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Public opinion, race, and levels of desegregation in five Southern school districts

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ABSTRACT

Many of the nation's school systems that were once desegregated have resegregated by race and socioeconomic status—some more so than others. We investigate the relationship between public opinion about school diversity and levels of resegregation in five Southern school districts with varying amounts of resegregation: Charlotte, NC; Louisville, KY; Nashville, TN; Raleigh, NC; and Rock Hill, SC. Drawing upon case studies of the five districts and a unique public opinion dataset of over 5000 respondents, we find the relationship between attitudes toward diverse education and levels of desegregation strengthens when we control for respondents' race. In all five locales, we find a strong positive correspondence between Whites' attitudes and actual levels of desegregation. At the same time, we observe a negative relationship between Black respondents' attitudes toward school diversity and desegregation levels. We explore possible reasons for these relationships.

Many of the nation's school systems were desegregated from approximately the mid-1960s to the late-1980s but most once-desegregated districts have since resegregated by race and socioeconomic status. This is an important issue given the growing body of empirical evidence demonstrating desegregation's capacity for narrowing racial/ethnic achievement gaps and improving educational outcomes for all youth (Mickelson and Nkomo, 2012; Bohrnstedt et al., 2015; Frankenberg et al., 2016; Johnson and Nasaryan, 2019; Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006; Reardon, 2016; Reardon and Owens, 2014).[1] Yet, not all formerly desegregated school systems have experienced resegregation. Drawing upon public opinion surveys and case studies of five Southern school districts, we investigate the extent to which local public opinion about school diversity is related to actual levels of school desegregation in Charlotte, NC;

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[1] Because of the voluminous nature of the supporting literature, we only cite some of recent comprehensive studies on this topic. A more complete body of relevant research from the last four decades is catalogued and abstracted in the *K-12 Integration, Desegregation, and Segregation Archive* https://k16diversity.uncc.edu/?sfid=1721&_sft_archive=k-12-diversity.

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Louisville, KY; Nashville, TN; Raleigh, NC; and Rock Hill, SC.[2]

Our study is the first to compare relationships between public opinion and levels of desegregation in five Southern school districts in the twenty-first century. When we rank these five districts by public opinion in support of diversity, we find modest levels of correspondence between levels of support and levels of desegregation. This correspondence does not improve when we control for respondents' income, a characteristic that often correlates with public opinion. However, when we control for respondents' race there is markedly better positive correspondence within each district between the rankings of White levels of support for diversity and the rankings of levels of desegregation. At the same time, there is a strong negative relationship between the rankings of Black respondents' support for diversity and the five districts' desegregation levels.[3]

The relationship between public opinion in these five districts and their levels of desegregation can help us to see how local contexts foster or impede desegregation. This relationship is especially relevant today because of the centrality of voluntary policies for diversity, which have largely replaced court-mandated desegregation. We begin with the theoretical framing of the paper using policy responsiveness theory, followed by a summary of the research on public opinion and school desegregation, and the research questions to which this literature gives rise. We follow this framing with a description of the five upper South districts we have chosen. Following a discussion of our methods and data, we present the results of our comparisons among the five districts. We draw upon several qualitative case studies of each district to clarify the quantitative results. We conclude with a discussion of the implications of our findings for understanding the relationship among race, public opinion, and school desegregation.

1. Background

1.1. Policy responsiveness theory

Political systems that aspire to be democratic require some correspondence between public policy and important aspects of public opinion (Page, 1994; Perrin and McFarland, 2011; Stimson, 2015). It is this consideration that has given rise to the policy responsiveness literature's investigation of the extent of correspondence between the public's preferences —however defined and measured— and public policy —however defined and measured. In a comprehensive review of the literature that focused heavily on national U.S. data, Shapiro concluded that, despite important limitations and qualifications, the overall evidence "provides a sanguine picture of democracy at work" (Shapiro, 2011, 996).

One important qualification involves the extent to which there is what Druckman and Jacobs (2011) call segmented representation; that is, the extent to which policy may be more responsive to some sectors of the population than to others. Given this article's focus on desegregation, it's especially relevant to note the existence of reports of segmentation by race and/or ethnicity. In their study of federal spending on six issues, Griffin and Newman (2008) report that spending corresponds more to Whites' views than to those of Blacks and Latinx. And more recently in their study of state adoption of Medicaid expansion, Grogan and Park (2017) find that "state adoption decisions are positively related to White opinion and do not respond to nonwhite support levels."

Because of the frequent overlap between race/ethnicity and income, it's also important to note evidence of segmentation of policy responsiveness by income. Gilens concludes that the U.S. government's responsiveness is "strongly tilted towards the most affluent citizens" and that "under most circumstances the preferences of the vast majority of Americans appear to have essentially no impact on the policies the government does or doesn't adopt" (Gilens, 2012, 1). Similarly, Rigby and Wright (2011) argue that in some ways their state-level findings echo work focusing on national-level issues, which identify greater responsiveness to the wealthy than to the poor.

Less scholarship has been devoted to policy responsiveness at the local level, but it's plausible, as Shapiro suggests, that responsiveness is greater at levels "closer to the people" (2011, 996). Indeed, recent research suggests considerable responsiveness at the local level. Thus, Ybarra and Krebs (2016) studied smoke-free policies in U.S. counties and found support for democratic responsiveness based on factors such as the concentration of economic interest, interest group capacity, and the strength of the hospitality industry, among others. In a study of all cities and towns over 20,000 inhabitants, Tausanovitch and Warshaw (2014) report that policy outcomes are related to the liberalism/conservatism of citizens. Similarly, in a study of 2000 mid-size cities, Einstein and Kogan (2016) report substantial variation in local fiscal policy outcomes, suggesting that voter preferences help explain why cities adopted different policies.

The various studies of policy responsiveness in municipal and county government notwithstanding, the issue of the policy responsiveness of school boards has received relatively little systematic attention. The major exception is Berkman and Plutzer's (2005) comparison of citizen preferences for school spending with actual spending in almost all U.S. school districts. They find that

> … school districts are indeed democratic. To a degree that surprised both authors of this book, there is a high degree of correspondence between what citizens want and what they get (2005, 156).

[2] For greater clarity, we use the names of the school districts' major cities in lieu of their formal names: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (Charlotte, NC); Davidson County Public Schools (Nashville, TN); Jefferson County Public Schools (Louisville, KY), Wake County Public School System (Raleigh, NC); and York County School District 3 (Rock Hill, SC).

[3] Desegregation refers to the removal of the legal and social practices that divide students into different schools based on their social backgrounds. Integration occurs after desegregation when there is joint participation and mutual acceptance in all activities normally associated with school attendance. Diverse schools provide benefits to all students attending the schools with those from different racial, ethnic, economic and cultural backgrounds (Mickelson et al., 2015, 203-4). Although we recognize that *desegregation* is a process that can create racially and socioeconomically *diverse* schools, for convenience we use the terms somewhat interchangeably while remaining cognizant of the analytic distinction between the two.

These empirical findings, they conclude, are consistent with notions that educational governance "is rooted in our beliefs in democratic control", and the U.S. school board "is the crucible of democracy" (Berkman and Plutzer, 2005, xvii).

Our study breaks new ground by examining the relationship between local citizen opinions towards school diversity and actual levels of school desegregation in their school districts within the framework of this theoretical tradition. Our study is innovative in another respect given that prior research on public opinion and school policy has not explored segmented policy responsiveness with respect to race and income, as we do in this paper.

