

Female student raising her hand in a science classroom at Hoffman-Boston school, 1950s.

OPPOSITE: Students wait for the opening bell of the school year at the newly integrated Fort Myer elementary school, September 7, 1954.

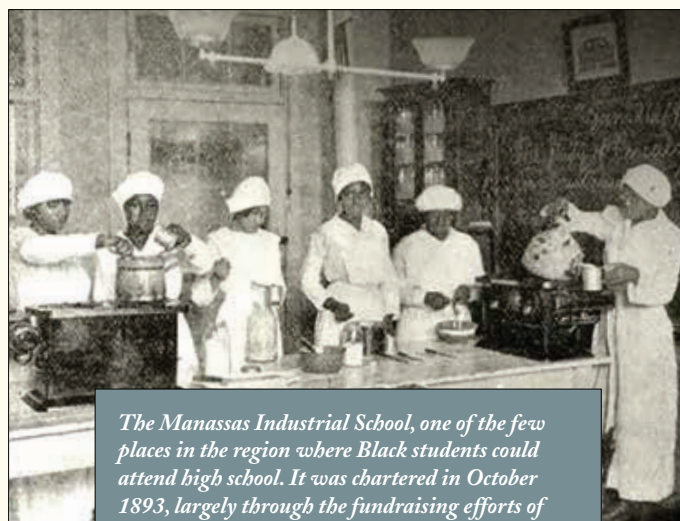
EDUCATION

For generations, Black families have been striving for educational opportunities as a chance at upward mobility, but students of color still face multiple barriers to quality schooling.

For enslaved people, education was a chance at freedom and upward mobility, which is why Virginia forbade education during enslavement.⁷ After Emancipation, freed Black families quickly established schools for Black students across the region, but they received little support from local government. The 1870 law that established Virginia's public school system required separate facilities for white and Black children, and Black schools received little funding, thereby ensuring that facilities, curriculum, teacher salaries, and educational outcomes would suffer. Schools for Black children were often one-room, overcrowded buildings that offered few grade levels, "castoff" books and furniture from white schools, outhouses, and little heat. Many Black students who wanted to attend high school rode trolleys and buses to Washington, D.C. or to the Manassas Industrial School.

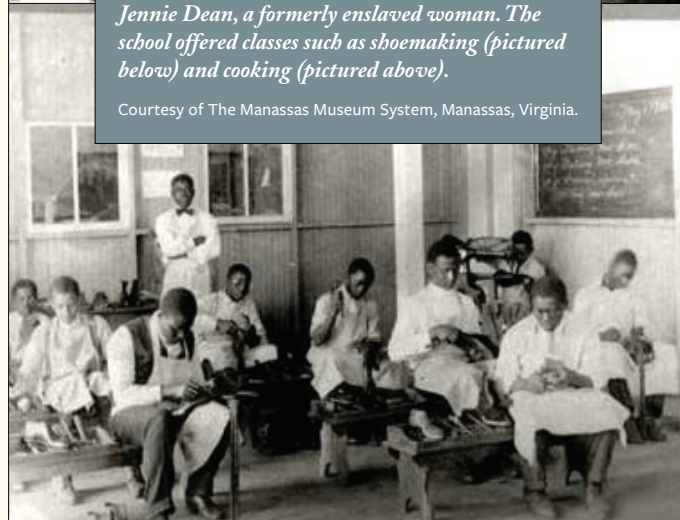
In the 1940s and 1950s, Black parents in Northern Virginia turned to the courts to demand better funding for Black schools and the right to enroll their children in white schools, but progress was slow. Virginia led a group of southern states in a movement known as "Massive Resistance," refusing to honor *Brown v. Board of Education*, the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court decision that prohibited school segregation. In 1956, Virginia passed "emergency" legislation that empowered the governor to close schools that were under court order to integrate, defund schools that did integrate, and give tuition grants to white

parents who enrolled their children in private schools later known as "segregation academies." A state board limited how many Black pupils could transfer to white schools, citing the psychological burden on white students and other racist criteria. Television news cameras were rolling in February 1959 when four Black children received police protection upon entering Arlington's Stratford Junior High School, the first Virginia school to desegregate.



The Manassas Industrial School, one of the few places in the region where Black students could attend high school. It was chartered in October 1893, largely through the fundraising efforts of Jennie Dean, a formerly enslaved woman. The school offered classes such as shoemaking (pictured below) and cooking (pictured above).

