRiemer (1988) found the only statistically significant difference in education coverage between education-award-winning and non-education-award-winning newspapers was the length of their stories. In terms of all other variables—including geographic origin of byline, percent of space devoted to education news, location of stories on the page, and number of education levels covered—award-winning and non-award-winning newspapers were not statistically significantly different, rendering simple assumptions about the quality of coverage difficult to make (DeRiemer 1988).

While it is not the only determinant of education coverage’s penetration of the news pages, length of story does play a key role—along with frequency of stories—in filling whatever number of pages news outlets devote to education coverage. Over the years, education coverage has gotten a relatively small allocation in the “newshole,” the space open for news content in a newspaper. A 1966 study of education coverage in newspapers was the fifth of its kind to ever be conducted. It found school news accounted for 0.84 percent of the total (Gordon 1968). DeRiemer (1988) reviewed 14 similar studies whose data collections spanned from 1929 to 1983 and found newspapers rarely devote more than 4 percent of room for education stories. And in 2009, 1.4 percent of national news coverage was education-related (Dionne, Jr. et al. 2009). In a
survey, education editors estimated they devoted over 7 percent of the newshole to education issues, a figure that clashes with nearly every published study of this topic (Hynds 1981).

iv. News Coverage of Crises in the Education System

Education coverage is episodic and reactive and is frequently focused on major events, announcements, controversies, or reports (Dionne, Jr. et al. 2009). One such major event was the April 27, 1983 release of the Nation at Risk report, whose message was that the American education system was headed toward a fate of mediocrity (Lee and Salwen 1994). Simultaneously, the report highlighted the mediocrity of American news media in terms of their education coverage (McQuaid 1989).

The flurry of attention on education that arrived with the 1983 report was not a new phenomenon. In the 1950s, the Soviet threat (made especially visible via their launch of Sputnik I in October of 1957) also galvanized newspapers to increase education coverage (Lee and Salwen 1994). Indeed, Ravitch argues, Americans only seriously address education issues when they get rolled into national security frames (1987). Critical events, not performance on tests, affect trends in public evaluations of local schools. Concentrated events are more likely to draw participation from activists, who, through framing, try to induce the public to attach certain meaning to a critical event (Pride 2002).

v. Localization of Education News Coverage

There is a demand for local (as opposed to regional or national) education coverage; people who live in a community want to know about their local schools, first and foremost (Petrilli 2009). McQuaid (1989) argues that localization of coverage is a problem for small newspapers, where a novice typically occupies the education reporting assignment, or “beat.” Nevertheless, local coverage is generally more nuanced, with less coverage of school violence.
and large events and more of local school board policies and reform plans (Dionne, Jr. et al. 2009). Layoffs in the news industry in recent years, though, threaten this more substantive local coverage (Dionne, Jr. et al. 2009; Petrilli 2009). Evidence suggests that smaller news staffs and local ownership can lead to imbalanced news coverage and reports, so while coverage may be more extensive or substantive, it also may be biased toward certain frames (Fico and Soffin 1995). In Fico and Soffin (1995), the top two most imbalanced local issues—which were not limited to ones related to education—were found to involve school-related controversies.

B. The Machinery of the Education News Media

Examination of what education news gets reported, and how, is more valuable if light is also shed on who is reporting on the issue. The expectations for and tendencies of the education beat reporter affect what gets reported. The special relationship between school districts and the press helps explain why certain topics are covered more (or from certain angles) and how the system works on the local level.

The reporter-school administrator relationship is not one that typically blossoms easily. There are whole studies whose subject is the ways in which harmony can be fostered between the two (Ediger 2001; Gorton and Newsome 1986; Sanders and Stegall 1986). About 96 percent of reporters surveyed felt news about their local education systems was accurate, but only about 69 percent of school principals agreed. The most significant disagreement between the two parties was on the topic of whether reporters were knowledgeable enough about the educational process to effectively relay school news to the public (Gorton and Newsome 1986). Bowler (1988) argues that the education beat “should be important”: it involves people’s children and money, two things about which most people care deeply.
i. Reporters and the Education Beat

In 1981, many newspapers were trying to change the education beat from one traditionally filled by brand new reporters and those who viewed it as a stepping stone (Hynds 1989). It had a reputation for being a beat nobody wanted (Crook and Manning-Miller 1993). In the late 1980s, editors defined the assignment as one that watched school boards and reported occasionally on a new local program (Bowler 1988), but by the late 2000s, the beat had transformed to one which attracted many new media reporters—bloggers, both amateur and professional. In 2009, there was nearly four times as much coverage of education reform on the internet as there was in newspapers, and it came from sources as varied as think tanks, concerned citizens, anonymous teachers, and professional education bloggers (Dionne, Jr. et al. 2009).

While education reporting blossomed to include a larger number of writers, there is still little diversity among those who edit coverage of education news. More than 9 in 10 education editors in the 1980s were white (Hynds 1981; Hynds 1989). In 1989, more than 70 percent of education editors had been at that position for fewer than five years, with fully one-fourth on the job for less than a year (Hynds 1989). Education beat writers are most often assigned both the K-12 and higher education areas, and some (half, in 1981) double as religion, general assignment, or other beat reporters (Hynds 1981; Petrilli 2009). As such, few education reporters are able to easily dig deeply into education reports or statistics (McQuaid 1989).

ii. The Multi-Level Influence of News Sources on Education Issues

News sources themselves can play roles not only in the realm of providing media coverage for consumers, but also in instigating media coverage. In Wake County, for instance, the owner and the editor of the News & Observer were proponents of the merger in 1975 and used their considerable influence in Raleigh to put pressure on school officials (Wake Education
Partnership 2006). Similarly, in 2010, Capitol Broadcasting Company CEO Jim Goodmon, whose company owns the WRAL television station in Raleigh, advertised on that station in support of the then-current diversity policy (Goldsmith and Hui 2010). Jain and Wong (1999) found that Chicago newspapers followed a “unitary actor framework,” where media reports were supportive of the administration’s education policies, presumably because that furthered the City of Chicago’s economic growth efforts. With editorials, story selection, and reporting resources—but also with casual dinners with city leaders, word of mouth communication, and political donations—news sources, their owners and their employees can operate at both a traditionally secondary and non-traditionally primary level of influence on education issues.

As a percentage of all news coverage, education tends to garner a small amount. Education coverage tends to be about critical events or conflicts, and is said to be reactionary.

**PART III: HISTORICAL NOTE ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RACE AND EDUCATION**

School systems are integral parts of communities, and that status makes them both a fair barometer of public sentiment and a frequent contributor to shifts in social expectations and norms. This dual role has been particularly visible in the area of American race relations; due to their reach and politicization, schools have become one of the main institutions included in the complex calculus of racial attitudes and action (Lewis 2001). Certainly, public schools are not the only contributing factor in race relations, but they are helpful in understanding the landscape and details in the struggle for racial equality and equity. The United States has made progress in
the areas of educational equality (sameness) and equity (fairness) for black children, but how much progress?

**A. Disparities in School Quality for Different Races**

Jim Crow era laws, which were first enacted in the last fourth of the nineteenth century and which dominated the legal landscape for racial issues until the mid-twentieth-century civil rights struggle, mandated racial segregation in schools. As a result, all blacks and whites necessarily attended separate schools from the period encompassing the end of slavery in the mid-1800s to the decade following the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court ruling in 1954.

The time period 1890 to 1910 saw the quality of black schools decline relative to those attended by whites. The imbalance between black and white schools grew greater in terms of expenditures per student, average class size, and length of the school day (Boozer et al. 1992). Then, until 1925, the level of resources in black schools raised more than it did for white schools. The onset of the Great Depression halted that progress, though (Boozer et al. 1992). Starting in the late 1930s and continuing to the 1950s, the racial gap in school spending shrank, but the educational opportunities available to white students still were “markedly superior” to those available to blacks (Ravitch 1983). Blacks still, on average, attended schools with shorter academic years and worse facilities than did whites (Ravitch 1983).

In the 1930s, spending on white schools in some areas was ten times more than spending on black schools, and though blacks represented about 21 percent of public school students in segregated systems at the time, they received about 10 percent of the total funding—half of what would have been strictly equal, and probably even less than what would have been equitable,
given past unevenness (Ravitch 1983). This puts the typical 1940s ratio of white spending—between 3 and 4.5 times that of black spending—in a more progressive context (Ravitch 1983).

Headway was apparent, though neither equality nor equity was. Throughout these decades of unequal distribution, the system of segregated and unequal schools (a circumstance upheld in 1896 as constitutional by the Supreme Court in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, under the assumption that “separate but equal” facilities would be provided for different races) ended up educating the very men and women who helped end the nearly 60 years of officially “separate but equal” American education (Ravitch 1983).

**B. The Law and American Education**

The legal tide began to turn in the 1940s and 1950s, when local courts began to see how, in reality, separate but equal schools and opportunities did not exist for blacks and whites. Prospective black graduate students denied entrance to institutions of higher education for which no suitable black alternative existed sued and won admittance, launching a slow-burning but distinct movement toward the landmark 1954 *Brown* ruling (Ravitch 1983).

At the time of the *Brown* ruling, approximately 40 percent of public school students attended segregated schools and nearly half the states in the union had segregated schools (Ravitch 1983). The decision was a huge victory for blacks, but also meant many black teachers would lose their jobs as schools were consolidated. It also ended up being mainly symbolic, as the Supreme Court issued no decree and almost no segregated school systems moved very quickly to adjust to the new law (Ravitch 1983). In 1955, the Court, in a move seen as a win for Southern states, placed desegregation in the hands of local school authorities, only asking them
to use their discretion and integrate as quickly as was responsible and possible (Ravitch 1983). It took more than ten years for the desegregation movement to gain traction.

Between 1965 and 1967, the federal court system saw the *Singleton* and *Jefferson* cases. Judges in these cases decided that Southern interpretations of the *Brown* decision, which Southerners felt only meant blacks should have the ability to go to any public school they wanted, were incorrect. Instead, the courts held, public schools needed to “integrate students, faculties, facilities, and activities” (Ravitch 1983). These decisions effectively changed the meaning of desegregation, moving it from a “stop discriminating” point of view to a “start integrating” one (Ravitch 1983). Coupled with the federal financial incentives involved in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, school districts began to desegregate (Boozer et al. 1992).

C. Race in the Classroom

In 1964, ten years after the *Brown* decision, 2 percent of Southern blacks went to school with whites. In 1968, 32 percent did, and in 1972, 91 percent did (Ravitch 1983). Clearly, the new law was effective, at some level, in reducing segregation in public schools.

In 1989, though, schools were still largely composed of mainly minorities or whites. One-third of black students attend schools that are 95 percent or more non-white, and about half of white students attend schools with less than 10 percent non-white representation (Boozer et al. 1992). To see a graphic representation of this data, please see Appendix B. Most white students live in highly segregated communities, and most believe their neighborhoods “happen to” be all white (Lewis 2001). Blacks have had somewhat similar feelings about their communities, too:
Some black communities have argued for more money and supplies for neighborhood schools instead of busing services (Ravitch 1983).

Lewis (2001), in an ethnographic study of a typical, mostly-white suburban public school, found that while there were “widespread denials” about the “salience of race” in the school, there existed overt and implicit racial messages in everyday proceedings and in the curriculum. There was surface multicultural education, where classes would perform skits during Black History Month and learn how to count to ten in other languages. There was little intervention when young children made race-based insults on the playground to the few minorities in the school, and teachers attempted to “deracialize” them, classifying the insults not as racially motivated, but as regular put-downs (Lewis 2001). The adults in the school tried so hard to eliminate race from their thoughts and actions—most teachers, when asked about how they thought of race in the school setting, became defensive and claimed to “not see colors”—that they let assumptions and superficiality about race rule and missed opportunities to learn and teach about unity and cultural differences (Lewis 2001). There are countless debates over what should be taught in schools, and about the extent to which desegregation leads to improvements in achievement. It is not unreasonable to suggest that while desegregation has done much to level the playing field for black and white students, it has not been a panacea for the education system.

D. Racial Disparities in Scholastic Achievement

Since 1970, the gap between white and black student achievement on standardized tests has narrowed, but the typical American black student still scores at the equivalent of whites’ 25th percentile (Boozer et al. 1992; Jencks and Phillips 1998). National surveys of high school seniors
show that the gap is narrowing not because whites are losing ground, but because blacks are gaining (Jencks and Phillips 1998).

The gap starts before kindergarten, probably a result of psychological, environmental, and cultural influences, and is compounded into adulthood by remaining inequalities in K-12 education (Jencks and Phillips 1998). Funding for black and white schools is now the same, as are teacher-pupil ratios, but predominately white schools attract better teachers, which have been shown to be the most important factor in a student’s academic success (Jencks and Phillips 1998).

Narrowing the achievement gap between blacks and whites will probably take more than a generation if historical gains are any indication. Jencks and Phillips (1998) argue that closing this gap, which would have consequences for labor, crime, and higher education, would do more to “promote racial equality in the United States than any other strategy now under serious discussion.”

Desegregation of schools has been twice delayed: it took until 1954 for the law to grant blacks equal educational opportunity, and since then, actual equality has not yet been achieved. The issue of race in schools remains touchy and treatment of racial differences superficial and defensive in many cases. A gap between black and white student achievement still exists, though it is narrower than before.
PART IV: MEDIA COVERAGE OF RACE IN EDUCATION

Just as education news, and all other news, can be presented with different frames, so can news involving different racial issues. Because blacks have a deep, complicated history in America, and because the Wake County schools merger and subsequent diversity policies were initially largely aimed at mixing blacks and whites at school, this section will address media coverage of blacks.

The media and the political elite, who provide much of the fodder for news media, have the power to mold the ways in which we think about race. The press, in employing certain frames while covering news events, has had a major impact on how citizens categorize races (Winter 2008). The 1968 Kerner Commission report asserted that whites—who have the strongest hold on politics and the press—learn about race from media portrayals of it, not from personal experience, and that given the continued relative segregation of races, this will continue to be the case (Winter 2008).

A. Framing of Race in News Media

There are two lenses media sources use in coverage of race, under which a wide variety of frames exist: individualism and egalitarianism (Kellstedt 2005). Media portrayals can contain traces of both, but analysis of words and images gives compelling evidence of a legitimate divide between these two ways of covering race-based issues. The first lens, individualism, is used to describe a sentiment that blacks, now given equal rights under the law, must get ahead on the basis of their merit. The second, egalitarianism, covers a feeling that all people must be given a fair chance, and that because blacks were heavily discriminated against for so long, special consideration must be given to acknowledge past wrongs (Kelstedt 2005).
There is a distinction between these lenses and the media frames described in Part I. There, in Section A, one standard by which to evaluate media frames of political issues was presented. The theory, advanced by Crigler et al., offers five media frames typically included in coverage of a political issue: economics, conflict, powerlessness, human impact, and morality. Of those five frames, three—powerlessness, human impact, and morality—generally fall under the umbrella of egalitarianism. The first two frames—economics and conflict—could lean in the direction of either the lens of egalitarianism or individualism. The point is that frames can be different from each other in terms of their lens.