1.2. Public opinion about school desegregation

Public support for the concept of school desegregation has grown over the past few decades and now appears widespread. The public generally supports the notion of racially diverse schools and believes such schools have had important outcomes for students, particularly Blacks, and for society overall (Frankenberg et al., 2016; Frankenberg and Jacobsen, 2011; Orfield, 1995; Siegel-Hawley, 2020; Williams, 2012). However, there is also a general pattern of opposition among most Whites to key strategies for putting the principle of school desegregation into practice. Specifically, scholars find that respondents express less support for diverse schools if busing is mentioned (Hochschild and Scott, 1998).

Also of interest are the views on desegregation among those who have experienced it. In a longitudinal study of public opinion about a suburban-central city busing plan in metropolitan Wilmington, Delaware, Raffel (1985) found that the general population remained opposed to busing after desegregation was implemented. Over time, White suburban opposition declined, but opposition increased among Blacks and White city residents. A study of misperceptions of the success of Nashville's desegregation plan reported that not only did most people in Nashville either not know, accept, or trust the empirical findings of academic success related to busing for desegregation, but among Whites, those without children in the schools were also the least negatively disposed to the practice (Pride, 2000; Pride and Woodward, 1995). In contrast, Orfield (1995) reported that national surveys conducted in the 1970s and 1980s showed that families with direct experience with desegregation were much more positive than the general public in their attitudes towards it, including Louisville parents whose children were bused for desegregation.

Smith (2004) argues that the combination of the federal government's retreat from pursuing desegregation combined with the civil rights era's enfranchisements of Blacks in many cases made local policy venues more favorable to desegregation efforts. And it is these local venues—more specifically school boards—that often play a key role in contemporary desegregation efforts. Even though educational policy is complicated by its nesting within the various policy venues created by federalism, most decisions about pupil assignment that directly affect levels of desegregation are made by local school boards (Mickelson et al., 2015). To be sure, the Supreme Court's decision in the 2007 *Parents Involved in Community Schools (PICS)* prohibits districts from adopting assignment policies that rely primarily on an individual student's race but allows school boards to use other nonindividual race-based or SES-based assignment strategies (*PICS*, 2007).

The switch from an era of primarily *mandated* desegregation to the present one of primarily *voluntary* desegregation in conjunction with the ascendant importance of local policy venues provides the context for this article's investigation of the extent to which there is a correspondence between levels of desegregation in a district and the attitudes of the district's residents, our measure of policy responsiveness. Our study capitalizes on the post *PICs* legal context that renders desegregation largely voluntary and thus heavily dependent upon on the actions of local school boards. All of the five local school boards in our study are elected and thus it is plausible to assume there is a relationship between local public opinion and a given community's school board decisions about pupil assignment.

1.3. The five school districts

The five upper South school districts in this study were purposively chosen because they have distinctive school desegregation histories, varying levels of racial resegregation at present, and all have available qualitative case studies about their desegregation histories. We selected upper South rather than deep South locales because of the former's histories of relatively less virulent racist politics.[4] Demographic data and descriptive statistics on the five communities and school districts appear in Table 1. The top half of the table shows population size and characteristics by race, geographic size and Black/White residential segregation in 2015, the year our opinion survey data were collected. The Residential Segregation Index of Dissimilarity (RDI) refers to the degree to which two or more groups live separately from one another in a geographic area. The RDI is a demographic measure of the evenness with which two groups (Black and White residents, in this case) are distributed across the target geographic areas (census tracts) that make up a larger area (counties). It ranges from 0 (complete integration) to 100 (complete segregation). In this study, the RDI can be interpreted as the proportion of either Black or White residents who would need to move to different census tracts to create a distribution that matches that of the larger area (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2019). While all five districts are multiethnic, we focus on distribution of Blacks and Whites because the two racial groups comprise the largest proportion of the population in all locales, and the politics of desegregation have historically revolved around a Black/White axis in most areas of the nation (Fiel and Zhang, 2019).

The bottom half of Table 1 presents characteristics of the school districts including demographic profiles of the student population, elected school boards, school organizational characteristics, as well as percent student population enrolled in charter or private schools. We focus on the same racial groups as before with respect to our measure of school diversity, a Black/White dissimilarity index

[4] The label Southern state connotes both a geographic location and a shared culture, politics, and history among Whites. Whites in all four states held slaves until the Emancipation Proclamation.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics for five upper South school systems, 2015.

	Charlotte	Rock Hill	Raleigh	Nashville	Louisville
Demographic Characteristics					
Land area in square miles	523[a]	180[a]	835[a]	504[a]	380[a]
N of total Population	990,288[a]	114,423[a]	976,019[a]	658,506[a]	755,809[a]
% Asian	5.2[a]	1.8[a]	6.1%[a]	3.2%[a]	2.4%[a]
% Black	30.9[a]	28[a]	20.7%[a]	27.6%[a]	20.7%[a]
% Latinx	12.5[a]	4.7[a]	9.9%[a]	9.9%[a]	4.7%[a]
% Native American	0.3[a]	1[a]	0.3%[a]	0.3%[a]	0.2%[a]
% White	56.7[a]	61[a]	67.6%[a]	62.4%[a]	72.9%[a]
% Other	4.1[a]	2.8[a]	2.8%[a]	4%[a]	0.7%[a]
B/W Residential Segregation Index	53[j]	N.A.	43[j]	48[j]	55[j]
School District Characteristics					
County-wide district	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
N of Students	146,211[b]	17,497[b]	157,839[b]	85,598[b]	100,777[b]
% Asian	6[b]	2[b]	7.6%[b]	4.1%[b]	3.6%[b]
% Black	39.6[b]	39[b]	23.8%[b]	42.2%[b]	36.7%[b]
% Latinx	21.9[b]	8[b]	17%[b]	21.8%[b]	9.4%[b]
% Native American	0.5[b]	1[b]	0.3%[b]	0.1%[b]	0.1%[b]
% White	29.4[b]	47[b]	47.5%[b]	30.1%[b]	46.1[b]
% Other	2.5[b]	3[b]	3.8%[b]	1.7%[b]	4[b]
N of high schools 2019	32[c]	3[i]	29[d]	18[e]	23[f]
N of middle schools 2019	46[c]	5[i]	37[d]	31[e]	23[f]
N of elementary schools 2019	94[c]	18[i]	116[d]	75[e]	93[f]
% district enrollment in private schools	10.5[b]	5[b]	10.2[b]	17.5[b]	22.5[b]
% district enrollment in charter schools	7.2[g]	10.4[i]	5.9[g]	9.7[h]	0
% Black school board members	44[k]	29[k]	22[k]	22[k]	14[k]
B/W Dissimilarity Index	61.2[l]	20.7[l]	41.1[l]	44.3[l]	35.5[l]

[a] American Community Survey, 2015
[b] National Center for Educational Statistics, 2015–2016 (Elementary/Secondary Information System).
[c] Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, *CMS Fast Facts*, 2018–2019.
[d] Wake County Public School System, *District Facts*, 2018–2019.
[e] Metro Nashville Public Schools, *Metro Nashville Public Schools*, 2018
[f] Jefferson County Public Schools, *School Profile Pages*, 2019
[g] North Carolina School Report Cards, 2014–2015, https://ncreportcards.ondemand.sas.com/src.
[h] Tennessee Charter School Sector *State of the Sector: Tennessee Charter Schools*, 2014–2015, http://www.tncharttercenter.org/sites/554/uploaded/files/TNCharterSOS201415WebVersionV2.pdf.
[i] Rock Hill Schools York County District Three https://www.rock-hill.k12.sc.us/domain/99.
[j] Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. *County Health Rankings & Road Maps: Residential Segregation—Black/White,* 2014–2015. https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/explore-health-rankings/measures-data-sources/county-health-rankings-model/health-factors/social-and-economic-factors/family-social-support/residential-segregation-blackwhite.
[k] Authors' calculation from data on 2015 school districts' websites.
[l] Authors' calculations from American Community Survey and census data.