Courtesy of The Manassas Museum System, Manassas, Virginia.



7. More educational opportunities were available to Black students in the District of Columbia which, until 1846, included parts of Alexandria and Arlington County.



Although the 1964 Civil Rights Act prohibited school segregation based on race, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1974 that school districts were generally not required to desegregate. White parents moved to outlying areas of Northern Virginia where schools had fewer minorities. This “white flight,” combined with exclusionary zoning and housing prices that kept people of color from joining them, heightened the racial segregation of neighborhoods (and classrooms). Although graduation rates among Black students have since increased, educational disparities persist. For example, the proportion of white and Black 8th graders in Fairfax County who passed the 2018–2019 Standards of Learning examination for mathematics was 91% and 74%, respectively. Students of color are more likely to be in schools that are inadequately funded, cannot retain teachers, and offer fewer advanced classes.

School segregation is worsening in Virginia. A student’s zip code matters — educational resources and outcomes are connected to a child’s neighborhood, largely because schools are funded by property taxes. The disparity in local tax revenue for schools, combined with residential segregation, ensures that middle- to high-income, predominantly white school districts, which typically require fewer resources to succeed, receive more funding than schools in low-income, mostly minority neighborhoods with greater needs. In addition to disparities between districts, segregation within districts is also prevalent and is estimated to contribute to at least half of all multiracial school segregation in Virginia.

The ability of Black students to obtain an education is also impacted by society’s tendency to criminalize Black people, which often starts

1. White supremacists seized a meeting room at Annandale High School on April 30, 1954, forcing a Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) workshop on integration to move outside onto the school lawn; **2.** Students affected by an upcoming court order to end segregation in Alexandria public schools play together on February 4, 1959, days before entering formerly all-white schools; **3.** Black children and their parents leave the Alexandria courthouse on September 8, 1958 after being denied an injunction to end segregation of the city’s schools. At the time, Virginia state law required the closure of any public school system that admitted Black students to white schools, as part of Virginia’s “massive resistance” to the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision; **4.** A building in Arlington selected to serve as a whites-only school in the event the state of Virginia closed Arlington’s public schools to resist desegregation, July 17, 1958. Whites-only “segregation academies” became common across the South. Note the misspelling (“grammer”) on the sign. **CENTER:** Table contrasting resources for white and Black schools in 1935 and 1945 school board budgets. From a flyer written by the civil rights activist Edwin Bancroft (E.B.) Henderson and distributed by the Fairfax County NAACP to call attention to school conditions that were separate but hardly equal. The flyer appears in Henderson’s *History of the Fairfax County Branch of the NAACP*.

Photos 1–4 Reprinted with permission of the DC Public Library, Star Collection © *Washington Post*. Center photo: Printed with the permission of the Tinner Hill Heritage Foundation, Inc: Henderson Family Collection.





**OUR DISGRACE AND SHAME
SCHOOL FACILITIES FOR NEGRO CHILDREN IN
FAIRFAX COUNTY**

- | WHITE SCHOOLS | NEGRO SCHOOLS |
|---|---|
| 1 All brick or stone, except 4 wooden buildings | 1 One to three room wooden buildings |
| 2 Have running water, janitorial service, inside toilets, central heating | 2 All have outside "pit" toilets for teachers and children, no running water; all stoves in the rooms |
| 3 Children ride in heated busses. | 3 No janitorial service—teachers do all cleaning, haul water, make fires |
| | 4 Three schools have no water on premises |
| | 5 Some children walk from 4 to 6 miles to school |
| | 6 Buses are old and rickety and are not heated. |

HOW SCHOOL FUNDS ARE SHARED

In 1935 the School Board sought a grant of \$153,022.50 from PWA and a bond issue (which was defeated) to raise \$187,027.50. Of this total of \$340,050.00 it was proposed to spend for:

WHITE SCHOOLS \$330,750—97.4 per cent
 COLORED SCHOOLS 9,000— 2.6 per cent

In 1935 this county owed the State Literary Fund \$188,739.32 (all of which had been spent on white schools). In that year the colored population of the county was 19 per cent.