As Kellstedt (2005) demonstrates, the lens most used in media coverage at a given time tends to push the public to assume opinions more related to that most-used lens. There are other variables—including economic climate, generational differences, number of racial issues in a time period—that sway public opinion, but Kellstedt remains convinced that while there may be only subtle differences in framing, those differences have “substantial” impact, at least in terms of public opinion. Researchers have found that swings in public opinion are tied to language—and, as a result, framing—used in news articles. The “dominant rhetoric” for addressing racial issues in America has morphed from blaming blacks for their troubles (blacks are biologically inferior to whites), to blaming whites (discrimination against blacks is wrong), back to blaming blacks (blacks lack a good worth ethic) (Greco Larson 2006).

An alternate view of media framing of blacks and of all other racial and ethnic minorities is one presented by Gutiérrez and Wilson (1995), in which there are five “developmental phases” seen in the press and popular culture. The first, the exclusionary phase, operates as if a minority group is not an important societal contributor. The second, the threatening-issue phase, marks the first coverage of a minority group in mainstream news, because it has now been perceived by
elites as a threat to the status quo. The third, the confrontation phase, describes the “inevitable” social conflict that arises after the population at large fears a minority group. The fourth, the stereotypical selection phase, accounts for the social presence of a minority group in ways that tend to highlight typical, surface assumptions about its culture. The final stage, integrated coverage, sees reporting that includes the minority group as part of the “us” group in the “us-vs.-them” framework.

If the above five-stage process of media coverage is used to describe current framing tendencies, American news would largely fall under the fourth—stereotypical selection. Newspapers portray the poor as “substantially” more black than is actually the case (Dreier 2005; Gilens 1996). Media coverage of blacks, especially in urban areas, is most often framed as bad news, which supports a stereotype that blacks cause more problems than people of other races (Dreier 2005). Media accounts of the poor also overemphasize the “non-deserving” or “least sympathetic” poor—unemployed working-age adults—and within that group, blacks are even more over-represented (Dreier 2005). The media’s propensity to frame the poor as disproportionately black leads to “overwhelmingly negative and misleading” views of urban America, where it is assumed there is mounting crime, racial tension, homelessness, and inadequate schools (Dreier 2005). It also leads the public to have a more individualistic, as opposed to egalitarian, view of blacks (Gilens 1996).

In the 1940s, the Washington Post’s policy was to automatically identify blacks as such in news articles that may have had nothing to do with their race. The absence of a racial identifier implied a person was white (Gilbert 1994). The Post dropped that policy in 1948, but the over-representation of blacks in press coverage of bad news still helps to instigate and perpetuate negative stereotypes. To push against this, groups including Unity: Journalists of
Color have lobbied news outlets to improve representation of minorities in media reports and in the newsroom, and have assembled suggestions for changes to certain terms so that “illegal alien” becomes “undocumented migrant,” for example (Benson 2005). Unity: Journalists of Color represents just one of many groups and individuals asking news sources to take a critical look at how their institutional history and editing processes might contribute to framing of racial or minority issues.

B. Media Coverage of the Mid-Twentieth-Century Civil Rights Movement

The most concentrated (and subsequently researched) coverage of blacks in recent American history is their civil rights struggle in the 1950s and 1960s. Greco Larson (2006), in her analysis, concluded that coverage of the movement “varied in focus and favorability,” with the most striking finding being that national newsmagazines and local newspapers were often critical more than they were supportive of the movement. Consistent with previously noted framing theory, actors in this sphere were viewed through individualistic or egalitarian lenses. Nonviolent demonstrators, depending on the news source, were described as upstanding, brave moral pillars or were construed as rebels who defied states’ rights and intentionally incited violence (Greco Larson 2006). In general, media in the American South portrayed blacks as a threat to the status quo until upper-level national politicians began to support civil reform, which resulted in blacks coming to be seen, at least by a larger percentage of newspapers than before, as peaceful operators asking for fundamental human rights (Greco Larson 2006).

It has been suggested that media coverage of the movement had three effects on public opinion: it increased national awareness of racial oppression; it helped focus the policy agenda on civil rights; and it pushed attitudes toward the liberal side (Greco Larson 2006). The media
has patted itself on the back for covering the movement with “courage and commitment” (Greco Larson 2006), and the media has been shown, on certain civil rights issues, to have bent the opinions of readers by using different frames¹ (Clawson et al. 1997).

Others point to the 1968 Kerner Commission report that criticized media indifference toward blacks and coverage of issues pertinent to them, which the report classified as too heavily emphasizing conflict and unrest while providing little context for the protests (Greco Larson 2006). Under this view of media framing of civil rights struggles, the press did not play a major role in moving public opinion to overcome racial oppression (Greco Larson 2006). In fact, according to three studies of the cause-and-effect relationship between press coverage of these issues and popular sentiment, public opinion had been independently changing over time—since perhaps even the 1940s—to gradually accept black grievances as legitimate (Burstein 1985; Kellstedt 2005; Page and Shapiro 1992). At best, the press served as one cog of many in the wheel of social progress.

C. Coverage of Desegregation in Education

The Brown decision in 1954 did not make the national press; instead, it was met only with opposition from Southern newspapers, if even addressed at all (Greco Larson 2006). A case study of coverage of the Brown decision in two Kansas newspapers reveals three major frames in place: the conflict frame, the consequences frame, and the domination/subordination frame (Fleming-Rife and Proffitt 2004). The newspapers under study were the Topeka Daily Capital, a mainstream news source, and the Plaindealer, a black weekly publication. The conflict frame

¹ Clawson et al.’s 1997 study found people reading coverage of a Ku Klux Klan rally in a free-speech frame had higher tolerance for the KKK than those who received the “disruption of the public order” frame.
was by far the most dominant one employed in coverage of the Supreme Court’s decision. The
*Daily Capital* wrote on segregation-vs.-desegregation, Republican-vs.-Democrat, and public-
school-vs.-voucher-like-program conflicts, and the *Plaindealer*, in addition to writing about
those conflicts, stressed that blacks needed to “fight” for desegregation (Fleming-Rife and
Proffitt 2004). In all, actual movements of school districts toward desegregation and its
associated issues, such as busing, gained much more attention from the press than the court’s
ruling (Greco Larson 2006). The attention on desegregation as a proxy for all racial policy—
coupled with the fact that in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the overall frame in the media
switched from egalitarianism to individualism, where terms like “leveling the playing field” and
“making up for past discrimination” were replaced with “race-based quotas” and “reverse
discrimination” (Kellstedt 2005)—ushered in a new era of news coverage of the black quest for
equality under the law and in real life.

Desegregation in a community brought with it a “sharply increased” rate of anti-busing
activity (Olzak et al. 1994), and instead of being just one angle of the issue, busing became the
focal point. The busing of students to meet racial enrollment quotas, often framed as oppressive
“forced” busing, became the issue on which the sum total of people’s feelings about
desegregation was dropped. In the years after the *Brown* case was decided, the media, claims
Jones (1993), was manipulated to frame the ensuing desegregation efforts not as a righting of the
many wrongs of racial discrimination, but as a delineation of who was for or against busing,
whether the impact on whites was unconstitutional, and whether benefits of busing were going to
people who were not injured in the first place. In Los Angeles, newspapers provided “extremely
little” coverage of experts discussing the inequality of minority education, instead focusing on
incendiary press conferences where people attacked the judicial system and spread misinformation that was quoted the next day (Orfield 1993).

*In general, the lenses of egalitarianism and individualism, from which multiple frames can be drawn, are seen in coverage of race in education. Media accounts display a skewed conception of the poor as more black than the group is. Additionally, arguments about race in education, and subsequent news coverage, can be proxies for or projections of larger societal racial tensions or issues.*
METHODOLOGY
A. The Significance of the Three Time Periods Under Study

To examine which frames dominated press coverage of diversity in Wake County schools—and to see how, if at all, framing of diversity policies in the public schools changed over the course of 35 years—I will focus on three specific time periods that saw heightened thought and action on the issue.

The first period of interest encompasses the creation of the Wake County Public School System as it exists today. Before 1975, the area had been split into two school districts: Raleigh City Schools and Wake County Schools. The merger—actually voted into law on September 3, 1975—was a victory for businesses that wanted the downtown area to continue to grow, and who feared the masses were headed for the suburbs (Wake Education Partnership 2006). But 75 percent of area residents at the time of the merger actually voted against the idea in a non-binding referendum, and had similarly struck down a referendum on merger in 1972. This point in time marks the creation of the modern era of Wake County school diversity programs and represents a broader national cultural shift in the early and mid 1970s.

The second period of study is late 1999 to early 2000. At this point, the district had been using race to determine school placements—in all schools but especially in magnet schools—for nearly 20 years, but had begun searching for a different way to maintain diverse schools (Silberman 2002). From a legal standpoint, moving away from a race-based policy toward a socioeconomic-based one was attractive, and the district did so, officially, on March 30, 2000. In a short time the district became the gold standard, yet again, against which all other interested districts could judge their own diversity programs.

The third period of examination spans late 2009 to early 2010. As it entered the new decade, Wake County had a reversal of power on its school board; once controlled by Democrats
(after years of, according to one former board chairman, a partisan-politics-free existence), the board now had a Republican majority bent on eliminating the diversity policy in favor of “neighborhood schools.” At a May 18, 2010, school board meeting in Raleigh, in front of an international audience by way of New York Times and Economist on-site coverage, Wake County voted to end its longstanding diversity policy. There had been a major public outcry over the previous months from liberals who were against eliminating the diversity policy. There was strong conservative support for eliminating it. The board said it planned to take time—up to 15 months—to fully enact changes, and it began to make decisions about magnet schools without regard to race or income-level.

These three points in Wake County history have been selected for two reasons. First, all are related to the same basic issue: diversity in Wake County public schools. Keeping the issue the same, while accepting changing decades, political climate, and public figures, allows for evaluation of how these changes may relate to differing media framing over the years.

Second, I am interested to see how one distinct entity—a public school system—changes in around one generation. This case study is fascinating in its circuitousness—a merger introduced to ensure diversity in schools yields a school board that ultimately disowns the very goals that helped create it—and I believe investigating the role of the press during the lifespan of the diversity policy will yield useful conclusions and produce opportunities for further study.

B. The Data Collection Process

To determine which media frames were used and which went unexplored during each time period, it is necessary to ensure consistent data collection across all three. For this reason,
this study will use only the *News & Observer*.\(^2\) Also, each time period will include news items written about the issue of diversity both before and after each major change to the policy, which allows a glimpse into the causes and effects of each major decision.

For the first time period, the 12-month period spanning January 1 to December 31, 1975 was surveyed. For the second and third periods, a nine-month period—six months of which came before the final decision to change the diversity policy and three months of which followed it—was examined. This discrepancy exists because of the relative dearth of available news items in 1975. Bolstering the number of news items included in the 1975 analysis strengthens the statistical significance of the data. Additionally, the time periods under study remain similar in that the major decision to change the diversity policy was made around two-thirds of the way through the time period.\(^3\) While not ideal, the relatively similar set-ups still allow for nearly analogous readings of trends, patterns, and associations across the three time periods.

For each time period, an Initial Group of news items was found. Then, through various processes described below, a Narrowed Group emerged. Ultimately, a Final Group of news items was selected for this study.

**i. Data Collection for the 1975 Period**

Records for the *News & Observer* are available for each time period—but not in the same form. Archives of the newspaper’s 1975 content are only available on microfilm. Close attention was paid to the index for the newspaper, as it was able to focus searches through many reels of

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\(^2\) This project will, unfortunately, not include an analysis of rival, alternative, black, or web publications. *The Raleigh Times*, a competitor to the *News & Observer*, folded before the second and third time periods. *The (Fuquay-Varina, N.C.) Independent*, a small Wake County town’s publication, only has records available for two of the three time periods. *The Carolinian*, a black semiweekly, has the same problem. The web was only a reality for the two most recent time periods. If the goal of this study were to evaluate media framing of diversity across time periods as well as in different types of media, the inclusion of more types of media would have been more important.

\(^3\) In 1975, the decision was made three-fourths, not two-thirds, of the way through, which does serve to highlight the time before the decision more in the first period than in the second or third periods.
film. Of the many thousands of terms listed in the 1975 index, six were found to be most useful.\(^4\) **APPENDIX C** lists all index terms evaluated for usefulness in this study.

After settling on the six useful index terms, there existed six lists of news items that were possibly related to the issue of merger and diversity. Previews of the news items in this Initial Group—in this case their headlines—were used to make educated guesses about whether the article, column, or editorial would discuss the issue of diversity in schools. Because only a headline was available, selection for inclusion in the Narrowed Group tended to be more liberal, as the subject matter of a news item was sometimes not obvious from merely a headline. There were 111 news items selected; each of those items was then retrieved from the microfilm and retained in hard copy. During the process of retrieving those 111 items from the film, an additional five items, which were found in a random fashion, were discovered to be relevant to the issue of diversity in schools. In total, there were 116 news items in this Narrowed Group.

Items in the Narrowed Group found to relate to diversity in schools were analyzed, coded, and recorded in a final database. The items found to not relate to diversity in schools were eliminated from the study, though were retained in physical form. The Final Group for 1975 includes 70 news items.

The 70 news items retained in the final data set were coded with a variety of attributes. First, and more importantly, was their principal method of framing the issue of diversity.\(^5\) Other

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\(^4\) The six index terms or phrases used in selection of newspaper content for 1975 were: “Raleigh – Education – Integration and separation” (page 526); “Raleigh – Education, Board of” (527-8); “Raleigh – Schools” (564-6); “Raleigh – Wake Interim Board of Education” (582); “Wake County – Education, Board of” (694-7); “Wake County – Schools” (714-4).

\(^5\) Part C of this section describes what frames are used in this study—and what they mean. Part D details the process by which news items were assigned to one of those five frames.
data included were the date of publication; the section and page on which the items began; and
the type of item—whether it was a news article, a column, or an editorial.  


Data for the second and third time periods in this study were available in an online
database, NewsBank’s “America’s Newspapers.” Though the specific methods of data collection
used for the 1999-2000 and 2009-2010 periods were different from those used for the 1975
period, conceptually similar steps to those used with 1975 data were followed in obtaining,
selecting, and coding data for the second and third periods. To winnow press coverage to a more
manageable level, a specific search term was used in the second and third time periods. In 1999-
2000 coverage, 444 news items were selected—meaning they were the results of the specific
search in America’s Newspapers—for the Initial Group of news items. In 2009-2010 coverage,
710 news items were selected for the Initial Group.