(DI). Analogous to the RDI above, a DI compares the distribution of any two groups (again, Blacks and Whites) and indicates the proportion of students who would need to change schools in order that the demographics of the student body in each school mirror the district's overall demographics. The smaller the DI, the more racially balanced are the schools, with a DI of zero suggesting complete desegregation and a DI of 100 indicating complete segregation.

1.3.1. Charlotte

The Charlotte school district has played an iconic role in school desegregation history. The case that led to the unanimous Supreme Court decision in *Swann* (1971) allowing busing for desegregation arose in Charlotte. In the aftermath of that decision, Charlotte—relying heavily on mandatory pupil assignments and a system of paired elementary schools—developed a desegregation plan that from the mid-70s to the late-80s was one of the nation's most successful. However, Charlotte's burgeoning population, driven by in-migration of White northerners and mid-westerners who, accustomed to their smaller racially and socioeconomically homogeneous suburban school districts, grew increasingly and vocally opposed to the busing plan they encountered.

In response to these and other developments, including the business elite's waning support for desegregation, in 1992 Charlotte replaced much of mandatory busing with a system of voluntary choice among an expanded array of magnet schools. But a White parent's legal challenge to his daughter's failure to gain a seat in a popular magnet school through the race-conscious assignment lottery led to the reopening of *Swann* and several important consequences as of 2002: the federal courts vacated most of the original *Swann* orders and the school board implemented a "race-neutral" pupil assignment plan largely based on where families lived. Within a few years CMS resegregated. Just as the Supreme Court's 1971 decision in *Swann* allowing busing exemplified the federal judiciary's enforcement of desegregation, so too did the federal courts' later decisions to vacate the original *Swann* orders exemplify the national retreat from desegregation (Smith, 2004; Smith et al., 2004). Indeed, by 2015 Charlotte was, as indicated by Table 1, the most

segregated of our five districts.

1.3.2. Louisville

Louisville presents an interesting contrast to Charlotte. Moreover, it has played a key role in recent desegregation legal history. Despite a rocky start in the mid-1970s, by 1978 Louisville embraced integration, eventually becoming one of the nation's most desegregated districts, a path it continued to follow even as the twentieth century wound down (Garland, 2013; Phillips et al., 2009). However, in 1998, a group of Black parents filed suit in federal court challenging the district's pupil assignment racial guidelines, especially their use for an historically Black high school. The high school's magnet programs, high graduation rates, and other academic achievements made it a school that many Blacks wanted to attend. But in seeking to promote desegregation, the school district had developed policies to increase the school's White population, thus denying many Black students the opportunity to enroll. Their lawsuit resulted in a federal district court judge ruling that racial guidelines at the district's magnet schools were unconstitutional, but the district continued to use these guidelines at non-magnet schools. Subsequently, all racial guidelines were challenged in federal court by a White parent whose child, because of desegregation guidelines, was denied enrollment in a neighborhood school. The case, along with one from Seattle, made it to the Supreme Court that, in a landmark decision *Parents Involved in Community Schools* (*PICS* 2007), ruled that the use of an individual student's race as an assignment criterion violated the Fourteenth Amendment. Importantly, Justice Kennedy's controlling opinion acknowledged the nation's compelling interest in diverse schools and permitted the use of other strategies to pursue integration. Forced to revamp its pupil assignment plan, Louisville used other policies allowed under *PICS* in its largely successful pursuit of diversity, and as Table 1 shows, was the second most desegregated of our five districts in 2015.

1.3.3. Nashville

Nashville has a contentious desegregation history that more closely resembles Charlotte's than do the histories of Raleigh, Rock Hill, or Louisville. In 1982, more than a decade of courtroom, school board and community battles over desegregation resulted in a court-approved desegregation busing plan that relied heavily on mandatory pupil assignments and the pairing of Black inner-city schools with outlying schools in largely White suburban neighborhoods. The plan generated high levels of desegregation but faced growing opposition from various segments of the community including the business elite. In an effort to placate that opposition, Nashville, as did Charlotte, replaced some of the mandatory assignments with magnet schools. But opposition to the desegregation plan continued, and in 1998 a federal court released the district from judicial supervision and approved an agreement between the school board and the plaintiffs in the decades-long desegregation litigation. The agreement included $206 million for school improvements and a new assignment plan that relied heavily on cohort continuity and students attending schools in their neighborhoods. The emphasis on assigning students to schools close to their residences resulted, as it did in Charlotte, in a sharp increase in resegregation (Houston, 2012; Smrekar and Honey, 2019).

1.3.4. Raleigh

The Charlotte and Raleigh School Districts are North Carolina's two largest, but their recent desegregation histories differ in important aspects (Parcel and Taylor, 2015). Raleigh was never under a court order to desegregate. A combination of federal pressure and interest in cost savings, however, motivated the consolidation of Raleigh city schools and Wake County schools, achieved in 1976. Beginning in the 1980s, the district introduced a series of magnet schools in Black and lower-SES areas of Raleigh that voluntarily drew White and middle-class families to enroll their children in them, producing considerable desegregation.

The Raleigh area experienced strong population growth during the last few decades. The district had been re-segregating slowly but steadily since the beginning of the 21st century, owing in part to Latinx immigration. By the year 2000, however, Raleigh had grown in population so quickly that the district was having difficulty building enough new schools to accommodate the growth. This was particularly pronounced in communities outside the city center. Such growth was also challenged by the reluctance of county commissioners to provide sufficient funds for new schools. Remaining committed to their diversity achievements, the Democratic-leaning school board began a system of student reassignments so that SES balance could be roughly maintained in the district. These changes became increasingly unpopular, as families lacked certainty regarding where their children would attend school from year to year.

The district had also created several year-round schools, which some parents liked for either their perceived education advantages, or because such schools appeared to be less appealing to minority and/or lower SES families. However, by 2007, the board was making assignment to some year-round schools effectively mandatory. The 2009 school board election rejected this model and elected a strong majority Republican-leaning board who ran on platforms repudiating such assignments and emphasizing neighborhood schools. By 2011, however, politically unpopular school board behavior ushered in a Democratic-leaning board once again. The 2011 board drastically slowed student reassignments, but neighborhood schools were never again at center stage.

1.3.5. Rock Hill

Of our five districts, Rock Hill is the smallest, the least well known and unlike the other four is not a countywide district. We include this district because of its contrast to Charlotte, of which it is a nearby suburb. Rock Hill was never under court order to desegregate. But in response to federal desegregation efforts and threats to withhold aid, Rock Hill largely desegregated its public schools in the 1960s and 1970s, with the most glaring long-term exception being an elementary school at which Blacks were 94 percent of the school's enrollment in 2000–2001 compared with the district-wide 35 percent Black enrollment. The opening of a new elementary school in August 2002 gave the school board an opportunity to revamp much of the district's heavily neighborhood-based school assignment plan with the anticipation that the busing of some Whites to the segregated school would lower its percentage Black enrollment. However, the proposed busing of these White students triggered a lawsuit in federal district court to stop the

implementation of the new assignment plan. The negotiations to settle the lawsuit allowed the implementation of the new assignment plan with the result that the older school's Black enrollment dropped to approximately 55 percent. Similar efforts to improve racial balance at the high school level also succeeded. Enrollment at one of the district's two high schools was much Whiter and prosperous than at the other high school. The opening of a third high school in 2005 gave the board an opportunity to address that longstanding disparity and achieve greater racial and socioeconomic balance among the three high schools than had previous existed between the two schools (Smith et al., 2008).

