



ISSUES IN EDUCATION SERIES

**Education and Poverty
in
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools**

By J. Mitchell Aberman

July 2008

A conservative community's interests
are promoted by giving every child
a top-notch education

The Swann Fellowship

1510 E. 7th St. Charlotte, NC 28204 www.swannfellowship.org

*This is the inaugural monograph in a series on issues facing our community.
Author J. Mitchell Aberman is a Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools parent and a business lawyer in private practice.
He is a member of the board of the Swann Fellowship.*

This paper may be downloaded as a PDF file from the website listed below.

080814

The Swann Fellowship is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit formed in 1997 to advocate for quality, equitable, integrated public education. More information is available at our website.

The Swann Fellowship

1510 E.7th St. Charlotte, NC 28204
704-408-3348 www.swannfellowship.org swannfello@aol.com
Leonard R. (Deacon) Jones, President

Executive Summary

Poverty has progressively concentrated in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School System since conclusion of the federal desegregation case and introduction of a “Choice Plan” in 2002. The number of schools in which more than 90% of the students are eligible for free and reduced lunch (“extreme high poverty schools”) has increased every year. Several schools have poverty levels exceeding 94%.¹

As the poverty level in a school increases, the problems that poverty presents do not increase proportionately. It is much worse. They compound.

As discussed below, a viable solution will cost a lot of money. However, moral issues aside, fiscally conservative citizens shortchange themselves by not ponying up to rescue low-performing, high-poverty schools. Most of the impoverished students leave school between ages 15 and 18 without the basic academic preparation and impulse control skills needed to obtain and hold a productive job (much less obtain higher education). When they leave the school system, they do not simply disappear. They remain in the community doing *something* with the time on their hands. If the activity cannot be productive, there is a high probability it will be criminal or otherwise burdensome. There is a direct relationship between criminal home invasions and CMS failures.

The responses of CMS to the needs of extreme high poverty amounts to rearranging deck chairs on the sinking Titanic. CMS has been constrained by funding but also by its inherent reluctance to make dramatic changes.

Rigorously enforced pacing guidelines assure that the minimum curriculum is covered, but there is a difference between covering information and teaching it. Students who miss a unit are left unable to grasp material that builds on the unlearned lesson. Students who simply cannot keep pace have no hope. Meanwhile, high-poverty schools lack the resources to provide individual attention to the large numbers of ill-prepared students, and the teachers are not permitted to vary the curriculum or the pace. The phrase “making education available” reflects the CMS misunderstanding that covering material is equivalent to teaching it.

Ironically, the North Carolina statutes anticipate this issue and require a “Personal Education Plan” for students who fail core subjects. This means that the school must apply “focused intervention” and instruction that is “specifically designed” for the student. Presently, a majority of students in many high-poverty schools are entitled to “personal” plans. In most instances, they are getting one-size-fits-all-failing-student plans that actually entail no more efforts for any particular student than would otherwise be expended. There is no actual personalization for most failing students in high-poverty schools.

It is at the elementary level that students become irretrievably lost. Conversely, the best return on efforts to teach high-poverty students will occur at the elementary level, given that many older students are already in too deep of an educational hole to be rescued, except by extraordinarily intensive effort that will rarely be applied. CMS must divert its concentrated efforts to elementary schools. Presently, only two out of 44 low-performing elementary schools are included in the CMS “Achievement Zone” reserved for schools needing special attention. CMS has failed to recognize the importance of addressing problems of low achievement at the elementary level.

CMS could reduce the number of high-poverty schools. In many instances it would not require long-distance busing to do so. Much of the separation between affluence and poverty is intentionally maintained to protect the “success” of more affluent schools and thereby avoid “white flight” or “bright flight” that occurs when significant numbers of low-income students are assigned to affluent schools. In at least one instance, an extreme high-poverty school sits approximately 100 feet from the boundary of an affluent school. Political forces make it extraordinarily unlikely that the school board will reverse the inequitable assignment trend voluntarily. Accordingly, this paper focuses on measures that CMS should take to at least mitigate the effects of concentrated poverty in schools.

It will take innovative policies, enthusiastic teachers and far more money.