Because these hundreds of news articles were not guaranteed to relate to the issue of
diversity in schools (many were about elections, a subject that included the search terms “race”
and “Wake County,” for example), several tools were used to gather a Narrowed Group for each
time period. Instead of viewing the first paragraph of each item, the “keyword-in-context” option
was selected. The 20-to-40-word preview, which included search terms as they appeared in
actual sentences in the item, along with the headline, indicated whether or not an item should be
in the Narrowed Group. If it appeared as if it belonged, the full article was viewed. If it did not,
the article was never viewed. Finally, if a news item in the Narrowed Group indeed discussed
diversity in schools, it entered into the Final Group for the time period. The Final Group for the

6 Letters to the editor, among other types of news, were not included because they do not represent the
newspaper’s own content—and because letters were not available in the first time period.
7 The search term used for the second two periods was: [“socioeconomic” or “race” or “reassignment” or
“diversity” or “busing” in All Text and “Wake County” or “public school” in All Text]. This means that
any resultant article had to include at least one of the first five terms and at least one of the last two.
1999-2000 time period is composed of 87 items and the Final Group for the 2009-2010 period comprises 174 items. Exactly as had been done with Final Group items in 1975, these items were first put into principal frames. Then, the date of publication; the section and page on which the items began; and the type of news item was recorded.

C. The Selection of Media Frames Used in this Study

The primary data collected from each news item was its principal media frame. Secondary frames were not noted for reasons of efficiency and inconsistency. The frames used in this study to describe news items were chosen, after an exploratory period, from a foundation of media framing theory set by Crigler et al. The theory describes five frames media use when conveying information about political events and issues, which a public school diversity policy is (Crigler et al. 1992). The frames are Economics, Conflict, Powerlessness, Human Impact, and Morality, and serve as inspiration for the five frames used in this study.

In an exploratory reading of 15 to 20 news items from each time period, Crigler et al.’s theory, of all the various methods of conceiving frames, proved most congruent to the subject matter in this study. To organize the different ways in which the News & Observer tended to differentiate coverage of diversity, five frames were ultimately employed: Budget, Human Impact, School Structure, Legality, and Value. Some hew closely to ones suggested by Crigler et al., though there are some significant omissions and changes. For example, the Conflict frame as outlined by Crigler et al. is amorphous and is therefore not included in the frames in this study. There can be conflict in any number of other frames, and two—Powerlessness and Morality—have conflict built in, rendering a separate Conflict frame a misfit with the other frames.
This study’s Budget frame is directly related to the Economy frame in Crigler et al. Items falling into this frame discuss the economic impact of diversity. Examples of this frame are the costs of busing or the impact of diversity on property values or local businesses.

The Human Impact frame is directly informed by the same frame in Crigler et al. Items falling into this frame discuss the on-the-ground impact of diversity on students, parents, school climate, or community. An example of this frame is instability students may face in school assignments and the effect diversity has on friendship or athletic competition.

The School Structure frame is an organically devised frame specific to this study. Items falling into this frame pertain to the effects of the diversity policy on the structure of the school system. Examples of this frame include the composition of a school board; redistricting; school construction; and magnet schools.

The Legality frame is also specifically created for this particular study. Items falling into this frame address the legal aspects of diversity. Examples of this frame are school reassignment lawsuits and the legality of race-based school policies.

The final frame used in this study is Value, an outgrowth of the Powerlessness and Morality frames Crigler et al. present. Items falling into this frame must address whether there is value in diversity—and how much. Examples of this frame are claims of higher test scores as a result of diversity; the notion that sitting near a student of a different race does not help one’s education; and gains in cultural awareness as a result of diversity.

To see representative news items for each of the five frames, see Appendix D.
D. The Assignment of Frames to News Items

In assigning frames to news items in the Final Group, there are three measures that were taken to ensure correct deductive categorization.

The most apparent assignment strategy was simply recognizing the gestalt of the item—the general look and feel that in many cases immediately suggested the frame. Some news items were simply archetypes of a frame and needed no further analysis than a brief view of confirmation.

Using trigger words was a second, more mechanical method for determining which frame to assign a news item. There are certain words that were always (or nearly always) used in only one of the five frames and, therefore, provided an indication as to which frame was being addressed. During the exploratory period in which 15 to 20 news items from each time period were evaluated, certain words and phrases emerged as “triggers” of certain frames. Searching for triggers was an effective way to accurately and consistently assign frames. See APPENDIX E for a complete listing of trigger words used in this study.

A third technique was useful for categorizing particularly complicated items. Articles with trigger words from more than one frame must lean in one direction more than another, even if by just a bit. In circumstances like this, where a news item could be placed into more than one frame, trigger words in the headline took precedence, as the headline is the most visible representation of the article—and indicative of the article’s most prominent point. Similarly, the closer a trigger word appeared to the beginning of the item, the more weight was given to the frame that trigger word represented.
THE CONTEXT AND THE COVERAGE
PART I: JANUARY 1, 1975 – DECEMBER 31, 1975

A. The Context

In 1975, Raleigh City Schools were becoming more and more black, in part because the city school system had been losing about 2 percent of its students per year since 1969.8 Those students who were leaving were participants in the “white flight” to suburban areas served by Wake County public schools.9 In 1972, a merger referendum, whereby city and county schools would coalesce into one system, was voted down by a substantial margin.10 Three years later, Raleigh school board officials—and, increasingly, Wake officials—began to push for merger again.11 In January of 1975, the chairman of the Raleigh Board of Education spoke in favor of merger at a meeting of the Raleigh Kiwanis Club, where just the week before, Mary M. Gentry, chairwoman of the Wake County Board of Education, had spoken against it.12

The issue of merger, wrote the News & Observer’s editorial board in late March, “stirs deep passions, but the specter of an increasingly segregated Capital City…should stir feelings of equal magnitude.”13 Claude Sitton, then editor of the paper, wrote in late April that, “absent merger, Raleigh will become a slum peopled by the poor and underprivileged of both races with all of the social blight and physical rot that entails.”14

April and May saw the most robust discussion of the pros and cons of merger; a Wake County School Board vote was undeniably on the horizon. The News & Observer’s editorial page, along with the Raleigh City Board of Education, became the biggest champions of the

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8 “School Merger Pushed.” January 18, 1975. All citations in this section, “The Context and the Coverage,” are from the News & Observer unless otherwise noted.
9 “City Officials See Changes In All Schools’ Race Makeup.” March 18, 1975.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
merger. Members of the Wake County Board of Education, however, were split on the issue. Several board members, and many Wake County citizens, opposed the merger for various reasons, many of which had nothing to do, explicitly, with racial or other diversity, but which, at their cores, were related to the effects of promoting diversity. For the first four months of the year, the opposition ruminated about the issue. Gentry worried about the “long existing communities of which the school is the center. These towns fear the loss of their schools. I can offer no answer to that fear.” She saw “no educational advantage to merger. I see it hauling the children out of the county into the city.” The merger “flashes fears of massive busing into the minds of many county residents.”

In early May, the winds of change began to blow. The May 6 Wake County vote (5-3) to back the merger, coupled with the April 14 unanimous Raleigh City vote, put the issue before the Wake County Board of Commissioners. The next day, on May 7, those commissioners voted, 4-1, to formally request legislation to merge the two districts, a move they said would “better promote the education advantages of all the children of Wake County.” Public forums held that month were “intense,” and were overwhelmingly dominated by people who opposed the merger.

In late July, a powerful group, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, filed a class action lawsuit against Wake County schools that put pressure on legislators to merge the systems. The suit charged the system with “discrimination against blacks in school and class assignments,” which the lawsuit said “resulted in substantial concentrations of black and white students in all black or predominately black, and all white or predominately white classes or

16 “City’s School Woes Nudge County.” April 14, 1975.
17 “County School Board Votes to Back Merger.” May 6, 1975.
18 “Commissioners OK Merger of Schools.” May 7, 1975.
sections of classes and programs.” Many people assumed “unification of the two school systems would eliminate the principal ground for the suit.” They were correct: Julius L. Chambers, the lawyer for the NAACP, said on October 31 that the suit would “probably be dismissed when the systems merge.”

Late August brought formal presentation and discussion of the merger plan. Topics addressed were redistricting, elections, and short-term pupil assignments but controversial, racially tinged issues, like bus routes, long-term pupil reassignments, and racial ratios, were unaddressed. On September 3, the Wake school board, followed immediately by its Raleigh counterpart, voted to send the merger plan to legislators, who were expected to hand it final approval. Those opposed to the merger contended it “would be of no benefit to their children but would likely increase integration.” Supporters celebrated “the greatest day for education for all the children of Wake County.” In September and beyond, the two school boards met to iron out details of the merged system, to be officially born on July 1, 1976. These details would include issues around racial diversity, such as student assignment.

Meanwhile, Raleigh school officials were already reporting that the 1975-76 school year had “opened this fall with less racial tension than ever before,” even though the merger was a school year away. “Last year all the blacks would’ve been over there and all the whites over here,” said a white student. “White students noisily plopped down beside blacks” in the lunch

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line, according to the *News & Observer*, setting the stage for a school system whose diversity—and diversity policies—would be celebrated for decades to come.27

**B. The Coverage**

In 1975, the media framed issues of public school diversity in Wake and Raleigh schools in five ways. The most employed frame, School Structure, comprised 28 percent of *News & Observer* coverage. The second-most and third-most used frames were Value and Legality, which represented 27 and 26 percent of media coverage, respectively. The Human Impact frame made up 13 percent of the total and the Budget frame 6 percent. There were no articles that did not fit into one of the five frames. Figure 1 shows these statistics graphically and Table 1 shows them numerically. Together, they contain the most basic, yet most essential, data in this report.

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Table 1: Media Frames in 1975 Coverage (Sum)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human Impact</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legality</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Structure</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>70</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The newspaper coverage largely ignored or deemphasized the monetary costs the merger—and thus diversity in Wake County public schools—would have. The lack of coverage of the budgetary angle of the issue (the Budget frame) is an indication that not enough was known about the potential effects of the city-county merger to determine whether the merger would cost less or more than the status quo. There was some brief mention of the merger and its effect on local taxes, but most mentions of money were secondary and vague, with both merger opponents and supporters arguing their way was more “efficient,” without providing evidence or explanation of this efficiency.

Additionally, there was scant coverage of the potential on-the-ground impact of the merger on city and county residents—the Human Impact frame. In mentioning busing frequently, the articles had the chance to pursue storylines that showed how a merger of the two systems would or would not change people’s everyday work schedules, transportation, or leisure time. However, mentions of busing more often fell into the School Structure frame, for they were less reflective of personal impact and more descriptive of system operations. Had merger opponents
made their arguments more in terms of the merger’s potentially adverse personal impacts, media coverage might have reflected that concern. This, in turn, could have brought people’s personal plight—which in typical societies engenders more reaction than logical, disconnected arguments do—to the forefront in the minds of legislators and board members. The outcome could have been different.

The frames of Legality, School Structure, and Value show similar frequency in this time period and have the highest amounts of representation in the newspaper. First, the legal issues around not having diverse schools probably provided a strong impetus to look at merger again. Two NAACP lawsuits—one new and one old, both accusing the schools of racial discrimination—and the continuing court-ordered supervision of desegregation in Raleigh schools contributed to the movement toward merger, and so were covered in the press.

The focus on how ensuring diversity would have logistical effects—articles for which the School Structure frame applies—was a sign that, unlike in the early 1970s, when the merger idea was struck down quickly and forcefully, the public was more comfortable talking about the potential for a merger, and was willing to widen the scope of the discussion to entertain the possibility of the actual passing of the merger. This acknowledgment of the possibility of coming change, when combined with vigorous debate about the value (or lack of value) of diversity, helps explain why the merger passed.

Of course, the public and its elected representatives in the legislature and on the school boards debated the pros and cons of mixing races through merger prior to its final passage in September. Thus, the final, and most well-represented frame, is Value. It is primarily in articles with the Value frame that philosophical, moral, and ethical arguments are presented for diversity. These kinds of arguments not only tend to resonate well with the public—think back to the
landmark *Brown* and how it emphasized the immorality of separate but equal school environments—but also serve as the underlying motivation for change. Without a belief in the value of diversity, discussions about its monetary costs, legality, or logistics likely would not exist.

While summary and percentage figures are helpful in describing overall patterns in a time period, it is also useful to dive deeper into the fluctuations in frame appearance over time. Figure 2 is a graphic depiction of the prevalence of each frame over the twelve months of 1975. The Legality frame spikes in August, while the Value frame has twin peaks in April and September. Articles in the School Structure frame tend to fall in the months of May, August, and September. The Human Impact and Budget frames, because they are so much less represented, do not show much variation over time, and the variation they do show is at such low numbers that it is unfit for analysis.

**Figure 2: Media Frames Over Time in 1975 Coverage (Sum)**

*Figure 2: Media Frames Over Time in 1975 Coverage (Sum)*

*y-axis: number of articles*

*x-axis: month-long periods, from January 1 – December 31, 1975*
The School Structure frame exhibits two major spikes—in May, and in August and September. The earlier increase is most likely explained by the votes of the Wake County School Board and the County Commissioners in favor of moving forward on merger. Articles such as “Legislators given merger task” on May 7 and “How to install merger is issue” on May 10 mark that month as one in which there were many discussions about the structure of the future merged systems. Then, in the late summer and early fall, there appeared a second upwing in articles with the School Structure frame, right as the final decision, on September 3, neared and was then made. That the School Structure frame was prevalent during this time of foundational upheaval is unsurprising; in essence, the merger was one massive change to the area’s school structure, where two school systems became one in the quest for, among other things, racial diversity.

Discussion of the value of diversity hit its highest point in April and continued strongly into May because this was the time immediately preceding the votes by the Wake County School Board and the County Commissioners on whether to move toward merger or not. This is the time when the most robust debate about the merits of merger was likely to surface. The Value frame was also high in September, which is related to the actual September 3 passage of the bill. The passage, which was surrounded by hyperbolic statements from both camps, culminated with stories like “Relief, anger mark end of a decade of struggle” on September 4, where both sides were at their most emotional, either praising the merger as the “greatest day for education for all of the children” or as a low point in the social story of the region.

In July and August, articles about the legality of diversity appear more often because of the NAACP lawsuit, in which schools were accused of racial discrimination in class assignments. It is not surprising that legal issues only get coverage when lawsuits are involved. Newspapers rarely employ reporters in investigations of legality for both resource and
appearance-of-bias reasons; there are other, more immediate items to cover, and looking into the legality of certain practices would likely put newspapers in a situation where it looked like they supported one side over the other.