In other words, while Charlotte was rapidly resegregating in the early years of the twentieth century, nearby Rock Hill was moving in just the opposite direction. In fact, in 2015 Charlotte was the most segregated of our five districts and 23 miles south down I-77 Rock Hill was the least segregated. That contrast between Charlotte and neighboring Rock Hill along with the available case studies of Rock Hill are reasons we included this little-known district in our research project.

2. Guiding research questions

Given these five case studies and the policy responsiveness literature that informs this study, we have developed several guiding research questions. The first one concerns the fundamental theoretical linkage the literature proposes:

- *Do the five districts' levels of actual desegregation correspond to the overall levels of local public opinion in support of desegregation?*

Extrapolating from the corpus of research on segmentation of public opinion by income and race, our initial question gives rise to four additional research questions. The first two additional research questions involve race:

- *After disaggregating public opinion within each school district by respondents' race, do we find White respondents' support for diversity corresponds more closely to the district levels of desegregation than the overall public opinion in support of diversity?*
- *Similarly, within each locale, does Black respondents' support for diversity correspond more closely to the district levels of desegregation than the overall public's support?*

Importantly, the answers to the previous two questions are theoretically and empirically independent of one another; that is, the answers to both could be "to a large extent", "somewhat", or "to a little extent."

The frequent overlap between race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status leads to the next two questions, whose answers are also theoretically independent of each other.

- *After disaggregating public opinion within each school district by respondents' income, does affluent respondents' support for diversity correspond more closely to the district levels of desegregation than the overall public's support of diversity?*
- *Similarly, does low-income respondents' support for diversity correspond more closely to the district levels of desegregation than the overall public's level of support?*

Because our answers to these questions are based on five cases, any answers face two related problems. The first is that with only five sites, it may be difficult to discern any relationships. The second is that any discernible relationships in a small purposive sample have limited generalizability. These problems notwithstanding, our exploratory descriptive study's potential to illuminate possible relationships among public opinion and school diversity in the five districts may offer important insights that can inform policy and spur future research.

3. Data, measures, analytic strategies

To investigate these questions, we collected 2015 public opinion polling data that investigates the correspondence between levels of desegregation and attitudes about educational diversity in our school districts. Using polling data, we compare the rankings of the five districts (relative to one another) on attitudinal measures related to diversity with their rankings on levels of desegregation as measured by the Black/White Dissimilarity Index (DI). We correlate the ranking of each attitude with the ranking of the system's levels of desegregation using a Spearman Rank Order correlation coefficient. To clarify our findings, we repeat our analyses with our data disaggregated by respondent race and income. As an additional check on the validity of our findings, we further investigate if political party affiliation or self-identified ideological stance are viable alternative explanations for our findings. Finally, we investigate variation in several organizational features of the districts themselves that might account for our results. We then use the case studies of each district to contextualize and amplify our comparative findings from the districts' rankings on desegregation and attitudes toward diversity. Our study thus offers a unique descriptive examination of race, public opinion, and levels of school desegregation within a comparative framework.

3.1. Survey design and implementation

Guided by Parcel and Taylor's (2015) public opinion survey for Raleigh on similar issues, we developed an updated instrument with five slightly different versions. While the vast majority of the questions were the same across the five sites, we also used case study information from the respective sites to craft questions unique to each area. Our surveys ascertained respondents' beliefs abou

contemporary strategies for educational reform; school and classroom diversity; and ideological perspectives about education, democracy, and society more generally. We also obtained detailed demographic data, family background, and related information.

Our survey strategy employed automated polling to landlines and live cell phone interviews with randomly selected respondents in the five school districts. Specifically, we supplemented the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) strategy by including a separate cell-phone sample with whom we conducted live interviews. Households with cell phones only (CPO) continue to grow (Kempf and Remington, 2007). Given that men, those of lower SES and Latinx backgrounds are more likely to be CPO users (Blumberg and Luke, 2012), adding this component to the 2015 data collection increased the number of poll respondents with these characteristics.

3.2. Sample and data

These strategies allowed us to obtain a total of 5302 useable opinion surveys across the five sites: 1209 from Raleigh, 1107 from Charlotte, 830 from Rock Hill, 1145 from Louisville, and 1011 from Nashville. Response rates varied by locale and ranged from 7.8% in Rock Hill to 2.6% in Nashville. To examine sample representativeness, we conducted one-way analyses of variance and Chi Square tests to detect whether the mode of survey administration correlated with the social characteristics of those who completed the interviews. Our results indicate there were no correlations between mode of administration and who completed the interviews (response rates and ANVOA results are available upon request).

3.2.1. Ensuring polling data are representative

Because people who respond to polls are not perfectly representative of larger populations, we used a procedure known as post-stratification weighting, also known as ratio estimation (raking) to balance the sample. The procedure assigns a weight value to each respondent so that marginal totals of the adjusted weights on specified characteristics match the corresponding marginal totals for the population. Weighting addresses issues of self-selection. A major advantage of raking is its ability to produce respondent weights that are simultaneously based on multiple control totals, such as marital status, race, sex and SES (Battaglia et al., 2004). This approach is used on major federal government surveys including the American Community Survey, the National Survey of Family Growth, and the National Health Interview Survey. Groves (2006) shows these procedures produce valid estimates. We followed this strategy and raked survey data from each site using the 2015 American Community Survey to develop the weight factors for each locale. Once survey responses were raked, we addressed missing data, using stochastic regression imputation for demographic variables, and multiple imputation for the income variable and for the 30 belief statements. There was only a handful of missing data for all variables. The exception was family income, for which missing data ranged from a high of 21.6% in Raleigh to a low of 18.6% in Charlotte.

3.3. Variables

3.3.1. Structure of attitudes

To capture the underlying attitudinal structure among the 30 belief statements in our survey, we employed Principal Axis factor analyses with oblique rotations. We began the factor analyses with data from one district. Most of the belief statements loaded on one of eight factors. The same factor structure also emerged when we repeated the factor analysis separately with data from the four other sites and again for the entire sample.

3.3.2. Attitudes about diverse education

For this article, we analyze only the subset of beliefs that capture attitudes about school diversity and related topics. Support for Diversity is constructed with four belief statements about children's learning in racially and socioeconomically desegregated schools and classrooms (see Appendix 1 for the wording of the belief statements). We also ascertain respondents' opinion about Social Purpose Politics. Political scientist Clarence Stone (1998; 15) defined Social Purpose Politics as the ability of interested parties to go beyond a "narrow understanding of their stake in the education system… [and] come together around a larger vision of what is at issue." Stone argues that coming together, in turn, contributes to mobilization in support of a communitywide cause. One of these causes, we claim, is desegregation of public schools.