Regarding policies, children are less likely to fall behind if they receive individual attention and encouragement. When a child does not grasp the content of a lesson, the way to tell him is not through a

poor grade on his paper and perhaps a general invitation for tutoring. The new regimen should expect that a teacher will talk directly with the student and go over the material – every time. This requires much smaller class sizes. At the same time, bright students require encouragement and advanced material to avoid becoming bored, detached from school and being penalized for having been assigned to a school that is otherwise focused on achieving minimum competencies.

The best teachers will more likely be the most enthusiastic and highly motivated ones. Compensation policies should provide incentives and rewards to not only teach the most difficult children at the highest-poverty schools, but also to succeed in growing their performance. CMS has the metrics to measure growth on an individual classroom basis (and on an individual student basis). CMS should provide relatively modest compensation for teachers at affluent schools. It should provide large competitive bonuses to teachers who achieve the highest growth in test scores (which will likely occur mostly in high-poverty schools, since they have the lowest baselines). And CMS should provide incentives for teachers in the system to transfer to classrooms that have the largest potential for improvement.

If we resign ourselves to “let the devil take the hindmost,” the devil will accept the offer, and the community will pay the costs of crime, jail bonds and court and jail system operating expense, as well as more public welfare expense. It costs between \$8,000 and \$9,000 to educate the average child in CMS. It costs in excess of \$25,000 to incarcerate many, if not most, of the failures of CMS. Our community can spend a lot more than the current amount on impoverished students and ultimately save money if the money is well spent on teaching. How much should we spend on high-poverty students? As much as it takes to get the job done. It could mean a sea-change in funding.

In short, our community is turning progressively more schools into high-poverty factories of educational failure. The attempts by CMS to deal with the problem have been ill-focused on upper grades, have been overly regimented, and have failed to recognize the need to connect with individual students. They have been woefully constrained by insufficient funds and the political difficulty of allocating far more resources to high-poverty schools than to affluent ones.

We need an epiphany, shared by the voters and Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners, as well as by the CMS Board of Education and staff. They need to realize that, for the sake of community as a whole, each individual student in high-poverty schools must be reached and encouraged, as well as taught; they must develop a new teaching approach with the necessary funding allocations by working backwards from that objective. CMS needs to do this immediately, before the next class of kindergarten children embark on a hopeless educational journey.

Recommendation

Provide a personalized education to each child in the high-poverty schools. Revise the pedagogy to entail direct, personalized interaction between teacher and student with regard to each lesson. As an integral part of the pedagogy, teachers should continually communicate high expectations to each child. Start with the elementary schools. Meanwhile, County Commissioners and voters will need to fund a higher cost and reconcile themselves to greater expenditures in the high-poverty schools. The costs will be more than recovered in savings when the students mature.

Concentration of poverty makes a difficult job more difficult

With too few exceptions, it is easier to educate a child from an affluent household than one who lives in poverty. There are many different reasons for this. Some of the effect may be due to the fact that education tends to correlate with economic success, and therefore many children from poverty are raised by adults who do not appreciate the importance of educational success or the rigor that it takes to achieve it. Many other economically disadvantaged students have parents or care-givers who very much appreciate education but lack the ability to help their child, either due to their own lack of education or on account of the pressures that living in poverty place on the time of adults trying to support a household, i.e., multiple jobs, long waits for transportation, et cetera.

Children from poverty also frequently lack the necessary focus and impulse control skills that are necessary for efficient learning.

A graph charting each CMS elementary school's test scores against an indicator of the enrolled children's poverty produces a clear visual image of the correlation between poverty and low academic achievement. The two lines form an unmistakable "X." [Chart, page 12.] As poverty goes up, scores come down.

Accordingly, when we fill a school exclusively with impoverished children, we get the personal problems of each individual child, the negative reinforcing behavior of a large number of other such children, and a dearth of positive peer models. Add to this a near total absence of parents who provide educational enrichment materials and many hours of volunteer tutorial and other classroom support in affluent schools.