What Figure 2 is not able to do with precision is identify lengthier trends in the prevalence of each frame in media coverage. When the time period in question—the whole of 1975—is broken into three smaller time periods, each lasting four months, more patterns emerge that point to broader trends in news coverage of diversity during this time. In Figure 3, data suggest that the time after the major decision was made is significantly less important to the newspaper than the months leading up to that decision.

**Figure 3: Breakdown by Thirds in 1975 Coverage (Percent)**

![Figure 3: Breakdown by Thirds in 1975 Coverage (Percent)](image)

The final decision on September 3 was made near the break between the second and third portions of 1975. Except for articles addressing the effects of diversity on school system structure, all frames had disproportionally small third-portion representation, which reflects the idea that media tend to cover conflict. Because there was less conflict in the months after the decision to merge had been made, there were fewer issues and events the paper covered around
diversity, even though the issue was as salient, if not more so, now that the school systems were to be merged. Now, it was actually happening, and there was much to do. The emphasis on planning the structure of the new school system helps explain why School Structure was the only frame to appear disproportionally more in the third portion of the time period; more than any other issue, defining the structure of the school system would be an ongoing concern now that the merger was complete.

The preceding data help elucidate trends in coverage of the five frames in the entire newspaper. But there is imprecision to that analysis when it comes to determining a newspaper’s priorities and predilections in coverage of an issue. A newspaper is not a democratic entity, where readers get equal access to all its content and choose the order in which to consume it. Rather, a newspaper is more akin to a monarchy, where content is presented to the reader in a way that its editors feel is representative of the important news of the day—the news the editors deem most essential for readers looking to learn about their area. The frames most represented on the front page, where editors place the most newsworthy articles, give a nuanced glimpse into the angles of the issue they consider more important than others. For an in-depth examination and analysis of front-page representation of the media frames in all three time periods, please see Appendix F.

Another way to parse the framing data is to look at which frames were more associated with certain kinds of news coverage. After all, there are three varieties of news coverage—the editorial, written by a board with a single voice; the column, written by an individual, sometimes affiliated with the news source and sometimes a community member; and the news article, written by a reporter to be an unbiased account of facts and events. Figure 4 invites analysis that considers the different functions and goals of each kind of coverage.
Figure 4: Media Frames by Kind of Coverage in 1975 (Percent)

There were 8 columns (C); 11 editorials (E), and 51 news articles (N) in the time period

Editorials, the influential voice of the newspaper, addressed the issue of diversity in terms of its effects on the structure of the school system more than the other four frames combined. This was mainly in the form of assurances that changes to the system would be for the better, and that pupil reassignments would not start in the year after merger. (The latter fact became an important selling point for proponents of merger.) Without the ability to say that merger would not ever affect assignments or break up schools as they were presently organized, the editorials instead emphasized the care that would be taken in reorganizing the schools. In attempting to appeal to opponents of merger, the editorials stressed that no immediate changes would occur as a result. This line of argument from the editorial board likely explains the significant jump in the School Structure frame, from 28 percent of the total coverage to 55 percent of editorials. A pursuasive way to appeal to dissenters is to assure them their fears are unfounded.
PART II: SEPTEMBER 30, 1999 – JUNE 30, 2000

A. The Context

The early October Wake County School Board election in 1999 brought four newcomers to the board of nine, though when all was said and done, the board’s opinion of diversity in schools did not change much. What did change, though, were the methods the district used to ensure diversity. Shortly after the new members joined the board, there was increased discussion and heightened awareness of recent court cases that had potential effects on Wake’s reassignment and diversity plan options. In 1999, two U.S. Court of Appeals decisions (Tuttle v. Arlington County School Board and Eisenberg v. Montgomery County Public Schools) and a Charlotte, North Carolina, district court decision (Capacchione v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools) forbade school boards from using the race of a student in assigning him or her to a school. In fact, even if using race in assignment decisions “leads to resegregated schools, even if most parents desire their children to attend racially diverse schools, and even if school boards are acting in good faith,” districts were not allowed to do so (Boger and Bower 2000). At the time, there was much uncertainty regarding what was going to be allowed in the future; the district and appellate court decisions were enough to cause concern in Wake County about its race-based diversity policy.

In October, it became obvious that Wake would have to address the legality of its busing and diversity policies, “possibly with an eye toward backing away from the kind of active desegregation efforts that have long been in place.” The News & Observer’s editorial board was exasperated, bemoaning the recent court decisions and noting, “if challenges to diversity

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28 “Board stands on verge of makeover with newcomers.” October 2, 1999.
29 “Board stands on verge of makeover with newcomers.” October 2, 1999.
efforts in the United States ultimately succeed, the obvious result would be a return to segregated
classrooms and exclusionary institutions.”

Though the editorial board was addressing legal challenges to diversity efforts, there was also a solid undercurrent of support, led by blacks, for another kind of challenge to diversity efforts.

News reporter Tim Simmons brought “a crisis out of hiding” with his three-part series, in late November, on the dire educational outlook black children in North Carolina faced. His series, the outgrowth of a five-month News & Observer study, reported that, “race, not poverty, drives a wedge between the test scores of black and white children.”

The series explored the stances of black leaders, educators, and parents on the issue, and the overriding feeling was that contemporary segregated schools needed a second glance—and chance. Eddie David, a black English teacher on the State Board of Education, “understands segregation. He understands the perspective of black parents who feel they are still sending their children to someone else’s public schools—he understands the parents’ lack of trust.”

The final part of Simmons’s series highlighted some local efforts, mostly charter schools, that harkened back to the segregated schools of the early and mid 1900s, but only to what educators and parents considered their valuable aspects: discipline, community, and more attention to education, not diversity.

A black Wake County grandmother, Rosa Quick, summed up the issue for those who shared this opinion of diversity and education. “I don’t call it segregation. I call it community. Let me put it this way. I don’t care at all whether I sit in a classroom with you or not. It doesn’t make any difference. All I wanted was an education.”

Chuck Neely, a white candidate for governor of

North Carolina, shared Quick’s opinion. “I don’t buy the idea that a black child has to sit down next to a white child to get a first-class education. That is demeaning.”

This debate over the value of diversity did not sway the Wake County School Board or administrators when it came to their opinions of diversity in the district. In late November, the board began discussing the way forward for its diversity policy, as well as reflecting on its impact. The editorial board opined that racial balance in public education “has been about an education system that reflects the community in which it thrives—providing an equitable, high-quality education for all, bringing together at early ages children from racial, social and economically diverse backgrounds so that in learning together, they will learn to live together.”

A departing board official plainly said, “Integration has worked in this county.” What was becoming certain was that the district would have to work around recent legal roadblocks to race-based diversity to maintain diversity in some other way. In late November, Wake Schools Superintendent Jim Surratt proposed assigning students to schools based on their test scores, not race. In early December, he amended his proposal, this time suggesting what would ultimately become the county’s new diversity policy: assigning students to schools based on socioeconomic status, not race. The new strategy would mean similarly diverse schools, as race and socioeconomic status tend to hew closely to one another. The goals were that no school would have more than 25 percent of students scoring below grade level on year-end tests or no more than 40 percent eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch. To meet that goal, the district had to assign certain students to schools not near their homes. The diversity policies dictated how those students were to be assigned to meet the goals.

37 “Gilbert prepares to leave school board.” November 27, 1999.
38 “Surratt calls for tying school assignments to test scores.” November 24, 1999.
With the decision solidified to switch to income levels as the diversifying factor, Wake County began a long slog toward implementing that policy in an environment of rapidly increasing enrollment, parental pressure to maintain stability in school assignments, and new school construction. Administrators embarked on “the most complex reassignment effort since the early 1980s,” which resulted in many changes to student assignments. “It’s a brave new world,” said Surratt, who noted the novelty of the plan and lack of an available roadmap. The editorial board acknowledged that the district’s commitment to diversity had “entailed inconvenience for some families,” but that it was “in the service of a greater good.”

The proposed new plan brought that inconvenience to the families of about 6300 students. The first few months of the year saw a spike in parental complaints about their children’s reassignments. A North Raleigh parent, concerned that her whole neighborhood would be reassigned to a different school, complained that the commute to the new school was “12 miles each way. These people making these decisions—I don’t know what’s on their minds.” Elsewhere, groups of parents organized against the changes in their neighborhood, but their efforts were in response to potentially outdated data. The school board modified its reassignment plan many times, partially in response to parent feedback and partially to ensure the maximum number of schools met their diversity standards. On April 30, the board adopted its final reassignment plan, which, while lowering the number of students affected, still changed school assignments for 3500 students. As the board made this final decision, Surratt announced

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he was leaving the district for a superintendent position in a Texas district. His new employer had no diversity policy, and its schools were either mostly white or mostly black.47

In the months following the official switch from a race-based to socioeconomic-based diversity policy, residents continued to seek recourse in what they considered an unfair situation. Sixty-eight children living in rent-subsidized housing in Washington Terrace, for instance, were moved from Brentwood to Joyner Elementary School as part of the reassignment plan. After, Brentwood parents celebrated the departure of the low-income students at a community barbecue, and the co-presidents of the Joyner Parent Teacher Association threatened to sue.48 Tension did abate as time went on, but even in mid June, 1400 parents were gearing up—and practicing their speeches—for the district’s assignment hearings. Parents got two minutes to convince board members to overrule their child’s reassignment. “The chance of success in this annual ritual isn’t great,” reported the News & Observer, “but that doesn’t stop many parents from trying.”49 Similarly, one could suggest that the chance of educational breakthrough as a result of the annual school reassignments was not great. But this did not stop Wake County from trying to ensure academic success in a diverse environment—until 2010.

B. The Coverage

The second time period of evaluation is unique in that it does not contain fundamental changes to the Wake County diversity policies. The changes are concrete and substantive, yet they reflect a devotion to same basic opinions regarding diversity in public schools. This element of the second time period helps explicate the data and its peculiarities.

The overall breakdown of frames across all types of coverage and all locations of the newspaper is not close to even; see Figure 5. There are three major frames represented—Value, Human Impact, and School Structure—and together they account for 86 percent of total coverage. The first, Value, describes fully one-third of coverage. News pieces containing the Human Impact and School Structure frames comprise 29 and 24 percent of the total, respectively. Finally, the legality of diversity policies covered 10 percent of news content and costs of diversity 4 percent.

**Figure 5: Media Frames in 1999-2000 Coverage (Percent)**
Table 2: Media Frames in 1999-2000 Coverage (Sum)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human Impact</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legality</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Structure</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>87</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coverage of the legality of diversity, only one-tenth of the total, was not prevalent throughout the nine-month survey of coverage. However, its influence on the decisions made in this time period about diversity is considerable. There is evidence to suggest that because legality of the diversity policy was such an integral element of the shift from race to socioeconomic status, it was mentioned only briefly in relation to other angles of the issue. The fact that there needed to be a switch, for legal reasons, to a new system of school assignments, engendered near total agreement among stakeholders on that issue, such that there was no further discussion of the legality of policy. The lack of debate and conflict was an important reason for the small representation of the Legality frame.

Budgetary effects of changes to the diversity policy were rarely discussed because there was to be no major change to anything that would cost money, such as new buildings, the overall busing needs, or administrative additions. There was also no large-scale difference in the racial makeups of schools, which some people say has an effect on property values or the ability of an area to attract businesses.
A major contributor, though the lowest of the “big three” in this time period, was articles exhibiting the School Structure frame. The significant share of the total this frame represents is consistent with the amount and substantiality of discussion about the changes to the structure of the school system resulting from the switch from race-based to socioeconomic-based diversity. After the legal ground for the change was solidified, the discussion turned to issues relating to school reassignment, busing, and magnet school changes, all of which, when viewed holistically or dispassionately, fall under the frame of School Structure.

Different from School Structure coverage, Human Impact-related coverage puts the focus on specific people and how policies, or changes to those policies, affect or may affect them personally. Coverage of the human impact of the diversity policy, which mainly included people’s concerns about being reassigned again as a result of the altered policy and, made up 29 percent of total coverage. The importance placed on this angle of the issue by the News & Observer and by local parents probably led to the decision of the school board to decrease, by several thousand, the number of students ultimately reassigned.

The groundswell of black displeasure with the diversity model and their move toward segregated—though segregated on their terms—schools to solve the problem of the black-white achievement gap, is likely to have had an impact on the amount of coverage in the Value frame. In addition, board members, who were almost exclusively in favor of maintaining current broader diversity goals and plans, continued to argue for diversity on moral and historical grounds, which sought to highlight the value in diversity and the need for it to live on in some form.

Figure 6 expresses framing data across time, by month-long period. The Value, Legality, and Human Impact frames sprung up earlier in the time period, and School Structure made its
heartiest appearance midway through the period. The graph indicates, and real-life events confirm, that much of the important discussion, and thus news coverage, occurred toward the first half of the nine-month timespan.

Figure 6: Media Frames Over Time in 1999-2000 Coverage (Sum)

y-axis: number of articles
x-axis: month-long periods, from September 30, 1999 – June 30, 2000

In November (month 2), coverage of the value of diversity was very high due to Tim Simmons’s three-part series on the failure of public education when it comes to black students. Most of the articles in this month portrayed diversity as a distraction, or at least something not nearly as important as good teachers or a good educational environment. In fact, some articles from this period with the Value frame advocated systems that were more segregated, like all-black charter schools and the neighborhood schools of yesteryear that drew from all-black neighborhoods. “Black parents seek a better choice,” the third part in Simmons’s series, on November 23, showcased the value in all-black schools, and thus addressed the issue of diversity from a point of view that found its value lacking. In January (month 4), the new board members
rejected a first proposal for a new assignment policy, which they said did not do enough to maintain the district’s commitment to diversity. During the month of January, in order to influence the next iteration of the assignment policy, people spoke on the value of diversity. A January 13 editorial, “Strength in diversity,” for example, promoted the “social benefits of classroom diversity.”

Discussion of the on-the-ground impact of diversity policies was especially dominant in January (month 4) as a result of the new school board plan, introduced toward the end of the month, to implement a system whereby schools would be organized to achieve socioeconomic, not racial, diversity. As a correlary, the district would then need to reassign many students under the new diversity plan. Coverage that included the Human Impact frame remained relatively high until the official change to the diversity policy was made on March 30, the end of month 6. After that point, coverage bearing that angle subsided a bit, but not to levels as low as in late 1999, suggesting the issue of personal impact remained relevant even after the reassignment decision was made. This is logical; the upshot of such a reassignment plan is that many students must switch schools, so if any frame were to persist, it would be one that is descriptive of continued changes to busing patterns, personal schedules, and school locations. Indeed, in the three months after the decision was made, Human Impact-framed articles were the most prevalent among all five frames.