3.3.3. Operationalization of desegregation

Our indicator of desegregation is each school district's DI calculated using only elementary school demographic data. We restrict the DI to elementary schools because they are more sensitive measures of diversity than secondary schools given the latter's multiple attendance zones, catchment areas, and typically larger enrollments (Fiel and Zhang, 2019).

3.3.4. Demographic characteristics of respondents

Prior public opinion research suggests respondents differ regarding their attitudes toward public education generally, and about school desegregation particularly, by their race, educational attainment, gender, parental status, prior experiences with desegregation, income, party affiliation, and political ideology. Our survey data collected indicators of these characteristics.

3.4. Analytic strategy

If levels of desegregation and public opinion about school diversity are related, *ceteris paribus*, we should find consistency in rankings of school systems on their DI score (level of desegregation) and the ranking of a community's public opinion toward diversity.

To investigate if a community's public opinion toward education and diversity corresponds with its school policies, we proceeded in several steps that sequentially investigated this overriding expectation, and then the four more specific research questions arising from it. We first created the relative ranking of each of the five communities' elementary school racial Dissimilarity Index arrayed from most desegregated (1) to least desegregated (5). We ranked means of the two attitudes in each district from most supportive of diversity (1) to least (5). Next, within each district, we correlated the rankings between each attitude and the DI using a Spearman Rank Order correlation coefficient.[5]

As noted earlier, public opinion on most policy issues tends to be segmented by respondents' income and race. To explore the possibility of race or income segmentation in attitudes toward desegregation, our last steps examined if these two demographic characteristics moderate respondents' attitudes. We disaggregated respondents by race (Black/White) and income ($100,000 or above/$50,000 and below) within each school district. We calculated means for the set of race or income pairs on the three attitudes, weighted the mean attitude by the relative size of the race/income group; and ranked them similarly (1) to (5). Then for each group in the pairs, we correlated the rankings between each attitude and the district's DI ranking using a Spearman Rank Order correlation coefficient.

4. Results

School system ranked DI scores and each districts' ranked means on the two key attitude measures of public opinion toward education and diversity appear in Table 2. Reading left to right, the five school system's rankings on their DI are followed by the ranking of their means on the two attitudes that interest us. Table 2 allows us to see the baseline policy responsiveness relationship between the rankings of DI scores and the rankings of attitudes in each locale before we disaggregate by race and income.

The first row of Table 2 presents rankings of the most desegregated system of the five, Rock Hill, SC. Its public opinion rankings on both indicators are first among all school districts. Louisville appears in the second row. It is ranked second in desegregation. However, it ranks lowest in attitudinal support for diverse schools, a discrepancy that we investigate below. The third row shows the rankings for Raleigh and the fourth row presents Nashville. The rankings of attitudes from Raleigh's respondents are somewhat less supportive of diverse schooling than we would expect given the district's DI ranking. The opposite is true for Nashville where public opinion rankings appear to be somewhat more supportive of diversity than the ranking of the district's DI. The last row in Table 2 presents mean rankings from Charlotte. Although Charlotte is the most segregated district among the five we examine, it ranks second in attitudinal support for diversity and second in social purpose politics. Overall, then, the rankings in Table 2 suggest an inconclusive answer to our first research question.

Our next analysis examined if public opinion about school diversity is segmented by race or income. We calculated the differences in mean attitudes of respondents disaggregated by race and income for each locale. We weighted a racial or income group's mean attitudes by the proportion of that racial/income group in each community. As we noted earlier, the rationale for weighting the mean is to address the plausibility that the higher the percentage of a particular racial or income group in the population, the more political clout it may have in comparison to other groups in the same district and, very importantly for our analysis, the same racial or income group in the other districts. We then employed Bonferroni post hoc comparisons to examine if the racial and income disaggregated mean differences on attitudes we found were statistically significant across the districts. Results presented in Table 3 show there are significant differences in all attitudes by race and income across all five locales.

Table 4 presents the findings from our examination of the relationship between public opinion about school diversity and levels of desegregation disaggregated by respondents' race. Results for Whites appear in the top half of the table and the bottom half of the table displays results for Blacks. For Whites, the Spearman Rank Order correlations indicate there is a strong positive relationship between White respondents' attitudes toward diverse education and levels of desegregation in their community (0.90; 0.90). In contrast, the Spearman Rank Order correlations for Blacks also are moderately strong, but they are negative (−0.60; −0.70). In other words, our findings suggest that greater White support for diversity is strongly associated with higher levels of desegregation and lower White support for diversity is strongly associated with lower levels of desegregation. Whites who live in more segregated districts, on average, appear to hold opinions less supportive of diversity. Strikingly, the attitudes of Blacks toward diversity, whether more or less positive, appear to have no relationship to actual levels of diversity in their community's public schools.

The close relationship between race and SES opens the possibility that these provocative findings could actually be an indication of a relationship between levels of desegregation and levels of affluence rather than race itself. If affluence rather than race is more closely related to levels of desegregation in a school system, we should find comparable association between school desegregation and public

[5] We recognize the limits of using the Spearman Rank Order correlations given our small sample size. We employ the correlations to elucidate any patterns that emerge from our descriptions of public opinion differences among Whites and Blacks and between high and low SES respondents and the education policies across the five sites. Given this narrow objective, the small sample size itself is not an issue and our estimates of the rank correlations are not artifacts. The uncertainty in the estimates is where the small sample size comes into play. Thus, we calculated a Spearman Rank Order correlation coefficient for all correlations between an attitude's rank and the district's DI rank using the following formula for an approximate 95% confidence interval.tanh(arctanh(r) ±1.96/sqrt(n - 3) Applying this formula to an estimate of 0.9, then you get an approximate 95% CI of [0.086, 0.993]. Similarly, if you apply the formula to an estimate of 0.1 (one of the smaller estimates), we obtain an approximate 95% CI of [-0.858, 0.903]. The intervals are not symmetric because they are constrained by an upper and lower bound of ± 1. Given that these are fairly wide ranges it is necessary to acknowledge the uncertainty in the estimates. The authors are grateful to Shawn Bauldry for his insightful comments on this issue, which we summarize in this footnote.

Table 2
School racial dissimilarity index scores, means on two attitudes toward diverse education, and rankings by school district[a].

School District	B/W Racial DissimilarityIndex 2015		Support for Race & SES Diversity in Schools		Social Purpose Politics	
	DI	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank
Rock Hill	20.7	1	15.51	1	4.30	1
Louisville	335	2	14.32	5	4.21	2 (3)[b]
Raleigh	41.1	3	14.75	4	4.11	5
Nashville	44.3	4	14.81	3	4.18	4
Charlotte	61.2	5	15.15	2	4.22	2

[a] 1 = most supportive of diversity, 5 = least supportive of diversity.
[b] Given the small differences in means and the possibilities of sampling errors, we assign the same rank to the districts. The number in parentheses indicates the actual rank.

Table 3
Post-hoc comparisons of mean differences on two attitude by respondents' race and income within five school districts.

Attitudes Toward Diversity	SchoolDistrict	White/Black	High Income/Low Income
		Mean differences	Mean differences
Social Purpose Politics	Rock Hill	0.12	0.71***
	Louisville	0.13	0.43**
	Raleigh	0.69***	0.73***
	Nashville	−0.47**	0.27
	Charlotte	−0.02	0.41**
Diverse Schools & Classrooms	Rock Hill	−1.13**	−0.37
	Louisville	−2.05***	2.22***
	Raleigh	−1.91***	−1.53***
	Nashville	−1.94***	−0.41**
	Charlotte	−2.00***	−0.83**

*p < .05 **p < .01 *** p < .001.

