

West Charlotte High School Timeline

Blue: demographic developments

Red: legal developments

Green: local, state, national developments

Purple: West Charlotte High-specific developments

- 1920 Mecklenburg County population 80,695, 33 percent African American.
- 1923 Second Ward High becomes Charlotte's first African American high school.
- 1938 West Charlotte High becomes Charlotte's second African American high school. Clinton Blake appointed principal. Twelve teachers and 442 students in grades 7-10.
- 1941 West Charlotte's first graduating class: 41 girls and 17 boys.
- 1948 NAACP report highlights inequities between Charlotte's black and white high schools.
- 1950 Mecklenburg County population 197,052, 25 percent African American.
- 1954 Supreme Court rules in *Brown v. Board* that segregated schools are unconstitutional.
- West Charlotte High moves to a brand-new building. The old building becomes Northwest Junior High.
- 1957 Four black students start classes at historically white Charlotte schools.
- Harassment of Dorothy Counts at Harding High sparks worldwide publicity.
- 1959 Consolidation of Charlotte City Schools and Mecklenburg County Schools creates Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools.
- 1960 Charlotte sit-ins begin.
- Downtown "urban renewal" project approved by Charlotte City Council.
- 64 percent of African Americans and 15 percent of whites live below the poverty line.
- 1961 Bulldozing begins in Charlotte's Second Ward/Brooklyn neighborhood.
- 1963 Martin Luther King visits Charlotte.
- Restaurant seating desegregated citywide.
- 1965 Bombs explode at homes of four Charlotte activists. The bombers are never identified.
- Julius Chambers files *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools* lawsuit.

- 1966 Clinton Blake retires; replaced by Second Ward principal Spencer Durant.
School board votes to close seven historically black schools.
- 1968 Julius Chambers argues *Swann* lawsuit before federal judge James McMillan.
- 1969 McMillan rules that Charlotte-Mecklenburg must fully desegregate all of its schools.
Because of persisting housing segregation, this will require massive cross-town busing.
School board votes to close seven more historically black schools, including Second Ward High.
Final phase of "urban renewal" begins.
Spencer Durant retires; replaced by former York Road High principal Gerson Stroud.
- 1970 First year of full desegregation.
- 1971 Supreme Court unanimously affirms McMillan's *Swann* decision.
- 1973 Longtime West Charlotte assistant principal "Pop" Miller named principal of historically white East Mecklenburg High.
- 1974 Fearing West Charlotte will be closed, supporters organize petitions and demonstrations.
The grassroots Community Advisory Group makes West Charlotte the lynchpin of a new busing plan. Residents of some of Charlotte's most affluent neighborhoods agree to send their children to West Charlotte. The plan ends four years of intense conflict that had consumed the city.
Gerson Stroud replaced by Sam Haywood, West Charlotte's first white principal.
Haywood takes down memorabilia from the segregated era; longtime staff members Mertye Rice and Marge Belton tell him to put it back.
- 1976 Sam Haywood leaves; John Fries becomes principal.
- 1978 John Fries leaves; Bill McMillan becomes principal.
- 1980 Mecklenburg County population 404,270, 26 percent African American.
Ronald Reagan elected President.
- 1981 Bill McMillan leaves; Richard Cansler becomes principal.
- 1982 First class to spend all 12 years in desegregated schools graduates.

New York Times article highlights Charlotte's busing successes.

Mertye Rice retires. She lauds the graduates of 1982, writing: "this group of youngsters should constantly remind all of us what can be accomplished with courage, patience and determination . . . They dared hope and dream and they made it work."

1983 *A Nation at Risk* warns of "a rising tide of mediocrity in U.S. schools."

1984 Ronald Reagan visits Charlotte, meets icy silence when he calls busing a "failed experiment."

1986 Richard Cansler leaves; Lewis Layne becomes principal.

1988 *Charlotte Observer* series notes that despite requirements of racial balance, economic differences between schools are creating significant inequalities.

1989 Lewis Layne leaves; Barbara Ledford becomes principal.

1990 23 percent of African Americans and 5 percent of whites live below the poverty line.

1991 John Murphy becomes superintendent, promotes "magnet schools" instead of busing.

Wall Street Journal describes West Charlotte as "a warm picture of integrated Young America."

1993 Only 15 percent of Charlotte-Mecklenburg's white students live within four miles of the center city.

1994 Barbara Ledford retires; Will Crawford becomes principal.

1996 Will Crawford leaves; Kenneth Simmons becomes principal.

1997 Kenneth Simmons removed amid heated controversy. Two-thirds of staff members leave. Terry Cline becomes principal.

Capacchione lawsuit filed.

North Carolina begins ranking schools based on standardized test performance.

1999 Terry Cline leaves; Venton Bell becomes principal.

Federal judge Robert Potter rules in *Capacchione* that Charlotte-Mecklenburg must stop using race in student assignment.

2000 Venton Bell retires; Deloris Lee becomes principal.

President George W. Bush signs "No Child Left Behind" legislation.

West Charlotte is ranked the second lowest-performing high school in North Carolina.

- 2003 Charlotte-Mecklenburg debuts a neighborhood-based "choice" plan to replace busing.
West Charlotte becomes the highest-poverty, least diverse high school in the system.
- 2005 Deloris Lee retires; John Modest becomes principal.
Judge Howard Manning, who oversees the *Leandro* school funding case, calls the education offered at Charlotte's high-poverty high schools "academic genocide."
- 2006 Peter Gorman becomes superintendent, promotes strategies of corporate reform.
- 2009 John Modest leaves; Shelton Jeffries becomes principal.
- 2010 Mecklenburg County population 919,628, 31 percent African American.
School board approves hotly contested reorganization plan that closes eight schools, most in African American neighborhoods, and creates west side K-8 schools.
- 2012 Shelton Jeffries leaves; John Wall, Jr. becomes principal.
Project L.I.F.T. begins.
- 2015 John Wall, Jr. leaves; Timisha Barnes-Jones becomes principal