February and March (months 5 and 6) saw heightened coverage from the School Structure angle. This is due, most likely, to the release of the first reassignment plan, revocation of that plan, and subsequent introduction of a new one. Articles like the February 1 “Wake magnet program expands by six schools” and the February 3 “Diversity plan leaves 12 schools untouched” explain the contents of the first version of the reassignment plan. The next month,
when the board retreated to reassess the first, failed plan, articles like “Wake board retracts several reassignment proposals” detail what went wrong. After the second, and ultimately final, plan is submitted, the March 10 “Wake student reassignments overhauled” offers a synopsis of impending changes to the school structure. It is during February and March that the board solidifies the specifics of the reassignment plan, which is commensurate with the upswing in news coverage with the School Structure frame.

The legality of race-based socioeconomic diversity, as mentioned above, was material in only the first part of the time period in question. After November and December, there was no longer much legal coverage because the questionable legality of race-based and the known legality of socioeconomic-based diversity policies were ingrained in the actions and decisions of the board. The legal arguments for socioeconomic diversity were so strong that they did not need to be recapitulated or reviewed.

Figure 6 appears to skew to the left, meaning each frame looks to mainly spike toward the left side of the chart. Figure 7 explores this apparent shift and examines the data as organized into thirds.
With the exception of the Budget frame, which has a very low pool from which to draw conclusions (see Table 2 for frame sums), the third time period contains a disproportionally small amount of coverage. In fact, the only frame that garners above 19 percent of its total coverage in the third portion is Human Impact, which, per the above analysis, can reasonably expect to see continuing discussion in the real world, and thus coverage in the newspaper.

Legality of the diversity policy is so stressed in the first portion because it is the foundational reason behind the change to the policy: the district is worried about the legality of assigning students based on race. In the second of the three periods, the board established it would change its diversity policy, which helps explain the relatively large percentage of the Human Impact and School Structure frames—frames one would assume would be stressed in light of the news that the district would be changing its assignments, which would, in turn, affect personal lives. Lasty, that coverage in which the value of diversity is the focus would overwhelmingly fall in the first and second periods is unsurprising, given the goal of value-based
arguments, which is to affect people’s decisions. After the important decision is made, there is little functional worth in attempting to change minds.

Figure 8: Media Frames by Kind of Coverage in 1999-2000 (Percent)

There were 3 columns (C); 14 editorials (E), and 70 news articles (N) in the time period

The most important finding in Figure 8 is that in almost three of four editorials, the value of diversity was the angle from which the editorial writers argued. This is a rate nearly three times higher than the coverage of the frame in the news section. The board considered itself a cheerleader of diversity in this period because there was no real threat to that position. There was only a series of minor setbacks along the way: assignment complications, a superintendent who left. The editorials sought to smooth over these small setbacks and propel the new socioeconomic diversity plan forward with frequent reminders that diversity fostered a unique learning environment, boosted test scores, and more vigorously prepared students for the real world.
A. The Context

On December 1, 2009, four recently-elected, Republican members were sworn into their positions on the Wake County School Board. The five-to-four voting structure that would remain in place for the entire period of this study began that day. (The fifth Republican member, Ron Margiotta, was already on the board.) John T. Tedesco, who would be the new board’s unofficial spokesman for the next year, was forthright with the new majority’s plans: “We will begin to make systemic changes,” he said. “It’s not going to happen overnight.”50 His statements proved true. At that first meeting, the new board discussed the district’s long-standing diversity policy. The majority’s proposal to change the diversity policy was not available to the public beforehand, but the board did send a strong message to attendees. The *News & Observer* reported, “an overhead projector showed the phrase ‘creating and maintaining a diverse student body’ with a line through it.”51 The debate over whether the diversity policy was worth the trouble, a debate that would last for months, through several votes, at protests, and during contentious meetings, had begun.

At the core of the majority’s proposal was a stark move away from using socioeconomic status to determine school assignments. Simultaneously, there would be a push for neighborhood school assignments, which would eliminate the need for busing for diversity, effectively ending efforts to balance the percentages of low-income students in Wake schools.52

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50 “School changes likely gradual.” December 1, 2009.
51 “School board gets leaders replaced.” December 2, 2009.
52 “Board’s boldness draws criticism.” December 3, 2009.
In late 2009 and early 2010, the pro- and anti-diversity policy supporters, both of which were loud, mobilized, and determined, sought to change the mind of other side. Supporters of the status quo cried that, “diversity has been a challenging but worthwhile characteristic of Wake’s schools,” that it enriched the educational experience by “exposing children to others of different backgrounds.”

They made the issue into one of international competition, where, to excel, one needed the skills to cooperate with diverse persons, “whether those differences lie in race, ethnicity, religion, country of origin or socioeconomic status.” At a more basic level, diversity, it was said, “contributes to the long-term quality of life for everyone.” Not all supporters of diversity held that opinion for the same reason, but they banded together to work against those trying to dismantle the diversity policy.

A new board member argued that, “there’s no proof that the diversity policy works.” A News & Observer columnist asks the Rev. William Barber, North Carolina NAACP president, “where, oh where…does it say that a proper education can be acquired only be seating a poor kid next to a richer or whiter one?”

One observer claimed to know the “real goal” of the socioeconomic diversity policy, and it was not “cultural exchange.” “It’s an attempt to have the parenting skills invested in high-achieving Asian and white families, who typically come from more affluent families, rub off on generally lower-achieving, generally less well-off African-American and Hispanic families,” he wrote. Another new board member took a pragmatic look at anti-diversity goals and noted that, “under community-based schools, we may have more

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53 “Winds are up.” January 7, 2010.
54 “How schools’ diversity aids NCSU.” December 11, 2009.
57 “Diversity is not a cure-all.” January 12, 2009.
schools with higher needs. We need to figure out how we can get more resources to those schools.\textsuperscript{59}

The debate continued to rage, and in mid February, Wake County Superintendent Del Burns resigned, saying that his conscience could not handle the impending dismantling of the diversity policy he had worked to maintain and improve.\textsuperscript{60} Burns was eventually removed from his post. The first of three major 5-4 votes, each of which brought the district closer to eliminating its longstanding diversity policy, was entered on March 3, 2010. More than 50 people, most of whom were critics of the policy, spoke at the very heated, tense meeting.\textsuperscript{61} In essence, the resolution set Wake on a trajectory toward “community zones,” but provided few details except a timeline lasting nine to 15 months for “honing” of ideas.\textsuperscript{62}

March and April played host to further debate over the policy, with neither side acquiescing on any aspect. Opponents of the new board majority tried many tactics: the NAACP lodged a complaint that accused the board majority of racism\textsuperscript{63}; experts, such as Dr. Helen Ladd of Duke University, presented research and findings to the board\textsuperscript{64}; churches held candlelight rallies and sang, cheered, jeered, and prayed\textsuperscript{65}; and protesters caused a ruckus at the March 24 board meeting at which the second major anti-diversity vote was entered.\textsuperscript{66} The failure to stop the board majority did not stop the efforts of diversity supporters. The board majority’s vote sent it closer to its goal of a “zoned” system made up of neighborhood schools.

\textsuperscript{59}“Schools may turn to merit pay.” December 9, 2009.
\textsuperscript{60}“Citing conscience, schools chief resigns.” February 17, 2010.
\textsuperscript{61}“Wake ends diversity policy in raucous, tense meeting.” March 3, 2010.
\textsuperscript{62}“Wake board’s task is arduous.” March 4, 2010.
\textsuperscript{63}“NAACP lodges a complaint.” March 6, 2010.
\textsuperscript{64}“Scholars say keep schools diverse.” March 18, 2010.
\textsuperscript{65}“By candlelight, they see a dim future.” March 23, 2010.
\textsuperscript{66}“Halls cleared, 3 arrested.” March 24, 2010.
On April 24, a month after protestors invaded their meeting, Tedesco presented the first official neighborhood assignment plan. The plan, which emphasized local schools, family choice, and economic and cultural diversity, was short on details on the new assignment model, the crux of the new plan. The board’s policy committee passed the plan five days later. Finally, on May 18, despite staunch objections from many onlookers and a formal statement of concern from the Wake County Board of Commissioners, the school board officially ended “30 years of policy designed to promote school diversity in favor of moving the state’s largest district toward neighborhood schools.” Still, diversity supporters vowed to not give up the fight—and did not. On July 21, Rev. Barber and 18 others were arrested for civil disobedience in conjunction with a day of mass protest and biting criticism of the new board majority and its recent votes. Former North Carolina Governor Jim Hunt “condemned dropping diversity as a consideration in assigning students to school,” citing the proclivity of teachers to venture toward schools in wealthier areas.

The diversity policy was tossed, though, and board majority members began the “politically bruising slog” to divide the county into what they termed “community school zones.” The plan still lacked details, which threw a few variables to the mix—variables that both sides felt they could influence. Discussion about the plans dominated the months after the final, official decision to end the diversity policy. In late July, the board settled on what it thought would work: a system of “controlled choice,” in which the county would be divided into new attendance zones, with “parents choosing among several schools and the system making final

67 “School zone concepts see first light.” April 24, 2010.
68 “Community school plan takes a step.” April 29, 2010.
69 “Board to board: We’re worried.” April 20, 2010.
70 “School board about to end diversity policy.” May 18, 2010.
72 “Hunt hails diversity over neighborhood schools.” August 6, 2010.
decisions based on parental requests.”\textsuperscript{73} The policy was not formalized and received much attention and critique. For instance, the new assignment policy would be a “big factor” in determining which high schools had high-performing athletic teams. The new policy could not avoid these kinds of natural push-and-pull effects, but it was successful in avoiding diversity as a factor in school assignments, something many thought set the district back decades but which others found a fitting ending to an unfit system.

B. The Coverage

The ferocity of the debate over the worth of diversity (i.e. whether or not it was helpful in the mission to educate) showed through in the data culled from 2009-2010 coverage of changes to the diversity policy in Wake County. Over half of the articles in this time period were categorized as having Value framing. The next most prevalent frame was School Structure, with 26 percent. When combined with the Value frame, these two represented almost four in five news items written during the nine-month period. Figure 9 has the full data representation, where Budget, Legality, and Human Impact frames represent 10, 5, and 4 percent of the total, respectively. Table 3 contains the raw numbers from which Figure 9 was derived.

\textsuperscript{73} “‘Controlled choice’ sets script for school zones.” July 28, 2010.
The debate over the value of diversity was, by far, the most common frame. Though the newly-elected school board members said—and demonstrated—many times they had their minds made up, the public latched on to the issue and both sides, on a continual basis, shared their support or disapproval of diversity in schools. The fact that this board was starkly divided on
ideological grounds, where the majority in favor of eliminating the policy was Republican and the minority who supported the status quo was Democrat, probably contributed to the dominance of the discussion about the true value of diversity. Both sides presented studies, petitions, and experts, and followed gut feelings about the issue to constantly keep at the forefront their answer to the question, Is Wake’s diversity policy worth it?

School Structure was also a very popular lens through which to view the issue of diversity because the decision of the school board had very large potential, and then actual, effects on the way the schools operated. Discussion on magnet schools, International Baccalaurate programs, year-round schools, and, of course, school reassignments (or the lack thereof) contributed to greater news coverage of diversity and its effects on the structure of the school system.

**Figure 10: Media Frames Over Time in 2009-2010 Coverage (Sum)**

![Graph showing media frames over time]  
*Figure 10: Media Frames Over Time in 2009-2010 Coverage (Sum)*

- **y-axis:** number of articles  
- **x-axis:** month-long periods, from November 18, 2009 – August 18, 2010
The Legality, School Structure, and Value frames all increased—see Figure 10—in the fourth month-long period, which encompassed February 19 to March 18, probably because of the heightened attention that came with the resignation of Superintendent Del Burns. His distaste for the opinions of the new board majority on the value of diversity showed through in news articles, which then was countered in columns like “Don't assume racism” on March 10, where the writer prioritized convenience over diversity. The fourth month-long period also saw higher levels of coverage for the three frames because during this period, the board submitted the first vote of three that would ultimately end the diversity policy. The NAACP lodged a complaint, too, which drove coverage of the legal nature of diversity.

In addition to peaking in month 4, debate over the value of diversity also rose in month 8. That month, which covered the period June 19 to July 18, was a time of much consternation among diversity supporters as they flailed, trying to find more effective ways of voicing their intense displeasure at what the new majority had done. For instance, a major protest was planned during this month, and articles like “Arrests anticipated for schools rally” on June 22 demonstrate the continued coverage this frame received, even after the final diversity decision had been made.

News coverage including the School Structure frame was highest in the months right around the board’s final decision to cancel the diversity policy, and in the final month, when the board was moving forward with its new school assignment plans, which described the structure of the forthcoming new system. Articles like “Community school plan takes a step” on April 29, “Redrawing of school zones starts” on June 9, and “Eyeing the models” on July 29 are representative of the discussions happening in the sixth, seventh, and ninth month-long periods in this nine-month study.
The two major media frames in this time period—School Structure and Value—did not lay dormant in any of the portions of the nine-month period. As Figure 11 shows, the two frames were relatively evenly represented in each three-month portion.

**Figure 11: Breakdown by Thirds in 2009-2010 Coverage (Percent)**

It is surprising that articles in the Human Impact frame did not see any representation in the months after the final decision, when that appears to be the time ripest for discussion about the personal impact of the new assignment policy. The only frame that was emphasized more in the third portion of this period of study than in the first or second was School Structure. Before the final decision to end the diversity policy was made, there was little and vague information about what the consequences for the structure of Wake County schools would be. Only after the diversity policy was scrapped did the board begin to look at how, specifically, the structure of the school system would change as a result.

Columns and editorials were shown, in Figure 12, to carry relatively more value-based content than news articles.
There were 42 columns (C); 28 editorials (E), and 104 news articles (N) in the time period

While each category of news was dominated by discussion of the value of diversity, opinionated news content—columns and editorials—showed a much higher bent toward that frame. Almost four in five of the 48 columns made an argument about the value of diversity, and three in five editorials did. This is commensurate with the aims of opinion pieces, which in large part are designed to appeal to the heart, not mind, of a reader. The goal of an opinion piece is to change a reader’s mind, and to do that, it is often effective to address the morals or ethics around an issue, not its budgetary or legal aspects.

News articles, on the other hand, no longer appear to be as skewed toward the Value frame as Figure 9 indicates. Now, the School Structure frame is closer, proportionally, to Value, though it still trails behind. Together, they continue to dwarf the representation of other frames in the time period 2009-2010.
CONCLUSION
Callaghan and Schnell (2005) argue media frames are important to society for four reasons.

First, successful framing may have some influence on policy attitudes. This is certainly the goal of a newspaper editorial or opinion piece, in which writers select how to portray an issue in order to have an effect on public policy.

Second, frames help identify those responsible for outcomes. In this study, the dominant frames were in areas of greatest conflict—areas whose landscapes were populated and influenced by key decision makers as they constructed the outcome for the district’s diversity policy.

