

Brown v. Board of Education
50th Anniversary, May 17, 2004
Danville, Virginia

Timeline

- 1954 - On May 17 the United States Supreme Court repudiates the doctrine of "separate but equal" facilities based on race (Plessy v. Ferguson, 163 U.S. 537) and declares segregated education in the public schools unconstitutional. Their decision in Brown v. Board of Education (347 U.S. 483) provides the legal foundation for school integration throughout the United States.
- 1956 - Harry Byrd, an ardent segregationist and political kingmaker, leads a "massive resistance" movement in Virginia to challenge the high court's decision on desegregation. Claiming judicial overreach into state's rights, the governor and general assembly pass laws to block school integration by withholding money for its implementation.
- 1959 - Decisions by the Virginia Supreme Court and a federal court render Virginia's "massive resistance" laws unconstitutional. State business leaders meet with governor Lindsay Almond and persuade him to abandon his opposition to court mandated desegregation.
- 1960 - Sacred Heart Catholic School, a parochial school established 1954 in Danville, admits children from two black Roman Catholic families and becomes the first school in the city to begin integration.
- Governor Almond directs all school districts in Virginia to integrate, thus ending the campaign of "massive resistance."
- 1964 - The U.S. Congress passes the Civil Rights Act (Public Law 88-352)
- The first black students attend George Washington High School in Danville under a "freedom of choice" plan, which allows any students to select either the formerly all black Langston High School or the formerly all white G.W.H.S. The lack of school buses and the city's demographics severely limit the plan's effectiveness, and no white students choose Langston High School.
- 1968 - The Supreme Court in Green v. New Kent County (391 U.S. 430) declares such "freedom of choice plans" ineffectual in ending

segregation and orders the schools to find a new approach to achieve integration.

Charles H. Harris is elected to the Danville City Council, the first black to sit on the council since Reconstruction. Voter registration in the black community soars, providing him a firm political base to push for full integration.

1969 - The U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare approves Danville's new desegregation plan. The administration and faculty of both high schools, guided by school superintendent O.T. Bonner and high school principal E.T. Motley, begin planning the transition.

1970 - George Washington High School starts its first year as a fully integrated high school. On September 11, a scuffle between two youths, one white and the other black, breaks out at a high school football game and rapidly escalates into a racial conflict between the students. To quell any further disturbances, the public schools are closed on September 15 and re-opened the following day under a strict "get tough" policy enforced by the local police. The week closes out without any major confrontations.

Averett College integrates its programs.

The local Y.W.C.A. combines its two racially segregated programs into one integrated program.

1980 - After serving on the Danville City Council for over 20 years, Charles Harris is elected the first black mayor of the city.

2000- According to the National Center of Education, the racial composition of George Washington High School stands at 39.2% white and 59.7% black.

Exhibit compiled by Clara G. Fountain and James Verdini
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