The 1945-46 PROPOSED budget provided among other items:

FOR WHITE SCHOOLS	FOR COLORED SCHOOLS
Administration \$18,380	0
Operation of School	?
Plant 80,350	
(Salary of janitor, light, telephone and fuel)	
Capital Outlay \$745,000	\$45,000

The following proposed expenditures of a proposed loan from the State Literary fund were approved:

WHITE SCHOOLS	COLORED SCHOOLS
\$50,000 for Herndon High School	0
\$40,000 for 2 classrooms, wash room and cafeteria at Vienna	0
\$20,000 for 2 classrooms at Lincolina	0
\$10,000 to complete 2 classrooms at Groveton	0
\$40,000 additional was secured to add elementary rooms to Madison School	



with youth. The “school to prison pipeline” is a major problem in Virginia; in 2011–2012, Virginia schools referred Black students to police and courts at three times the national average. This process starts early; within K–12, school suspension and other forms of punishment disproportionately affect Black students, and carry long-term consequences for educational outcomes. In the 2015–2016 school year, Black students in Fairfax County were three times more likely to be suspended than white students.

Barriers to education continue beyond primary and secondary education. Tuition costs, standardized tests that favor whites, and biased admission policies exacerbate disparities in higher education. Most Black parents have not acquired or inherited the family savings that

enable many white families to pay for college, in part because of the barriers they and their ancestors faced in gainful employment and property ownership. As a consequence, at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, advances in Black students’ enrollment have been accompanied by some of the lowest persistence rates, highest undergraduate dropout rates, highest borrowing rates, and largest debt burdens of any racial group. In Fairfax County, 74% of white adults, but only 46% of Black adults, hold a Bachelor’s degree. Even with a bachelor’s degree, Black professionals in the United States who are aged 25 to 34 earn 15% less than the average earnings of all bachelor’s graduates of the same age, and their unemployment rate is two-thirds higher. These economic challenges, in turn, affect their ability to afford housing and the high cost of living in Northern Virginia. ❁

BELOW: Lance Newman (far left) and Ronald Deskin (second to left) leave Stratford Junior High School with other students, two days after the school became the first integrated school in Virginia. The two boys were among the first four Black students admitted by the formerly all-white school, 1959.



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The “**school to prison pipeline**” is a major problem in Virginia.

In 2011–2012, Virginia schools referred Black students to police and courts at **three times the national average.**

▲ Source: The US Department of Education Office of Civil Rights data collection on school discipline.

In the 2015–2016 school year, Black students in Fairfax County were **three times more likely** to be suspended than white students.

▲ Source: Fairfax County Public Schools, Student Behavior, Discipline, and Disproportionality: Phase 3 Executive Summary, 2019.



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SOURCE: Fairfax County. Fairfax Economic Success Strategic Plan, 2019.

CHANGING *THE* FUTURE

School districts in Northern Virginia should strengthen initiatives to reduce dropout rates among students of color, increase high school graduation rates, and prepare students adequately for college or vocations.

- State and local governments can promote policies at the school district level by working to adjust attendance boundaries to increase diversity, update funding formulas to deal adequately with fiscal needs, invest adequately in under-resourced school divisions, and expand broadband access throughout Northern Virginia.
- More proactive efforts are needed to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline and address racial bias in disciplinary suspensions, such as abolishing zero-tolerance policies, eliminating punishment for subjective offences, removing police officers from schools, and implementing programs for restorative justice. Fairfax County, for example, has focused on supporting positive behavior, increasing availability of apprenticeships and career academies that provide work experience, and expanding advanced academic programs; other jurisdictions should consider similar strategies.
- An important goal that can reduce bias in disciplinary suspensions and improve educational outcomes is to increase the diversity of the teacher workforce, which in many Northern Virginia jurisdictions is overwhelmingly white. Increasing the likelihood that students of color will interact with teachers who look like themselves is known to improve educational outcomes.
- Maintaining a diverse workforce requires not only hiring more teachers of color but also enacting policies to retain them, such as easing debt burdens, changing the school culture to create a more welcoming climate for teachers (and students and families) of color, and requiring recurring cultural-competency training as part of the teacher certification process.
- Students of color may also benefit from mentorship programs, as studies suggest that a student's personal connection with a teacher or another adult may influence college persistence and success.
- Expanding access to early childhood education and addressing health inequities among students of color are also effective strategies to improve educational outcomes. Several Northern Virginia jurisdictions are exploring the feasibility of community school or "whole school" models that address the social, emotional, physical, and academic needs of students.
- Initiatives to prioritize access to college for students of color—including reducing tuition costs, addressing biases in standardized testing and admission decisions, providing free two-year college, and reducing student loan burden—should be implemented. And Governor Northam's proposal for a tuition-free community college program for low- and middle-income students should move forward.