Third, frames can influence the priorities and stances of citizens by shifting the importance they assign to certain issues. That relatively more opinion pieces appeared during the most significant changes to the diversity policy, coupled with the fact that those pieces tended to emphasize the Value frame, is indicative of the impact framing can have on efforts to prioritize aspects of an issue.

Lastly, frames affect how people interpret political events. News coverage, especially opinion pieces, that emphasizes a certain frame—in this case, the Value frame—may affect how readers react to changes to the diversity policy.

A. The Influence of Conflict on Media Framing

Conflict is connected with how media coverage is framed. In each of the three time periods of this study, the most prevalent frames were ones that included conflicting ideas. A corollary conclusion is that lack of conflict leads to very low frame predominance.

This is consistent with the impression educators have of education coverage, which they believe dwells on conflicts and failures (Berliner and Biddle 1998).
i. 1975: City and County Merger

In 1975, at the time of the city-county merger, the three most employed media frames were Legality (26 percent of the total), Value (27), and School Structure (28). At this time, there were three main areas of conflict.

NAACP complaints that staked their claims of discrimination on the racial imbalance in school assignments—one lingering in Raleigh City Schools from the early 1970s and a fresh, 1975 one—contributed heavily to the volume of merger news in 1975. Court cases, which are an explicit type of conflict, in addition to the enduring issue of white flight and its legal ramifications, made the Legality frame a highly represented and conflict-ridden one.

The second highly represented frame is Value, which encompasses coverage of the debate over whether there is inherent value in aiming for diversity in schools. Implicit in the definition of this frame is disagreement about the value of diversity; as such, any mention of the Value frame is an example of agreement or disagreement, hallmarks of a conflict. In this period, school board members and Wake County citizens shared their opinions on the issue extensively, which is why the Value frame, in which conflict is embedded, was so highly represented.

Lastly, the School Structure frame was used the most in this period because of disagreement, both before and after it became apparent a merger would happen, about how the merged school system would be structured. There were wide-ranging disagreements about everything from new school construction to school reassignments, busing rules to school board elections processes. The major issue during this period of change to the diversity policy was structural in nature. As a result, there was much deliberation about how to set up the new school system, which led to a higher representation of the School Structure frame.
ii. 1999-2000: Shift from Racial to Socioeconomic Diversity

In the middle time period in this study, two media frames were most used in covering the shift from race-based to socioeconomic-based diversity in Wake schools: Human Impact (29 percent of the total) and Value (33). This time period differs from the first and third in that changes to the diversity policy during these nine months were less drastic and more nuanced. Ultimately, the county remained committed to institutionalized diversity. What changed was the process by which diversity was achieved—and this procedure modification led to conflict in two major areas.

The Human Impact frame, which describes coverage that delves into personal results of the diversity policy, was only dominant during this period, not in the first or third periods. The general public waffled on the value of diversity in schools (see below), but the school board and top district administrators, including Superintendent Jim Surratt, kept diversity a top priority. As a result, the main issue of contention became not whether to change the diversity policy, but how. In ultimately switching from a race-based to socioeconomic-based policy, the district made a commitment to the concept of diversity—but then had to re-arrange school assignments to achieve it. Parents and students were either angry about being moved to another area or about having other Wake County residents moved to their area. The outrage took many forms: it became about race, class, athletics, commutes, friend groups, and community unity. The most visible—and personal—fights were parental appeals to the school board, where they asked for exemption for their children from impending changes. Therefore, this time period in particular, by virtue of procedural changes to the diversity policy, saw high representation of the Human Impact frame in news coverage.
Though school board members and district administrators were almost exclusively in favor of committing to diversity, a sizeable group of regular citizens was not. Some blacks had become fed up with the low performance of black students in school and on tests. As a result, there was a backlash from black Wake County residents who wanted to return to all-black school environments (like the neighborhood schools of the pre-merger era or all-black charter schools), seeing limited value in racial diversity. To counter these and other attacks on diversity efforts, school board members and ordinary citizens alike continued to extol the value of having diversity in schools. Despite there being no eventual change to the district’s diversity priorities, there did exist considerable conflict over how valuable diversity really was. This debate over the value of diversity was reflected in the substantial coverage in this time period.

iii. 2009-2010: Deletion of Diversity Policy in Favor of Local Schools

The School Structure and Value frames led, by a considerable margin, news coverage of diversity in schools in the most recent time period. Articles in the former frame represented 26 percent of total news coverage and articles in the latter 55. Together, articles bearing these two frames accounted for more than three in four pieces.

Considerable changes to the district’s diversity policy—a move back to neighborhood schools and non-diversity-based school assignments—had resulting structural effects. Just as the merger in 1975 had new structural consequences, the 2010 neighborhood schools mandate necessitated a new master plan for the large system. There was intense conflict about what would happen to the district’s magnet and International Baccalaureate schools, which were originally conceived to diversify inner city schools and advanced classrooms. Additionally, debate abounded over how to hatch the new neighborhood schools. When it came to that issue, there was inherent conflict between assigning all students to the nearest school and ensuring continuity
in year-over-year school assignments, and there was wide-ranging opinion over how far the
district should move in each direction. Contrasting conceptual visions of the structure of the new
system led to relatively high rates of coverage.

By far, the highest represented frame in this time period was Value, because many people
and groups disagreed strongly over how valuable diversity in schools was. Republicans and
Democrats abhorred and adored, respectively, the district’s long-standing commitment to
diversity over most else. The political nature of the fight, and the associated involvement by
politicians, political interest groups, and financial backers, was a main driver of conflict over the
basic issue of the value of diversity. It seemed that everyone—from former and current North
Carolina governors to Wake County commissioners to public school educators—wanted, and
received, attention for their side of the issue. But there was also large-scale conflict among non-
political players during this time period. A powerful local news executive zeroed in on what he
considered the value of diversity. The NAACP led marches, sit-ins, and vigils in support of
maintaining diversity. Local churches approached the issue from yet another angle. The News &
Observer’s editorial board, always a staunch supporter of the diversity policy, also reiterated its
support for maintaining diversity in schools, often by harshly rebuking those with different
opinions. The Value frame occupied over half the news coverage in this time period because
there were so many area residents and groups advocating their side in the multifaceted debate
over the value of diversity.

iv. The Missing Budget Frame

Of the five news frames, only the Budget frame never appears in the most-used category
for a time period. The lack of coverage of the costs of diversity, whether they represent positive
or negative figures, directly reflects the lack of conflict over the economics of diversity. There could be several reasons for this dearth of debate.

First, calculating or predicting costs is difficult, especially given the multitude of effects the diversity policy may have; economic impacts of a diversity policy might affect construction costs, the tax base, or the ability of an area to attract businesses, among others. There may have simply not been a sustained effort to quantify the costs of diversity because of the complexity of the situation. Alternately, efforts to address this aspect of the issue may not have been successful in calculating the monetary costs or benefits.

Second, it may be considered taboo to attach a dollar amount to the value or associated costs of ensuring diversity in schools. In general, people shy away from participating in sensitive debates where the “racist” label is easily assigned, especially when there are many other ways to address diversity policies that do not so explicitly pinpoint their potential monetary burdens or benefits.

Just as a high level of conflict on a facet of the diversity issue tended to correspond to high representation of associated frames, low levels of conflict tended to correlate with low representation of related frames—in this study, the Budget frame across all time periods, and various single-period frames, too.⁷⁴

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⁷⁴ In the months after the August 18, 2010 end date in this study, the Great Schools in Wake Coalition has made the cost issue one of its major arguments. A prominent message on its website, accessed December 7, 2010, reads, “What the Wake School Board is NOT Telling You: New Assignment Zones = More Busing + More Reassignment + More $$$ It DOESN’T ADD UP. We’ll tell you why.” Its October 6, 2010 report, Calculating the Costs & Consequences, argues, “There are great costs associated with the paradigm change that the WCPSS board majority is proposing for Wake County.”
v. Implications of Media Frame Alignment with Conflict

The fact that more conflict around an angle of the diversity policy meant more coverage in that associated frame is only an observation. This conflict-framing connection has several implications for society at large, some of which are positive and some that are negative.

Most importantly, the News & Observer in these time periods tended to carry content that reflected what the local residents found most important when it came to the issue of diversity in schools—assuming that people argue over what they care about. It is vital to the public that a newspaper that purports to reflect the concerns in an area points its coverage to that area’s chosen issues of import. This tendency to cover conflict ensures readers are well-informed about different sides of an issue, an important part of making decisions on a personal and policy level.

A second advantage to covering conflict is that it generally attracts and retains attention of readers. It is not a small task, especially in 2010, to run a financially healthy newspaper; coverage that is framed according to where conflict exists can help sell more newspapers. Newspapers are vital engines of information—and thus social debate and change—and it would be a mistake to not recognize the importance of their continued existence.

However, coverage that so closely hews to areas of conflict marginalizes aspects of an issue that are boring or complex, but also important. Areas of conflict, while reflective of many people’s priorities, do not necessarily align with effective public policy or the common good. What may have been very instructive in each time period was robust discussion of the economic costs and benefits of diversity to Wake County, but the complexity of the issue, and associated high comprehension barrier, helped keep coverage with the Budget frame at a very low level and off the front page. Areas of greatest conflict often do not correspond to optimal areas of
discussion from a policy standpoint. Greater fixation on conflict may lead decision-makers to preoccupy themselves with the short-term flashpoints at the peril of the long-term public interest.

Second, areas of conflict are often selected by those with the most money or influence in an area. In other words, typically, well-organized or well-financed groups and individuals get to set the agenda, while silent, scattered, or less wealthy groups and individuals try in vain to gain as much attention. Instead of being what everyone considers the most important issues, areas of conflict may be driven by certain citizens—in this case, school board members, district administrators, powerful lawyers, and well-organized interest groups.

Third, focusing on the opposing, conflicting sides on the diversity policy may have had the effect of silencing those interested in compromise or a third option. Arguments tended to reflect the most ardent supporters and the most harsh critics; compromise is not conflict, by and large, and does not attract the attention that affects media framing.

Fourth, the sharp drop-off of total coverage in the third portion of each time period, a reflection of the general lack of conflict after major decisions had been made, has potential negative effects. The aftermath of major policy decisions, when finer details are established and metrics for measuring success are formulated, is an important part of policy-making and decision-making processes. The time following each major policy decision is more tied to the long-term scope, and its lower levels of conflict (with the exception of the protest and continued discussion about school assignment zones in the third term) lead to lower coverage and awareness of important topics.

vi. Limitations

Surely, conflict had an effect on which frames were used in the News & Observer’s coverage during these three time periods. There may be other reasons for their framing, though.
The staff of the newspaper may have found a certain side, or a certain frame, more important or compelling, which may have led to increased coverage using certain frames. Other outside factors, not solely conflict, may have affected framing of diversity, including the extent of state and national attention to the issue or reports from other news outlets.

**B. The Correlation Between Fundamental Change and Higher Opinion Representation**

In the two periods that saw fundamental changes to the diversity policy—1975 and 2009-2010—columns and editorials represented more of the total news coverage than when changes to the diversity policy were more technical. This correlation describes how opinion writers decide their topics and supports the notion that they are perceptive, not whimsical, cultural observers and commentators.

**i. Fundamental Change and the Associated Increase in Opinion Content**

In 1975, the county and city schools merged to one. In 2010, the diversity policy adopted as a result of that merger was scrapped. Both periods are associated with fundamental changes to the diversity policy. In the first period, columns and editorials represented 27% of the total news content. In 2009-2010, opinion content represented 40% of the total. In 1999-2000, it was just 20%.

The space the newspaper has devoted to all opinion content has been relatively similar across all time periods. The higher ratio of opinion to news content in the first and third periods is likely related to increased attention of opinion writers on the issue of diversity in schools, which in both periods underwent a large-scale overhaul. Fundamental systematic change correlates with higher rates of opinion content.
ii. Implications of the Link Between Fundamental Change and Opinion Content

The observed correlation between fundamental change and higher opinion-to-news ratios is an indication that opinion writers during these time periods selected topics based on the relative historical significance of each policy change. The ratio of opinion-to-news content was lowest in the second period, when the act of switching from one method of maintaining diversity to another was, on a historical plane, not as monumental as the merger or disbanding of the policy altogether. The purpose of the opinion section is to showcase a selection of viewpoints that reflects the important issues of the time and add reasoned debate to the general discourse. The data suggest writers during the three time periods had an accurate understanding of the relative significance of the changes to the diversity policy and were appropriately selective in writing about the issue.

iii. Limitations

This analysis assumes the reason for the changing ratios of opinion-to-news content is changes in the opinion section. This is not an unreasonable assumption, because though in absolute terms education news coverage increased over the three time periods, news content would probably only have covered the proportional amount of news occurring during that time period. Therefore, it is more likely that it is the opinion coverage that experiences either shrinkage or growth during these time periods.

C. The Emphasis of the Value Frame in Opinion Content

Columns and editorials in all three time periods tended to exhibit the Value frame, an indication that opinion writers found the value (or lack thereof) of diversity to be the most effective persuasive tool in making their point.

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75 See Tables 1, 2, and 3.
i. The Prevalence of the Value Frame in the Opinion Section

In 1975, the columns and editorials, in aggregate, used the Value frame in 32 percent of coverage. (Another prominent frame in this time period, with 37 percent, was School Structure.) In 1999-2000, opinion pieces addressed the value of diversity 59 percent of the time. In 2009-2010, it was 71 percent. In each time period, Value-framed coverage was a higher percentage of opinion pieces than it was news pieces.

ii. Implications of the Connection Between Opinion Pieces and Value Frame

The goal of opinion content is to persuade a stakeholder of something. It is significant that much of the opinion content addressed the issue of diversity in schools in terms of its educational value. A tendency to discuss the merits of the diversity policy itself is a major victory for reason and debate.

Discussion of the monetary effects of diversity (the Budget frame), the legal reasons for or against diversity (Legality), its effect on the structure of the Wake school system (School Structure), or its isolated effects on certain individuals (Human Impact) is important. Each of the four frames adds a valuable historical perspective to the policy change. All, however, address causes or effects of diversity in schools, not the value of diversity itself.

The Value frame—which encompasses discussion about the reasons for or against having a policy designed to maintain a level of diversity beyond what would naturally occur—is the one that strikes at the heart of the issue: Is the diversity policy good or bad for the educational experience of students? There is latitude on the topic. Value coverage can include arguments about test results, social skills, international competition, psychology of motivation, school safety, and extracurricular activities. The point is that Value coverage gets at the core issue of
diversity in schools; the other four frames address factors that produce or interact with the policy, but not the policy itself.