Table 4
Rankings of means, Spearman Rank Order correlations, and confidence intervals for two attitudes by respondent race, weighted by racial group's percent of adults in district, in five upper South school systems.

School System and Its Dissimilarity Index Rank		Social Purpose Politics	Support for Race & SES Diversity in Schools
		Rank of Mean Attitude Weighted by % Whites in School District	Rank of Mean Attitude Weighted by % Whites in School District
Whites			
Rock Hill	1	2	2
Louisville	2	1	1
Raleigh	3	3	3
Nashville	4	4	4
Charlotte	5	5	5
Spearman Rank Order Correlation Between Dissimilarity Index and …		0.90	0.90
C.I. Upper Boundary		.993	.993
C.I. Lower Boundary		.086	.086
Blacks			
Rock Hill	1	3	3
Louisville	2	4	5
Raleigh	3	5	4
Nashville	4	2	2
Charlotte	5	1	1
Spearman Rank Order Correlation Between Dissimilarity Index and …		−0.60	−0.70
C.I. Upper Boundary		0.471	0.476
C.I. Lower Boundary		−0.962	−0.978

opinion when we disaggregate our sample by income. To test this possibility, we disaggregate our sample in each site by respondents' family income. Then, within each locale, we rank public opinion in favor of diversity among respondents reporting annual incomes of $100,000 or higher and the rank of that district's DI. We repeat these rankings for those with incomes of $50,000 or lower. We find, across our five sites, levels of desegregation are more strongly related to affluent respondents' attitudes toward school diversity rather than the attitudes of the less prosperous citizens. The Spearman Rank Order correlations in Table 5 indicate there is a small relationship between affluent respondents' attitudes and desegregation in their community (−0.30; −0.30), however they are negative. School systems with affluent supporters of diversity are less desegregated than districts where the more affluent do not support school diversity. The correlations between lower income respondents' attitudes toward diversity and levels of desegregation in their communities range between 0.30 and −0.20. Thus, the answer to our fourth and fifth questions are that, while none of the relationships is particularly strong, results suggest the levels of diversity in a community's schools are not reflective of either high-income respondents or low-income respondents. Notably, across all five sites, our results suggest levels of school diversity are much more strongly associated with White respondents' attitudes toward diverse schools than to attitudes of any segment of the income distribution.[6]

4.1. An exploration of alternative reasons for findings

It is worth considering the possibility that the relationships we describe between the levels of public opinion and levels of desegregation are proxies for other underlying unmeasured relationships known to affect levels of school desegregation including: (i) residential segregation, (ii) a district's demographic composition, (iii) racial composition of school board, (iv) distortions of a community's DI from varying enrollment levels in private and charter schools, and (v) race as proxy for party affiliation and/or political ideology. We explore the first four alternatives by inspecting the descriptive statistics in Table 1. We conducted additional analyses for the fifth possibility.

4.1.1. Does residential segregation predict school segregation?

The residential segregation index in Table 1 suggests there is some relation between levels of school and residential segregation in Charlotte, Nashville, and Raleigh (we have no indicator of residential segregation in Rock Hill). Louisville is an important exception. Louisville, which ranks highest in residential segregation, is the second most diverse school system. In fact, Louisville's level of residential segregation (RDI = 55) is most similar to Charlotte's (RDI = 53), the district with the most segregated schools among the five sites. Since there is no such major exception in the comparison of White or Black attitudes and levels of school desegregation, we conclude that for our districts the relationship between White attitudes and school desegregation is not capturing the relationship between levels of residential segregation and school segregation.

4.1.2. Does demographic composition of the district affect diversity?

The second alternative possibility is that a district's level of desegregation is actually reflective of its underlying demographic composition. Districts with proportionally more Blacks will have more segregated schools irrespective of public opinion. The population characteristics in Table 1 do not support this possibility. Rock Hill, with 39 percent Black students, is the most desegregated district (DI = 20.7), while Charlotte with 39.6 percent Black students is least desegregated (DI = 61.2). Raleigh (DI of 43), with 23.8 percent Blacks, falls between the two other districts. Moreover, it is important to recall that we raked all public opinion indicators before we constructed our attitude variables, and weighted all means by racial composition within districts before conducting the Spearman Rank Order correlations. Finally, the DI itself accounts for relative race differences in population size in the five school districts.

4.1.3. Does racial composition of school boards correlate with districts' levels of desegregation?

We might expect that the percent of school board members who are Black will affect pupil assignment policies. According to this alternative possibility, given that Blacks are more favorable toward diverse education than Whites in every locale, the greater the percent of Black policy makers, the more desegregated the district likely will be. However, Table 1 indicates a pattern that is inconsistent with what we would expect if levels of desegregation were to reflect the proportion of a school board that is Black. In the case of the five districts, the greater the percent of Black members, the less diverse the school system is.

4.1.4. Does enrollment in alternatives to traditional public schools foster segregation?

The next alternative possibility for our findings is that variations by school system in percent of public school aged youth enrolled in private and/or charter schools distorts the calculation of each DI. This is because private and charter schools often exacerbate racial segregation by siphoning Whites from the traditional schools' population (Rotberg and Glazer, 2018). Descriptive statistics in Table 1 also fail to support this possibility. While in Charlotte, Rock Hill, and Raleigh combined enrollments in alternatives to traditional public schools (private and charter schools) captures between 16 percent and 17 percent of school-age youth, the three districts' DIs range from most to least desegregated. Louisville, whose private school enrollments were the largest (22.5 percent) and Nashville,

[6] We examined the possibility that our rejection of income differences in attitudes toward diversity as a proxy for our race differences finding is due to the exclusion of the middle income segment of the distribution. We ran the same analyses with the income distribution divided into high, middle, and lower income segments. The results of new analyses of income and attitudes did not change our interpretations of our initial findings regarding income as a proxy for race (results available upon request from first author).

Table 5
Rankings of means, Spearman Rank Order and confidence intervals by respondent income classification, weighted by income classification's percent of adults in district, in five upper South school systems.

School System and Its Dissimilarity Index Rank	Social Purpose Politics	Support for Race & SES Diversity in Schools
	Rank of Mean Attitude Weighted by % High Income Residents in School District	Rank of Mean Attitude Weighted by % High Income Residents in School District
Higher Income ($100,000 or more)		
Rock Hill 1	3	3
Louisville 2	5	5
Raleigh 3	1	1
Nashville 4	4	4
Charlotte 5	2	2
Spearman Rank Order Correlation Between Dissimilarity Index and …	−0.30	−0.30
C.I. Upper Boundary	−0.934	−0.934
C.I. Lower Boundary	0.791	0.791
Lower Income ($50,000 or less)		
Rock Hill 1	3	4
Louisville 2	1	1
Raleigh 3	5	5
Nashville 4	2	3
Charlotte 5	4	2
Spearman Rank Order Correlation Between Dissimilarity Index and …	0.30	−0.20
C.I. Upper Boundary	−0.791	−0.919
C.I. Lower Boundary	0.934	0.828

whose combined charter and private school enrollments topped 27.2 percent, were among the most diverse districts and the most segregated districts, respectively. Thus, none of the patterns in the descriptive data in Table 1 support alternatives to our interpretations of the findings regarding race, public opinion, and school diversity.

