

15 - 17 May 2026

Rome , Italy

Prince Edward County School Closing: a Compilation of Research Studies

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Abstract

This conference presentation examines the long-term educational and social consequences of the 1959–1964 public school closure in Prince Edward County, Virginia—the only U.S. school district to close its public schools for five years in defiance of the Supreme Court’s *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision. Although *Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County* was one of the five cases consolidated into *Brown*, local officials responded to desegregation mandates by defunding public education entirely, leaving approximately 1,700 African American students without access to formal public schooling. Featured in the newly released volume *Prince Edward County, Virginia School Closing: A Compilation of Research Studies* by Terence Hicks, this presentation situates the school closings within broader themes of massive resistance, the Civil Rights Movement, memory and racial healing, socialization, restorative justice, silence, and the importance of place.

Focusing on findings from Chapter 1 of the *Prince Edward County, Virginia School Closing* book, this presentation investigates the restorative justice potential of the Brown Scholarship Fund through an ethnographic case study of 14 Black scholarship recipients. The study addresses three central questions: recipients’ initial perceptions of the scholarship, the impact of the fund on their lives, and their recommendations for achieving restorative justice through the program. Findings reveal age-mitigated material benefits, literacy exclusion, personal growth, and persistent racial divides. Analysis further demonstrates that the scholarship program inadequately addressed emotional harms, excluded displaced populations, minimized historical visibility, and failed to engage future generations. The voices of those most harmed were largely absent from policy design, which occurred in segregated spaces and ultimately limited the fund’s justice potential. The presentation underscores the necessity of centering impacted communities in reparative educational policy.

Keywords: Integration; Resistance; Justice; Socialization; Social Science