Given the trend in total coverage to cover conflict, it is necessary to note that the newspaper’s editorial board and columnists at least are often covering the main, essential conflict at the heart of the diversity issue. This focus on the main issue is a solid way to ensure a valid public forum and is aligned with the public interest.

**iii. Limitations**

In my analysis, I did not record the positions—pro-or anti-diversity policy—the opinion content espoused. There appear to be more proponents than opponents of the diversity policy in columns. All editorials support diversity. A focus on the main issue is laudable, but severely lopsided focus, while still valuable, may not represent a totally effective popular debate. Also, the press is only one, albeit valuable, part of the public debate on issues like Wake County’s public school diversity policy. The media’s influence on policy, though substantial and evident, should not be construed as total.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A: Breakdown of Education Topics Covered

The following table is from the Brookings report that found that education coverage comprised 1.4 percent of national news coverage in 2009. The table itself breaks down that 1.4 percent of education coverage further into specific topics in the education field.

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<th>Education topic across all levels</th>
<th>Percent of stories</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>politics in education</td>
<td>7.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>H1N1 flu or health</td>
<td>7.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>economic stimulus package</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<tr>
<td>curricular reform</td>
<td>3.4</td>
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<td>school testing or testing results</td>
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<td>Diversity/minorities in schools</td>
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<td>clerical error/vacation days</td>
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Number of Stories 551


Page 8.
APPENDIX B: Racial Make-up of Schools

These are the graphs from which the following sentence is derived: “In 1989, though, schools were still largely composed of mainly minorities or whites. One-third of black students attend schools that are 95 percent or more non-white, and about half of white students attend schools with less than 10 percent non-white representation.”


APPENDIX C: 1975 Microfilm Index Terms

In reviewing each of the thousands of terms in the 1975 News & Observer microfilm index, six were found to contain relevant material to a study on the diversity policy or merger in Wake County. They are listed first, under the heading “Used.” Listed next under the heading “Not Used” are index terms that, at first glance, had a chance of relating to the study but which were found to be insufficient or unneeded. Note that only news items from the year 1975 were under consideration, though the index includes the year 1976, too.

**Used**

*(page number(s), index term)*

- 526, Raleigh – Education – Integration and separation
- 527-8, Raleigh – Education, Board of
- 564-6, Raleigh – Schools
- 582, Raleigh – Wake Interim Board of Education
- 694-7, Wake County – Education, Board of
- 713-4, Wake County – Schools

**Not Used**

*(page number(s), index term: reason)*

- 66, Bus Drivers: nothing to do with Wake or Raleigh schools
- 102, Children: nothing education-related
- 108, Civil rights: nothing education-related
- 138-9, Discrimination in education: nothing about Wake or Raleigh schools
- 159, Education: nothing about Wake or Raleigh schools
- 160, Education – Curricula: nothing about Wake or Raleigh schools
- 160, Education – Finance: nothing about Wake or Raleigh schools
- 160-1, Education – Integration and Segregation: nothing about Wake or Raleigh schools
- 162-3, Educational research: nothing about Wake or Raleigh schools
- 163, Educational tests and measurements: nothing about Wake or Raleigh schools
- 218, High schools: nothing about Wake or Raleigh schools
- 241-2, Kindergartens: nothing about Wake or Raleigh schools
- 269, Minorities: nothing about Wake or Raleigh schools
- 279, National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression: nothing about Wake or Raleigh schools
279: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People: nothing not already included in six terms above

280, Negroes: nothing about Wake or Raleigh schools

280, Negroes – Civil Rights: nothing about Wake or Raleigh schools

310-2, N.C. – Education, State Board of: nothing not already included in six terms above

389-92, N.C. – Public Instruction, Department of: nothing about diversity in Wake or Raleigh schools

431, North Carolina Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression: nothing about Wake or Raleigh schools

487, Private schools: nothing about Wake or Raleigh schools

493-4, Race discrimination: nothing about Wake or Raleigh schools

503-4, Raleigh – buses: nothing about Wake or Raleigh schools

521-2, Raleigh – civil rights: nothing about Wake or Raleigh schools

524, Raleigh – Discrimination in education: nothing not already included in six terms above

610, School buses: nothing about Wake or Raleigh schools

612, School management and organization: nothing not already included in six terms above

613-4, Schools: nothing not already included in six terms above

637, Students: nothing about Wake or Raleigh schools

685, Wake County – Children: nothing about Wake or Raleigh schools

693, Wake County – Discrimination in education: nothing not already included in six terms above
APPENDIX D: Examples of Each Media Frame in this Study

What follows are five articles from either the second or third period that are illustrative of each of the five frames used in this study. All articles, except for the Value example, are reprinted in full. The Value example had unrelated, secondary information that was deleted.

VALUE
WRAL owner backing diversity

Friday, February 26, 2010
By Thomas Goldsmith and T. Keung Hui

Cranking an already wrenching debate a few notches higher, Capitol Broadcasting, which owns WRAL, is pushing the value of diversity in Wake schools with a campaign of editorial messages airing on the television station.

"Diversity matters, and it begins in our schools," is the concluding message of the new 30-second spots on the area's most-watched news station. The spots come as members of a new majority on the county school board work to fulfill their campaign promises to ax Wake County's current diversity policy, which attempts to balance the number of students at each school based on economic backgrounds.

The spots drew an angry response from a key school board member who is part of the majority. But Capitol Broadcasting CEO Jim Goodmon said Thursday that they are not meant as a direct endorsement of the current policy but as a statement in favor of the principle of diversity.

"The company believes that diversity is a core community value, and we are just suggesting everybody think about it," said Goodmon, a booster of public schools as vital to the area's economic growth. "It doesn't say this policy's good or bad or do this or do that."

However, Goodmon said, diversity should be a key part of whatever student assignment policy the board adopts. The spot shows a succession of teenage students talking about the value to their educational experience of attending school with people from different ethnic and financial backgrounds. Another of the spots will show teachers talking about the same subject, Goodmon said.

"For me, diversity is bringing new ideas," says a young woman identified as Meera, a high school senior.

John Tedesco, a member of the school board majority, lashed out at Goodmon's move, calling it an attempt to influence the policy debate.

"He's wasting his money that could have been used to help people," Tedesco said. "He could have given it to the Rescue Mission or some other useful cause.

"Any company that is dividing the community would not be one that I'd choose to spend my advertising dollars with."

But Tedesco said he wasn't specifically calling for a boycott of Capitol Broadcasting's television and radio stations.

Goodmon noted that he has spoken out for years about the importance of a strong, diverse school system to the local economy. He also pointed out that Capitol Broadcasting was among the founders of the Wake Education Partnership, a nonprofit education advocacy group whose relations with the new board majority have been strained.

The day before last fall's school board elections, Goodmon spoke at a rally of community leaders who endorsed the schools' diversity policy. Goodmon also donated $750 last fall to losing school board candidates who backed the diversity policy.

Goodmon is also chairman of the board of the A.J. Fletcher Foundation, which is named for his grandfather.

BUDGET

As schools shift, will bus costs fall?

Monday, March 22, 2010
By Thomas Goldsmith

RALEIGH — Before Chris Malone won election to the Wake County school board last fall, he predicted that the system could save as much as $20 million annually by replacing diversity-related busing with a community-schools assignment system.

Last week, Malone's prediction was far less specific. He said only that the savings from cutting busing based on diversity would be "substantial," the same description used by John Hood, president of the John Locke Foundation, the Raleigh-based conservative think tank.

The question of future busing costs holds few certainties, but one is that Wake's financially stressed system will continue to transport...
tens of thousands of students by bus to get them to school. Another is that any savings in the state's $45 million portion of the schools' transportation costs of about $56 million would revert to the state.

Whether eliminating diversity as a factor will mean more money for the school system is hard to tease out, given the size and complexity of Wake's school bus operations and the factors other than diversity that transportation planners already deal with, from busing kids to magnet schools to relieving overcrowding caused by growth.

As Wake moves to community-based student assignments, many questions remain: Will magnet schools survive and, if so, how will students get to them? How much growth is coming, and how will it be met under a community-schools model? How much busing will be needed to get students to the next-closest school if their "neighborhood school" is already at capacity?

"I believe there will be savings; what the number is, I can't tell you," Malone said last week. "We'll determine that during the planning process."

On Tuesday, the nine-member board will vote for the second time on a framework for ending the system's decades-old practice of busing some students to keep individual school populations in racial or socioeconomic balance.

"For 30-something years, we have meant a certain thing by 'busing' - busing for a purpose other than getting kids to schools," said Hood, with the John Locke Foundation. "The anger has to do with being forced to do it."

The new plan specifies community-based student assignments, but it offers little detail about what effect the change will have on busing, other than to call for "effective and efficient" use of resources.

But a look at busing costs in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg County schools, North Carolina's second-largest district behind Wake, shows that the cost of busing has continued to rise since the Charlotte system abandoned race-based assignment in 2002.

Charlotte's school system, with a higher percentage of low-income students, now pays about the same amount for busing as Wake even though the Charlotte system has fewer students.

$280K or $18 million?

The idea that ending busing for diversity will free up money that could be used for classroom instruction emerged often during last fall's heated school-board elections.

Eric Blau, a backer of the new majority and a member of the Wake Schools Community Alliance steering committee, was one of those who estimated savings for the schools at as much as $18 million, a figure he stands by.

"I think we should spend the money on actually educating kids instead of busing them throughout the county," Blau said.

Disagreements over what "diversity-based" busing really means tends to cloud the discourse about possible effects on funding if it's discontinued.

Wake schools administration staff say "busing for diversity" only amounts to half of one percent of all busing. Eliminating it would save only $280,000 annually, Wake schools staff told board members last year.

But that definition - students sent to a remote school chiefly to help diversity numbers - excludes the transportation of the roughly 10,000 magnet-school students who are bused from all over Wake County to create balance at inner-city schools. It also leaves out students who are bused to a non-neighborhood school to meet several goals, which could include diversity, school capacity or other factors.

"There are so many variables because of where growth is and where schools are," said Derek Graham, transportation section chief at the state Department of Public Instruction. "I'm not sure that it's possible for every child to attend the school that's closest to his or her home, because of where the schools are.

"To really quantify the savings, you have to develop the transportation plan and see where you are."

School district transportation planners will be asked to design system changes, many of which won't occur until the 2011-2012 school year, during the next nine to 15 months.

"I don't buy the argument that they are going to save a significant amount of money," said Tim Simmons, communications director of the Wake Education Partnership, a business-backed advocacy group that has supported Wake's existing diversity plan.

"We already know where the kids live and where the schools are located. There's a mismatch because of the way the county has grown up and where land is available."

Few would stop riding

Bob Snidemiller - Wake's senior director of transportation, operations and finance - wouldn't even hazard a guess as to whether the county can save money by cutting diversity-related busing. He's committed to following the board's parameters and trying to maintain the busing system's 100 percent efficiency rating with the state.

More than 70,000 Wake students ride buses daily and most of them will continue to do so, even if on shorter routes. Theoretically, creation of community assignment zones could mean more students live within the 1.5-mile area around a school in which families have to fend for themselves if there's a walkable route.

"In general, you are going to lose state funding if you are transporting fewer students - if they bike, walk, carpool," Snidemiller said.

Kristen Stocking, a Holly Springs parent and co-founder of the activist group Wake Schools Community Alliance, said those who campaigned for the eventual majority in last year's school board elections "threw out some figures" on bus savings but didn't view them as crucial to the debate.

"The overarching concern was with fiscal responsibility in general," she said.
Turned out, turned away

Saturday, May 6, 2000

By T. Keung Hui

RALEIGH -- The lawns aren't lush and the buildings need fresh paint, but the families at the Washington Terrace Apartments are getting by.

Many of the children go to the Boys and Girls Club on Raleigh Boulevard after school so they don't have to return to empty homes. Their parents, often single mothers, work one and two jobs. Many of the children are having problems keeping up in school, but some are overcoming the obstacles.

The hardest obstacle for these children of Raleigh's working poor may be finding a public school that will accept them without protest.

After the school board shifted 68 of the children from Brentwood to Joyner, another elementary school, Brentwood neighborhood leaders listed the children's departure as one reason to celebrate at a community barbecue today. Meanwhile, at Joyner, PTA leaders have circulated a letter threatening to sue if the kids are sent there.

"It's a shame, a damn shame - the kids don't have anywhere to go," said Monica Malone, 31, a receptionist whose son is being transferred to Joyner. "Joyner doesn't want them. Brentwood doesn't want them."

The students were reassigned as part of an effort to assure diversity throughout Wake County public schools. Concerned about legal challenges to school assignments based on race, the school board this year began to diversify schools according to family income and student performance.

The new focus requires a massive reshuffling of students, of which the Washington Terrace children are among the first. If their experience is any indication, the change will not come easily.

School board members insist the new focus, and the resulting reshuffling, will ultimately benefit schools.

"We're not trying to make Brentwood happy," said school board member Rosa Gill, whose district includes both Brentwood and Southeast Raleigh. "We're not trying to make Joyner sad. We're not trying to destroy the character of our students."

"We're hoping that because of our limited resources we're giving kids the opportunity to have the best education possible," Gill added.

For now, the policy has produced mostly pain for the children and parents at Washington Terrace.

Just getting by

Although race is no longer a factor in transfers, all but one of the students from Washington Terrace is a member of a minority group.

The community that has emerged around the apartment complex isn't the prettiest in the Capital, but the rents, starting at $460 a month, are reasonable. To live there, one must earn at least $11,040 in annual income, but no more than $37,380 for a family of four.

Paying the bills and finding time to be actively involved at their children's schools isn't easy for the parents.

"We're single parents who work," said Berdenia Carter, 42, who works two jobs - as a receptionist and a waitress - to take care of her own 7-year-old daughter, Dyamon, and to help care for her three granddaughters.

"We're not like MacGregor Downs [an upscale housing development in Cary] where they have time to help out at school."

The children from Washington Terrace have been bused to Brentwood since the 1980s.

Although many Brentwood residents have long wanted the children from Washington Terrace to go elsewhere, they have grown comfortable there.

"I don't want to go to Joyner," Dyamon said. "I don't know anybody there. I have more friends at Brentwood."

But in January the school board adopted a policy of trying to ensure that each school has no more than 40 percent of its students receiving free or reduced-price lunches and no more than 25 percent scoring below grade level on state reading tests. The theory is that students will do better when there aren't large concentrations of low performers. In March, Washington Terrace parents learned their kids would go to Joyner this fall.

Transferring the Washington Terrace pupils - 81 percent of whom are receiving subsidized lunches and 52 percent of whom test below grade level - would make Brentwood comply with the new policy.

Only three years ago, Brentwood received a Blue Ribbon Award for educational excellence from the U.S. Department of Education.

But in the past few years, many families in the attendance node for Brentwood - 47 percent of the elementary-age children have decided not to attend the school, according to Bruce Spader, president of the Brentwood Neighborhood Association. He said those parents felt instruction was suffering because teachers are too busy helping struggling students.