4.1.5. Is racially segmented policy responsiveness a proxy for political affiliation and/or ideology?

We explored the possibility that what appears to be racially segmented policy responsiveness to Whites' views on school diversity is actually a proxy for policy responsiveness to dominant political or ideology self-identification. We conducted analysis of our data by splitting the sample by political affiliation (Republican, Democrat, and Neither) and by ideological self-identification (conservative, moderate, and liberal) to see whether race is a proxy for either political affiliation or ideology. Our results indicate neither party affiliation or ideological self-identification are as strongly correlated with support for diversity as race. Like our results for income differences among respondents, political ideology and party affiliation differences were only modestly related to support for diversity —and only at times in the expected direction—but the Spearman correlations in every locale were distinctly smaller than they are for race differences between Blacks and Whites (results available upon request to the first author).

5. Discussion

This descriptive study's exploration of the relationship between public opinion and contemporary levels of racial diversity in five upper South school districts with varying levels of voluntary desegregation offers important insights into what is arguably the single most controversial U.S. education policy of the past seven decades. We begin our discussion by summarizing the answers to our research questions and then identifying what our findings suggest for policy and future research.

The first answer concerns the levels of desegregation and public opinion in support of diversity. We find that *overall* rankings of public support for diverse schools weakly track actual levels of desegregation in three of the five districts: Rock Hill, Raleigh, and Nashville. But the relationship is far from clear because in two of the locales—Charlotte and Louisville—the rankings initially appear contradictory. Charlotte is currently the most segregated district but ranks high in public opinion supporting diverse schools. Louisville's situation is just the reverse. It's the second most desegregated school system but ranks lowest in public opinion in support of diverse schools.

The reasons for Charlotte's and Louisville's discrepancies likely lie in the answers to the second and third research questions. Once we disaggregate public opinion by race, we find that there is a moderately strong negative relationship between the actual level of desegregation in a locale and the rankings of Blacks' attitudes in support for diversity. For Whites, the situation is very different. Actual levels of desegregation in each district vary and they correspond closely to the rankings of Whites' attitudes in support for diversity. Thus, once we control for respondents' race, we no longer find a weak relationship between public opinion and levels of diversity in our school systems; in Charlotte—the most segregated district—White support for desegregation is the lowest. In Louisville, which is the second most desegregated district, White support for desegregation is the highest. In Rock Hill, the most desegregated district, White attitudes' support for diversity ranks ever so slightly behind Louisville. In other words, the answer to the second research question, which involves the extent to which there is a correspondence between White public opinion and levels of desegregation, is "to a great extent."

Conversely, the answer to our third research question about the extent of correspondence between Black public opinion and levels of desegregation is that to the extent there is a relationship, it is a moderately negative one. Our answers to the second and third questions are especially important when compared with the answers to our fourth and fifth research questions regarding possible socioeconomic segmentation of public opinion. Disaggregating responses by income level allows us to see if the racial segmentation we observed is a proxy for class differences commonly found in public opinion research. Our results show that it is not. Although when broken down by respondents' income level, we observe a clear relationship between attitudinal support for diversity and actual levels of desegregation, this relationship is weaker than the relationship broken down by respondents' race and it is mostly negative rather than positive like the one for Whites' attitudes and diversity levels.

5.1. Black attitudes in support of diversity

It is notable that in 2015 there was a negative relationship between the rankings of actual levels of desegregation and rankings of Black public opinion in support of the policy in the five school districts we examined. We find that in every locale in our study, Blacks' opinion in support diverse education is more favorable than that of Whites in the same district but the rank order of their attitudes is not necessary the same as Whites. Although Whites in any particular district also generally support diverse education, levels among Whites are lower and vary much more than their Black neighbors. This means that on the most controversial race-related education issue in the last 66 years—an issue about which there has been massive political mobilization over the decades, a multitude of lower court battles and Supreme Court decisions, and hundreds of mandatory or voluntary desegregation policy initiatives—the rankings of our five districts provide no evidence that levels of desegregation are positively related to the preferences of Black citizens who live in them; in fact, we see evidence that they are negatively related.

Blacks in all five districts strongly support social purpose politics; that is, to varying degrees they embrace policies that serve the benefits the entire community. At the same time, it is also true that there is a small negative relationship between the rankings of Blacks' opinions in support of social purpose politics and the rankings of levels of diversity in their community. These two negative relationships between the rankings on education policy and Black citizens' opinions may be related to what every case study of the five districts discusses as histories of Black discontent, opposition, and anger over the implemention of desegregation, especially the

treatment of Black educational professionals, the imbalance in the number of years Black and White children were bused, and in the length and duration of the bus rides. More recently, Black citizens' discontent and anger were also provoked by disparities between the extent to which predominantly Black schools were closed or repurposed compared to the closings of predominantly White schools.

5.2. White attitudes in support of diversity

If our findings of a negative relationship between rankings among levels of desegregation and rankings of Black public opinion on diversity are surprising, it is certainly less surprising that across the five districts, levels of desegregation appear to correspond with White public opinion, given the generally greater political clout of Whites. During the era of the implementation of mandatory desegregation (roughly 1970–1990), public education leaders pursued desegregation even though national polling data at that time indicated the policy received more support from Blacks than from Whites; in fact, many Whites initially opposed the policy especially if busing was used to achieve the goal (Frankenberg et al., 2016; Orfield, 1995). Currently, local education leaders in our five sites appear more likely to pursue desegregation if the community's White citizens are more supportive of it.

In many ways this historical change in policy responsiveness, in conjunction with the previous one regarding Blacks' attitudes and districts' levels of diversity, provide support for what Derrick Bell has called the interest convergence thesis that states "the interest of Blacks in achieving racial equality will be only accommodated when that interest converges with the interests of Whites in policy-making positions" (Bell, 2004). There is ample evidence consistent with Bell's thesis, especially from Charlotte. When the predominantly White corporate and civic elites considered support for school desegregation as consistent with Charlotte's image as a progressive, peaceful new South city that offered a healthy business climate, they supported desegregation (Mickelson et al., 2015). But once the Charlotte economy took off and efforts to link school desegregation to a strong business climate were no longer necessary, corporate and civic leaders' commitment to public school desegregation waned and then was largely abandoned after the 1999 court order vacating *Swann*. Similar events characterize Nashville's desegregation history, as noted above. By contrast, a commitment to public school diversity remained important to the largely White civic leadership of Rock Hill, Louisville, and Raleigh, the three school districts that remain very to moderately diverse.

While we do not know why Whites in some districts are more supportive of school desegregation than in others, one possibility presents itself. White support for social purpose politics precisely tracks support for school desegregation across the five districts. To be sure, this pattern raises yet another question: Why are Whites in some districts more supportive of social purpose politics than others? Here, we can proffer the beginnings of an answer from the case studies of three districts—Rock Hill, Charlotte, and Raleigh. As Table 4 indicates, Rock Hill Whites rank highest in their embrace of social purpose politics, Charlotte Whites the lowest, and Raleigh's Whites fall in between. The work of Smith and his colleagues describes the emergence of high levels of social purpose politics in Rock Hill when a citizen task force grappled with the opening of a third high school (Smith et al., 2008). Initially that task force, according to its facilitator, was characterized by members primarily concerned with "protecting" their own neighborhoods' interests. But as the task force's work progressed, its members

> … challenged each other… [and asked themselves] if [we] really believe in all children? Well then why are you saying that? I think it was a soul searching of each other… I don't think anyone of them would say that they didn't have to do some compromising (Smith et al., 2008; 1019).