STORIES OF RESILIENCE

Black history is a story of resilience in defiance of displacement and discrimination. From the 1800s onward, Black families have been determined to establish communities and open businesses, churches, and schools. With little help from local governments, and often deprived of basic utilities such as electricity or plumbing, Black residents came together to find solutions. Oral histories from residents of these communities tell stories of folks looking out for one another and a strong sense of community.



Some Black contractors built homes for Black families that white builders turned away. Two formerly enslaved men, Henry Holmes and William Butler, became developers, building the Butler-Holmes subdivision in the Penrose section of Arlington in 1882. And Richard Drew, an Arlington carpenter, put his son through medical school. **Dr. Charles Drew (1904–1950) pioneered blood transfusion** for the military and became known as “the father of blood banking.”

ABOVE: Cartoon for the Office of War Information describing Dr. Charles Richard Drew, by Charles Alston, 1943. National Archives.

When the Union Army occupied Alexandria early in the Civil War, **the Black community began opening schools at a remarkable speed, led by women such as Anna Bell Davis, Mary Chase, Jane Crouch, and Harriet Jacobs.** The Columbia Street School and Saint Rose Institute opened in 1861; the First Select Colored School, Beulah Normal and Theological Institute, and Leland Warring school in 1862; the Union Town School, Sicles Barracks School, and Newtown School in 1863, and the Jacobs Free School in 1864.



ABOVE: Portrait of Harriet Jacobs, 1894. Wikicommons, public domain.

Students at the Fairfax African American school, established in the 1870s, used an outhouse and relied on a pot-bellied stove for heat; **in the winter, the students’ dedicated teacher, Minnie Hughes, was known to pour hot water from a kettle to warm their hands.** Hughes received no regular pay until 1916, and then received \$8 per month.

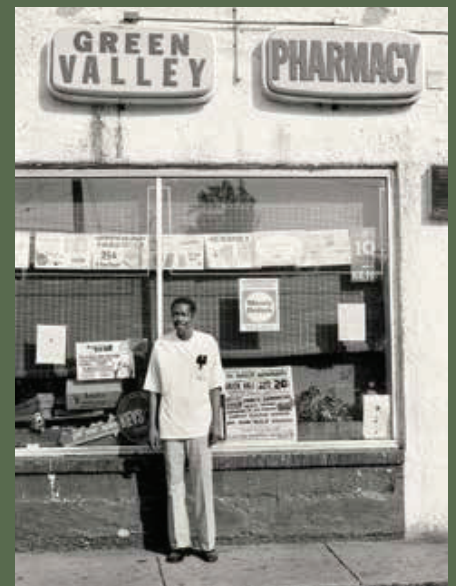


The success of the prominent Syphax family of Arlington

began when George Washington Parke Custis, the grandson of Martha Washington, manumitted his enslaved maid, Maria Carter Syphax. The Syphax family acquired 17 acres of his Arlington plantation in 1866, where they built a house and farm. Maria's son William went on to work in the U.S. Department of the Interior, and John served as a delegate to the Virginia legislature.

ABOVE: Portrait of Maria Carter Syphax, 1870 Wikicommons, public domain.

LEFT: Portrait of William Syphax, son of Maria and Charles Syphax. Wikicommons, public domain.



Levi Jones, whose parents were enslaved by George Washington, bought land in Green Valley and built a house in 1844. **His family and the Black settlers who followed** after the Civil War were resourceful in accumulating property and building a thriving Black community that included churches and schools. The success stories included William Augustus Rowe, a former slave who became a district representative; Selina Gray, the former maid for Robert E. Lee's wife, who acquired land that became "Gray's subdivision" in 1913; her son Harry Gray, a mason who had a 30-year career in the U.S. Department of the Interior; and Howard University School of Pharmacy graduate **Leonard "Doc" Muse** (pictured above) owner of Green Valley Pharmacy, a fixture of the Nauck community and likely the first Black-owned pharmacy in Arlington. Muse opened the pharmacy in 1952, during a time when most pharmacies did not welcome the Black community.

ABOVE: Leonard "Doc" Muse in front of Green Valley Pharmacy, 1980. Courtesy of the Arlington Photographic Documentary Project, photo by Lloyd Wolf.