The neighborhood association felt "good about" the student transfers, Spader said. "We felt like not only our neighborhood school would be better, but the kids that will be transferred out would be moving into a better situation."

Spader said the association will celebrate the reassignment victory, along with other neighborhood accomplishments over the past year such as the closing of nearby Yesterdays nightclub, during today's Brentwood Community Day.

Change of plans

The Washington Terrace children were initially going to be transferred to Olds, an elementary magnet school. But its principal, Mary Anne Wheeler, said Olds wouldn't have the space for the new children when they return to their campus in 2001 once renovations have been completed.

Joyner was then chosen because it is also a high-performing magnet school, where 82 percent of the pupils were at or above grade level last year.

But hopes for a smooth transfer were
lessened after Joyner's co-PTA presidents sent a letter last month to all parents, distributed through the school, urging them to oppose the reassignments. The dissenters argued that the crowded school, now at 120 percent of capacity, can't handle more students and that Joyner doesn't have the services, such as a Title I Basic Skills program, that the new children will need.

But what angered Washington Terrace parents - and led to accusations of racism - was the letter's claim that the transfers could have "the potential for reduction of property values in this neighborhood."

The letter also knocks the new diversity policy as a "politically correct" alternative to using race. A lawsuit is threatened if the transfers aren't rescinded.

"This was so cruel and awful, I don't want him [son] to go there," said Doretha Williams, 47, a hotel housekeeper whose son is a kindergartner at Brentwood.

Parents said the letter has also negatively affected their children. One mother said her son told her that he would run away from home before going to Joyner.

"I wouldn't want to go to that school, because the principal might be talking about us," said Jasmin Anderson, 10, a fourth-grader.

Jasmin's exasperated grandmother, Berdenia Carter, said that if no one wants the Washington Terrace students, they should be allowed to go to a school in their neighborhood, such as Conn or Powell elementary schools.

"We need to be at our own schools for our young Afro-Americans," she said.

While Joyner officials have said the letter wasn't officially from the PTA, Carter said it doesn't matter. "It shouldn't have been sent in the first place," Carter said. "There are probably more that feel that way and just didn't want to say it."

Holly West, Joyner's co-PTA president, previously has said she had support from the community for the letter. West and Barrie Shavlik, the other PTA leader, did not return calls this week.

A recent Gallup poll of Wake County residents suggests that many agree with Joyner's PTA leaders. About 35.5 percent of respondents said they support limiting the number of low-performing students, while about 24.5 percent favored limiting the number of low-income students.

Two Joyner grandparents sent a letter to West and Shavlik chastising them for their remarks.

"I would suggest that perhaps instead of inflaming people, we reach out and welcome the 70 children and their families and help them, as once again they are transported from their neighborhood," wrote Rosalyn and Samuel Ollison.

The Washington Terrace parents are lobbying the school board to drop the transfers. They met with local NAACP leaders last weekend and want West and Shavlik removed.

School board Chairman Wray Stephens said that the letter has created "an awful situation," but that the board has made its decision on reassignment.

The parents can file individual appeals, but Wake wouldn't have to transport the children if they win the right to stay at Brentwood. Malone, the receptionist whose son is being transferred, said providing transportation isn't an option for many parents because they don't have cars.

Joyner's principal, Kathleen Marynak, who is meeting Thursday with Washington Terrace parents, has been trying to assuage their concerns.

"They will be treated fairly," Marynak said. "They will be loved like every other child who goes to Joyner."

Stephens hopes future reassignments will not produce so much opposition. Residents, he said, need to think of their neighborhood as the entire county as the board considers making difficult reassignment choices next year to carry out the diversity policy throughout the system.

"We have to do things together," Stephens said. "If we fragment, there are winners and losers. We don't want that."

### SCHOOL STRUCTURE

**'Controlled choice' sets script for school zones**

Wednesday, July 28, 2010

By T. Keung Hui and Thomas Goldsmith

RALEIGH – Wake County parents will likely need to start doing homework to choose their children's schools, instead of having the decision made for them on the basis of their address.

Members of a key school board committee Tuesday praised an approach that would drop the longstanding idea of assigning neighborhoods to a specific school. Instead, the county would be divided into a number of new attendance zones, with parents choosing among several schools and the system making final decisions based on parental requests.

Although no formal vote was taken Tuesday, members of the board's student assignment committee told administrators to keep working on four zone maps that were presented.

"You can't have every child going to their neighborhood school or else you'd have schools over capacity and schools under capacity," said John Tedesco, chairman of the committee. "But we can provide them four or five logical choices they can choose from."

Tedesco said that this new-to-Wake "controlled choice" model would reduce the likelihood that students would be repeatedly reassigned to different schools. Massachusetts education consultant Michael Alves, a controlled choice proponent, pitched the idea to the committee members Tuesday.

Under the plan, the school system could better control growth and crowding in the zones, Tedesco said. He said Wake would likely allow students to continue at the
schools they currently attend. Based on their address, students now are assigned to a specific school. Although some apply for magnet schools or year-round schools, most attend their assigned schools.

But a school board majority elected in fall campaigned on changing the way students are assigned. Those board members promised to end the busing-for-diversity policy in favor of sending students to schools in their community.

The elimination of Wake's policy of trying to balance the percentages of low-income students at schools has split the school board and the community. But both sides in the fight are interested in how controlled choice could be adopted.

"I look forward to the continued discussion about controlled choice," Kevin Hill, a member of the board's minority, said after the meeting.

There would be magnets

In addition to selecting from schools within a student's zone, families would be able to apply to countywide magnet schools, Tedesco said.

A computer program would place students at schools within their zones on the basis of what parents request, Tedesco said. He said the program would consider factors such as proximity to a school and whether students have siblings there.

Tedesco said it would be impossible to grant everyone's first choice because the school system also has to consider factors such as crowding.

Allison Backhouse, a supporter of the majority, said the plan being considered is what parents wanted, because it will provide choices and promote stability. She said parents understand that they can't all go to the closest school.

"I don't think everybody thought that neighborhood meant going to school in your backyard," she said.

The four models presented Tuesday include options that would divide the county into:

- Fifteen zones based on current school assignment areas. It includes the middle schools that feed into those high schools and the elementary schools that feed into those middle schools.

Setting boundaries

Administrators said the models are based on minimizing reassignment, providing community schools and eliminating involuntary long-distance assignment of students.

Tedesco said the committee will narrow the list of models and adjust the one they recommend to the school board. He is hoping to have community meetings this fall about zone boundaries.

With haste, please

Details of how the new plan would work cannot come soon enough for John Wood, a real estate agent in Cary. He said agents aren't able to tell newcomers now where their children will be going to school.

"The concern is right now we don't have any idea how a new plan would work," Wood said.

Wake needs new ways to diversify schools, leaders say

Friday, December 10, 1999

By T. Keung Hui and Todd Silberman

RALEIGH -- Wake school leaders warned Thursday that racial segregation will return and educational quality will deteriorate unless they can find new strategies, defensible in the courts, to replace race-based pupil assignments.

Recent court rulings, including one that ended race-based assignments in Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools, mean that Wake can no longer attempt to balance schools' racial enrollments, Wake Schools Superintendent Jim Surratt said in a meeting with News & Observer reporters and editors. He said Wake will follow other school systems that are returning to de facto segregation unless it finds another basis for sorting students.

Perhaps, he said, there might be some way to maintain school diversity by assigning students according to socioeconomic status or academic performance.

"Wake did a better job of integrating schools than any large system than I know of," Surratt said. "But if you started dismantling that, the consequences could be just as devastating as other communities that have resegregated."

Since the early 1980s, Wake school leaders have strived for racial diversity by creating magnet schools to lure white students to facilities inside the Raleigh Beltline. School leaders also have used race as a factor in assigning other students as part of a goal to keep each school's minority percentage between 15 percent and 45 percent.

Michael Crowell, an attorney for the Wake school board, said recent federal court decisions are putting pressure on school systems to adjust their assignment practices.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg officials are developing a new system of neighborhood schools - including an inner-city core of schools where low-income pupils would be concentrated - in compliance with an order issued in September. The Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals has ruled against the use of racial criteria in school assignments in Arlington, Va., and Montgomery County, Md.

Consequently, Surratt and Wake school board Chairman Wray Stephens said Thursday that Wake no longer uses race as a factor in changing students' school assignments. A reassignment plan to be presented to the school board Jan. 10 will include:

- Sixteen zones based on high school assignment areas. It includes the middle schools that feed into those high schools and the elementary schools that feed into those middle schools.

LEGALITY

Michael Crowell, an attorney for the Wake school board, said recent federal court decisions are putting pressure on school systems to adjust their assignment practices.

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Consequently, Surratt and Wake school board Chairman Wray Stephens said Thursday that Wake no longer uses race as a factor in changing students' school assignments. A reassignment plan to be presented to the school board Jan. 10 will
move students solely to fill new schools, he said.

Surratt said the new assignment plan is a transitional one. He still hopes to have the school board adopt legally defensible ways to ensure balanced schools.

He again brought up an idea he raised during a recent board retreat: to limit the number of students at each school who are scoring below grade level on the state's end-of-grade exams. While the concept may not necessarily keep the schools diverse, he said, it could help ensure that every school is academically sound.

"In general, any school that has a disproportionately high percentage of low-performing students will create a cancer that will affect the entire community - not only in the education of its children but in its economic health as well," Surratt said.

Associate Superintendent Ray Massey said a formal proposal could be presented to the board next year.

Tom Oxholm, newly elected to the school board from North Raleigh, said the system should take steps to ensure that schools not divide along lines of economics or student performance.

"It would sure be great not to have to bus students more than necessary and still end up with desegregated schools and still manage to have a good mix of low-performing and high-performing students," Oxholm said. "My hope is that we could find an assignment plan that could satisfy the school system's goal and parents."
APPENDIX E: Trigger Words

To place news items into the five frames, the following trigger words were cross-referenced with the news item. Though inclusion of one or more trigger words in an item did not necessarily mean the item was assigned to the corresponding frame, it provided valuable direction during the frame-assignment process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Budget</th>
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<td>Stability</td>
<td>Poorest</td>
<td>Lawsuit</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Busing</td>
<td>Moving</td>
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<td>Rights</td>
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<td>Racial unrest</td>
<td>Underprivileged</td>
<td>Suit/sue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Construction</td>
<td>Uncertainty</td>
<td>Equitable</td>
<td>Discrimination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>The/my child(ren)</td>
<td>Unequal</td>
<td>Segregation</td>
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<td>School board</td>
<td>Pawns</td>
<td>(No) benefit(s)</td>
<td>Racial balance</td>
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<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>Hardship</td>
<td>Exclusionary</td>
<td>Racial ratios</td>
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<td>Teacher assignment</td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>Good/bad for community</td>
<td>Court-ordered</td>
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<td>Operations</td>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Minorities suffer</td>
<td>Violate</td>
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<td>Overcrowding</td>
<td>Education for all</td>
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<td>Frustration</td>
<td>Learning together</td>
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<td>Understand each other</td>
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APPENDIX F: Framing on the Front Page

A newspaper is not a democratic entity, where readers get equal access to all its content and choose the order in which to consume it. Rather, a newspaper is more akin to a monarchy, where content is presented to the reader in a way that its editors feel is representative of the important news of the day—the news the editors deem most essential for readers looking to learn about their area. The frames most represented on the front page, where editors invariably place the area’s most newsworthy articles (not editorials or columns), give a nuanced glimpse into the angles of the issue they consider more important than others. It is this glimpse that exposes the newspaper’s most fundamental beliefs about the issue of diversity in schools. The inherent spatial limits force the newspaper’s hand, and it becomes evident which frames it finds most compelling over the wider period of study. Figure A.1 shows the breakdown of frames on the front page for the 1975 time period.

Figure A.1: Media Frames in 1975 Front Page Coverage (Percent)

![Pie chart showing the breakdown of frames in 1975 front page coverage.]

Articles that discussed whether diversity had intrinsic value or not took precedence on the front page, both in terms of absolute representation and in terms of increase from its whole...
newspaper average. (Refer to Figure 1 for comparisons of whole-newspaper-vs.-front-page coverage.) This may indicate the newspaper’s opinion that debate over the merits of diversity, over all other angles, should drive stakeholders’ votes with regard to the merger. It also may reflect the fact that vigorous debate and public conflict tend to appeal to readers the most, a postulation that undermines the journlistic integrity of the placement process, but which also supports a correlary argument that what readers want to read, they also find important. Either way, it is evident that someone—and probably everyone—finds the debate over the value of diversity to be the most compelling angle of the issue of diversity in schools.

Additionally, the relatively overall similar nature of the front page to whole-newspaper composition indicates a general consistency of news value, in that what the newspaper covered as a whole represented, to a close extent, what it tended to show the public was the most important. In other words, reading into the apparent, but still relatively small, differences between whole-newspaper framing and front-page framing is less scientific and more quixotic than it might appear to be in graph form.

Figure A.2 displays the breakdown of front-page coverage of each frame in 1999-2000.
Compared with its whole-newspaper share (see Figure 5), Value-framed articles garner a 10 percent lower appearance on the front page. This may be due to the fact that most people were in agreement on the value of diversity, so the conflict that typically appears in conjunction with the Value frame was missing. Front pages crave conflict because it not only tends to be newsworthy, but readers enjoy reading about it.

Stories with the Budget frame never appear on the front page, probably because stories from that angle are something readers do not find easy to understand or relate to.

The fact that stories with the Legality, Human Impact, and School Structure frames have increased front-page coverage when compared with their whole-newspaper percentage probably is a function of the lack of stories about budgetary aspects of the diversity policy and the redundancy of stories with the Value frame. The three frames only increase their proportions by 4, 4, and 5 percent, respectively, changes that do not lend themselves to robust analysis.

Figure A.3 is able to portray the relative importance of different frames of news coverage in 2009-2010.
It is evident that the School Structure frame eats into the Value frame on the front page to a considerable extent. (See Figure 9 for a breakdown of frames used in the whole newspaper in 2009-2010.) While articles with School Structure frames represent 26 percent of total coverage, they represent 33 percent of front page coverage. The Value frame drops from 55 percent of coverage overall to 39 percent on the front page, a significant disparity. This is probably because there is an oversaturation of debate over the same basic issues. Therefore, articles with the Value theme are left off the front page to make room for more individually compelling articles, like those with the School Structure frame. Articles describing changes to the structure of the school system, which contain more novel information than articles on the value of diversity do, are more likely to have news value to readers. An article on the reassignment plan or magnet schools had fresh information each time that the public likely wanted to see, whereas recapitulations of the same talking points—either touting or dismissing the value of diversity—did not need front-page mentions each time.