The League of Women Voters referenced a "failure [of CMS] to account for the exponential rise in educational challenge that occurs as a school's percentage of FRL (free and reduced lunch) students rises."² The League noted:

Research shows clearly that as a school's poverty level rises, its challenges grow exponentially. A school with 60% of students on FRL faces far steeper challenges than one with 30 percent of students on FRL.³

The League addressed the exponential growth of challenges when a school's poverty level goes from 30% to 60%. Consider what the effect must be when it goes from 90% to 99%. In an elementary school of 500 students and 60% poverty, there are still parents of 200 students with some spare resources that can support the mission of the school and the education of their 200 students. At 90% poverty, there are 50 students having such parents. At 99%, there are theoretically five out of 500 students in the school who have such parents, and there is a good chance that those five simply did not take the steps to qualify for free or reduced lunch.⁴

CMS attempts to deal with high-poverty schools

After the federal court effectively prohibited racial considerations in the assignment of students, CMS implemented a "Choice Plan" that evolved into an assignment program based on neighborhood schools. The schools rapidly resegregated by both race and economic status. Neither the Board of Education nor the community is willing to entertain the notion of reducing the number of high-poverty schools by altering the assignment principles that create them.

CMS has tried various approaches to deal with high-poverty schools. It has created a special "Achievement Zone," (which inexplicably includes only two elementary schools). It has transferred highly respected and previously successful principals to low-performing, high-poverty schools. It has tried designating schools with a high percentage of FRL students as FOCUS schools and mandating (but not always funding) certain programs for them. More recently, it has tried to provide "Weighted Student Funding (WSF)," in which each FRL student is weighted at 1.3 times a non-FRL student, and the schools are theoretically funded based on the resulting weights.

Increased funding is not a solution to the problems, but rather only a means of paying for solutions

that have yet to be identified (or at least have yet to be significantly implemented). However, effective strategies to educate children in high-poverty schools will require a lot more funding than the 30% premium that CMS allocated under the last round of WSF.

Other efforts by CMS have generally been reasonable but piecemeal. As noted, CMS has moved experienced principals to schools generating very low test scores, with mixed results. Good principals are critically important, and a good principal will serve as the linchpin of a successful turnaround. However, the presence of a good principal is still only one necessary component toward having the right teachers in the classrooms pursuing the right strategies. A lot of the frustration is attributable to the continued absence of the “right” teachers and the lack of strategies that are sufficiently oriented toward individual disadvantaged students.

CMS has also placed eleven schools in the “Achievement Zone.” According to CMS,

The purpose of the Achievement Zone is to provide these struggling schools with the resources they need to succeed. Because these schools need the most help, they will get the most help. These schools will be first in line for resources, including proven teachers and strong principals. They will also be first in line for additional services, including public relations/volunteer partnerships assistance, support staffing and maintenance.

At present, it is too early to tell whether placement in the Achievement Zone is effective. However, only two elementary schools are in the Achievement Zone, and neither is in the bottom 10 of poverty (measured by percentage of FRL students), nor is either school in the bottom four in academic performance. Accordingly, the most challenged schools in both of these categories did not make it into the Achievement Zone.

CMS has generally continued to fund the high-poverty elementary schools at a higher level per student than the more affluent schools. However, the funding differentials still do not permit the 16 to one student-teacher ratios that CMS had announced would be implemented; most classes reportedly have 24 or 25 students. As importantly, most of the schools are pursuing a centrally planned, lockstep curriculum, without personalized education (discussed below), and most of the high-poverty schools remain on the bottom in terms of academic achievement.

Solving the problem one student at a time

Presently, elementary school (and most other) teachers follow a rigorous state-mandated pacing guideline. They must cover the entire North Carolina Standard Course Of Study for each subject at a prescribed pace over the school year. Meanwhile, they must somehow teach each day’s material to the students who may be unprepared to receive it or who may grasp it more slowly. The teachers must simultaneously conform to rigorous paperwork requirements, preparing a written lesson plan for each school day, and they must deal with the disciplinary issues and social issues (e.g., hunger, lack of school materials, lack of sleep, homelessness, truancy) that high-poverty students frequently present.

Some children fall behind. Once that happens, particularly at the elementary school level in reading or math, there is little hope for the child to catch up. Particularly in the high-poverty schools, there are few resources to help the many lagging children master the material they have missed and then accelerate forward to where the class is.

Even when material is first presented, with the still large classes that current funding levels necessitate, it is difficult for a teacher to have the sort of eye-to-eye discussion with a student to ascertain the nature of any problem, to explain the difficult aspects, and to watch the child perform in order to convey the necessary encouragement that he or she has mastered the material and can master the next step. Instead, teachers are constrained by the unrelenting pressure of pacing guidelines to present the material, give a test, grade the test, and move on. Children drop off to the sides like victims of an academic Bataan death march. There is little opportunity for the teacher to work intensely with each of the academically needy children in a high-poverty elementary school class.

