

Milliken v. Bradley
418 U.S. 717 (1974)

Identification of the Case (Brief Fact Summary)

Detroit Public Schools was inherently segregated due to the high number of black families living within the district's zone. A suit was brought against Michigan Governor William Milliken in 1970 by the NAACP claiming that the segregation in the school district was directly related to official policies of housing practiced and educational zoning.

Action Sought

Plaintiff sought to reverse the lower court's ruling to consolidate the Detroit Public School System with surrounding school districts in order to achieve acceptable levels of desegregation.

Facts of the Case

In 1970, the NAACP brought suit against Governor Milliken claiming that although the Detroit Public Schools did not practice or have policies purposefully segregating students in the district, there was inherent segregation due to housing policies that stem from the pre-Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the current zoning policies of the school district. The NAACP wanted the zones to be re-drawn and include the surrounding mostly white suburbs to achieve appropriate levels of desegregation within the district schools. The motion was denied on the first attempt; however, the Sixth Court of Appeals remanded the case back to the District Court where the State of Michigan and the school districts were held accountable for the segregation and ordered the implementation of a desegregation plan requiring the state to consolidate the district with surrounding districts and institute a busing program in order to meet acceptable desegregation levels. In 1974, Milliken and other officials brought the case before the Supreme Court of the United States.

Question(s) to be Answered by the Court

Do federal courts have the authority to impose a multi-district desegregation plan on schools?
Who is responsible for desegregating schools?

Answer(s) Given by the Court

In a 5 to 4 ruling, the Supreme Court stated that the outlying suburban school districts should not be included in the case because they showed no evidence of segregation.

Reasons for those Answers

The question should only relate to whether or not Detroit Public Schools was using policies to create segregated schools. The ruling stated that school districts were not required to desegregate unless school zones were drawn with racist intent and that there was no "particular racial balance in each 'school, grade or classroom.'" Detroit Public Schools was required to redistribute the white students across the district. The Court also emphasized the importance of local control over the operation of schools.

Significance of the Case

The decision to not allow rezoning to achieve desegregation or levels closer to acceptable desegregation kept students in poor, substandard, underfunded schools and denied students the ability to learn more about the world outside of their microcosm. It also allowed primarily white students in communities with higher socioeconomics to retain the higher funding brought into their school districts. Additionally, white students left the district at an

alarming high rate making the district more segregated than before.

Richmond annexed land from Chesterfield in the 1970s and a couple of schools were 'desegregated' through busing. The result was white-flight and the schools were no longer desegregated. Richmond City Public Schools is currently seeing a shift in demographics. Hispanic students now outnumber white students. Black students still make up approximately two-thirds of the student body but the numbers have been dropping each year while the number of Hispanic and white students has increased. These numbers are not in alignment with our city demographics. According to the 2018 US Census 2018 ACS 5-Year Survey, 47.8% of Richmond self-identified as black or African American, 45.4% self-identified as white or Hispanic. We may be moving toward a more evenly desegregated school district.

Academic Pledge:

"I have neither given nor received help on this work, nor am I aware of any infraction of the Honor Code."