

Marking 50 years since Milliken v. Bradley

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Lily Altavena, May 2025

What was decided in Milliken v. Bradley?

A 1974 U.S. Supreme Court decision that effectively barred districts from desegregating over district boundary lines.

Case came after a years-long battle over proposed attempted desegregation plans and fighting in court. Milliken case started in 1970, after the NAACP sued then-Michigan Gov. William Milliken over what the organization claimed was intentional segregation in Detroit's schools. While a lower court judge ordered Michigan education officials to draw up a desegregation plan involving Detroit and surrounding suburban school districts, the Supreme Court overturned that order, ruling 5-4 that "a federal court may not impose a multidistrict, area-wide remedy" to desegregate schools.

Looking for historical context to tell a modern story



(Detroit Free Press photo circa 2016)

What often gets lost in Detroit's desegregation story is that these efforts were driven in-part for resource equity. Districts like Detroit were funded inequitably, and advocates thought desegregated schools would see more resources.

Joyce Baugh: "The theory behind desegregation, back in the time of Milliken and since, it wasn't that Black kids needed to sit next to white kids and they would learn better... The idea is that the resources would flow."

Finding data... and leaving the house

Intent

Compare school district enrollment
from around the time of Milliken in
metro Detroit to now

How I did it

Emails with state librarians, a 3
hour (round-trip) drive and
several hours taking photos of
archival documents

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
RACIAL ETHNIC CENSUS

1379

BAY CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT 09-010

KAWKAWLIN WEST SCHOOL 5544

		NATIVE AMERICAN		BLACK		ASIAN AMERICAN		LATINO		WHITE		TOTAL
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
STUDENTS	-----	0		0		0		4	2.5	153	97.5	157
PROF. INSTRUG. STAFF	-----	0		0		0		0		6	100.0	6

PRE-K	#K	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8	#9	#10	#11	#12	SP	ED	NON-PUB	OTHER
				20	56	48	33										

TRI COUNTY CENTER 5999

		NATIVE AMERICAN		BLACK		ASIAN AMERICAN		LATINO		WHITE		TOTAL
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
STUDENTS	-----	0		0		0		0		29	100.0	29
PROF. INSTRUG. STAFF	-----	0		0		0		0		2	100.0	2

PRE-K	#K	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8	#9	#10	#11	#12	SP	ED	NON-PUB	OTHER
																	29

WESTERN HIGH SCHOOL SCHOOL 6257

		NATIVE AMERICAN		BLACK		ASIAN AMERICAN		LATINO		WHITE		TOTAL
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
STUDENTS	-----	5	.2	0		1	.4	15	.7	2031	99.0	2052
PROF. INSTRUG. STAFF	-----	0		0		0		0		88	100.0	88

PRE-K	#K	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8	#9	#10	#11	#12	SP	ED	NON-PUB	OTHER

CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT 09-010

		NATIVE AMERICAN		BLACK		ASIAN AMERICAN		LATINO		WHITE		TOTAL
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
STUDENTS	-----	44	.3	238	1.4	19	.1	752	4.4	15887	93.8	16940
PROF. INSTRUG. STAFF	-----	0		13	1.9	0		8	1.1	678	97.0	699

PRE-K	#K	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8	#9	#10	#11	#12	SP	ED	NON-PUB	OTHER
9	1340	1093	1088	1053	1075	1087	1154	1166	1207	1549	1585	1562	1386	252		327	

Understanding the data today - leading with voices

K. Dara Hill: "It was like a Band-Aid, a remedy to the harm that was caused by Milliken v. Bradley.. And so although I lived in a predominantly Black neighborhood, I attended racially integrated citywide schools, which was really an amazing experience."

Racial changes in enrollment in Detroit schools from 1975 to 2024

While some suburban school districts in metro Detroit have become more diverse in the years since a U.S. Supreme Court decision that effectively barred districts from desegregating over city lines, Detroit and a handful of suburbs have become more divided by race since 1975, a Detroit Free Press analysis has found.