Consequently, the assignment plan adopted by the task force resulted in the three high schools being much more racially and socioeconomically balanced than the two high schools had been.

In the same years that Rock Hill was making progress in achieving racial and SES balance in pupil assignment, neighboring Charlotte was moving in the opposite direction. After the federal court decision vacating the original *Swann* order, the board adopted a new pupil assignment plan that triggered large increases in resegregation due primarily to the school board's choice of a neighborhood school-based assignment plan. Even so, heavily White affluent outlying areas of the school district actively contemplated seceding from it. None of these developments was characterized by social purpose politics. In fact, just the reverse occurred: they—especially the efforts of outlying heavily White areas to secede—were characterized by an almost exclusive focus on what's best for "my children" and "my neighborhood" rather than on "our children" and "our community" (Mickelson et al., 2015).

In terms of social purpose politics and school diversity, Raleigh's recent history falls somewhere in between that of Rock Hill and Charlotte. As described earlier, unpopular school board decisions involving frequent school reassignments and essentially mandatory attendance at year-round schools for some families led voters to reject pro-diversity candidates in favor of neighborhood school advocates in an off-year election in 2009. However, the new board's unpopular actions galvanized the larger community to action in 2011 to replace the sitting board with a new one that promised (and delivered) diversity (Parcel and Taylor, 2015). Raleigh schools continue to be relatively desegregated, although reassignments have become less frequent.

5.3. Implications for theory and future research

We have framed our investigation within the context of policy responsiveness theory, which is concerned with the extent to which public policies are responsive to residents' opinions. We have found that policies concerning school diversity are responsive to resident preferences in the five districts we have studied, but this responsiveness is a function of White preferences. We acknowledge that Whites are the majority of residents in each of the districts. However, it is also the case that there are racial differences in the extent to which Blacks and Whites prefer diverse schools, with Blacks expressing significantly stronger preferences towards diversity in every one of our sites. These realities mean that where Whites are less supportive of such policies, progress towards pro-school diversity

policies is likely to be slowed. These findings also suggest that the policy responsiveness perspective should be revised to take into account possible mediating forces, like community contexts that include normative belief systems such as social purpose politics. Theories that merely point to the importance of majority preferences are inadequate to illuminate the implications of policies for which race is a strongly moderating factor. As such, our findings can help guide future research on policy responsiveness theory in a direction that should alert future researchers to the possible importance of race segmentation in driving local public policy.

5.4. Limitations

We acknowledge that our study has several important limitations. Although our post hoc analyses indicate the absolute differences we obtained in rankings and public opinion are statistically significant, we sidestep the question of whether the absolute differences we obtained in rankings on policy and public opinion are meaningful in a substantive sense—a non-trivial issue. Another important limitation is that our measure of diversity, the Black/White DI, does not capture the increasingly multiethnic character of the five districts' student populations. The same criticism is true of limiting our analytic sample to only Black and White respondents.

We do not examine the education policy processes. Instead, we describe public opinion in relationship to the outcomes of these processes, thereby limiting the insights our study can offer about the relationship of public opinion to levels of desegregation. Investigating the role of districts' financial situations, the role of state politics and policies, and the districts' geographic sizes, arguably relevant to the relationships in question, is beyond the scope of our study. We note, though, that because small Rock Hill and county-wide Louisville are the most desegregated districts, size is unlikely an important factor in the relationships of interest to us.

The final limitation of this study derives from the growing role of charter schools in the resegregation of public education. Evidence abounds that charters are a source of racial and SES segregation in public education (Riel et al., 2018). Importantly, at the time that we gathered public opinion data for this study, Louisville had no charters and Rock Hill had relatively few, while Charlotte, Raleigh, and Nashville had many more. Thus, it is possible that the relative absence of charters in the two most diverse districts contributed to their greater diversity. On the other hand, the presence of charters in Nashville, Raleigh, and Charlotte does not appear to account for varying levels of school desegregation or public opinion about diversity in these three districts.

6. Conclusion

Despite several limitations, our study nonetheless offers rather strikingly consistent findings across five locales suggesting that desegregation policy is positively related to public opinions of Whites, but negatively to opinions of Blacks. If, as the preponderance of research suggests, diverse public education is a necessary, albeit insufficient, condition for preparing students for citizenship in a complex multiethnic, democratic, and just globalizing economy and pluralistic society, public policy actors will need to create the necessary infrastructures for diverse schools. Given that local public opinion—especially support from Whites—appears crucial to sustaining desegregation, perhaps a key implication of this article is the necessity of generating support for the policy among all stakeholders across race, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups. It is arguably more vital to maintain or revitalize Black citizens' support for desegregation given that the demonstrably inequitable public education provided for Blacks during much of the last 150 years improved during the few decades of late twentieth century when public schools were desegregated.

There are at least three ways that this might be done. The first involves the features of pupil assignment plans that organically facilitate desegregation, while minimizing transportation of students. As noted earlier, opposition to desegregation is much greater when it is equated with busing. Alternative strategies would rely upon other approaches including the conscious location of new schools to maximize diversity or the strategic drawing of catchment zones consistent with *PICS*. Next, because housing policy is strongly related to education policy, communities that coordinate their education, housing, and transportation policies will foster school and residential desegregation (Rothstein, 2017). It is also necessary to change the narrative about desegregated education by better publicizing the corpus of research unambiguously demonstrating the positive short- and long-term benefits of the practice for school systems and neighborhoods, pupils and their families, and the vitality of the larger community's economy and civic life (Billings et al., 2020; Johnson and Nasaryan, 2019; Mickelson and Nkomo, 2012).

Fostering the conditions for the development of social purpose politics is also important. Previous case studies of Charlotte, Rock Hill, and Raleigh highlight the crucial facilitating role that a community's civic, religious, and business leaders, and school system personnel play in its development. Relatedly, some communities appear to have a stronger history of concern for the welfare of all their community's school children than do others. Studies of Raleigh school desegregation and resegregation document the development of magnet schools in the 1980s as a successful vehicle to promote desegregation, the persistence of those educational venues, and the lengths to which the community was willing to go to promote optimal opportunities to learn for all children. In addition, Raleigh's business community remained consistently supportive of strong schools throughout the county over a period of more than three decades. Thus, Raleigh's 2009 school board election appeared to reflect only a brief hiatus in community sentiment that has favored school diversity over many years.

Of course, it is much easier to prescribe these actions than to accomplish them. But in our judgment, it's certainly worth the effort if we aim to create public schools that provide a high quality of education to all children. Recent reports of the apparent failures of 21st century reforms to systematically improve outcomes and narrow racial and SES gaps are sobering (Goldstein, 2019; Green and Goldstein, 2019). Perhaps, as Hochschild (1997) observed, paraphrasing what Winston Churchill said about democracy, "School desegregation is the worst option, except for all the others."

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Appendix 1. Belief Statements Contributing to Attitudes Toward Diverse Education

Attitudes Toward Diverse Education and Related Constructs	Belief Statements Comprising Attitudes	Cronbach's Alpha
Support for Racial & SES Diversity in Schools[a]	Students learn best in racially diverse schools. Students learn best in economically diverse schools. Students learn best in racially diverse classrooms. Students learn best in economically diverse classrooms.	.91
Social Purpose Politics[b]	In making decisions, the school system needs to consider what's best for the whole community even if its decisions upset some parents.	N.A.

[a] 1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree.
[b] 1 = very favorable, 5 = very unfavorable.

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