Assuming that the 30% WSF premium is entirely used for additional teaching, it works out to, at best, an extra third of a teacher for a classroom that probably has nearly every child needing individual attention while the main teacher proceeds through the required material at the prescribed pace.

A study published in the journal *Science* tracked inner-city Milwaukee students who were randomly placed in a Montessori elementary program against peers who were placed in ordinary public schools. The students came from lower income, although not impoverished, families. The Montessori primary students performed marginally better on academic tests (despite the fact that testing and grading were not part of their academic program) and produced essays that were rated as “significantly more creative and as using significantly more sophisticated sentence structures.” The Montessori students also tested better on “executive function,” the ability to adapt to changing and more complex problems, an indicator of future school and life success.

The Montessori curriculum does not necessarily explain the difference. Instead, it is that the Montessori teaching method relies upon direct interaction between the teacher, who sits down with the student, frequently on a mat on the floor, evaluates the child’s mastery of a lesson and then gives the next lesson. The direct launch of the child into the next lesson communicates a belief that he or she will master it as well. Contrast this interaction with a classroom in which children sitting in rows of desks receive a broadcast from the front of the room, hand in homework papers and receive them marked up, and hand in tests and receive them marked up. They may be invited for additional tutorial, but in a high-poverty school, nearly all of the children will need to be invited to share in any tutorial effort, which somewhat dilutes the effectiveness if individual attention is needed.

In 1981, Eugene Lang returned to his old elementary school in East Harlem as the commencement speaker to the graduating sixth-grade class. On his way to the podium, the principal told him that this would likely be the last graduation for three out of four of the students. Looking over the sixth-graders assembled, Lang impulsively promised a college education to any of the students who graduated from high school. Going forward, Lang funded afterschool tutoring and enrichment programs for the 61 students. Ninety percent graduated from high school or obtained a GED, and 60% pursued higher education. In 1986, Lang formed the national “I Have A Dream” Foundation. Since then, 199 “I Have A Dream” programs have operated in 27 states and served over 15,000 students.⁵

Inspired by Lang, George Weiss, a Connecticut investment banker, made a similar offer in 1987 to a sixth-grade graduating class of an inner city Philadelphia school. Known as the “Belmont 112,” the students were tracked by the Philadelphia Inquirer for the next 20 years. One of them is a NASA aerospace engineer at Mission Control in Houston. One is a Massachusetts real estate investor creating housing for migrant workers. One teaches health and nutrition to pregnant teens. One writes movie scripts. High school graduates constitute 62% of the class, more than double the norm. College graduates constitute nearly 19%. The class holds 21 bachelor’s degrees, 10 associate degrees, 14 vocational certificates.⁶

Closer to home, Dr. Cindy Moss voluntarily took a class of consistently failing students at Independence High School; the students were reading on an average fourth-grade level. Dr. Moss served her biology students as a literacy teacher, study skills instructor, motivator, and guidance counselor, and by the end of the year the students all passed their end-of course exams in not only biology, but in their other courses as well.⁷ All of the students were accepted by colleges.⁸ Meanwhile, Dr. Moss won a prestigious Milken Family Foundation National Educator Award.⁹

Children tend to meet our expectations. Low expectations almost guarantee low performance. Meanwhile, a child who sees a purpose and benefit to education is far more likely to make the necessary effort to complete it than a child who expects a dead end. Nearly all children and adolescents desire some individual recognition. A student from poverty who expects a dead end is more likely to direct his behavior toward becoming someone to be reckoned with, one way or another.

We must reach each child in order to teach the child. Specifically, we need to persuade the child that he or she can succeed in education, and doing this requires that we convey an expectation that the child *will* achieve, while we find a means to ensure that he or she can go as far as the student’s intellectual ability and effort will carry.

Personal Education Plans

North Carolina law currently prescribes the approach that a school system must take to address academic failure. Section 115-105.41 requires that a personal education plan be prepared for each student. The statute reads in pertinent part:

At the beginning of the school year, a personal education plan [“PEP”] for academic improvement with focused intervention and performance benchmarks shall be developed for any student not performing at least at grade level, as identified by the State end-of-grade test. Focused intervention and accelerated activities should include research-based best practices that meet the needs of students and may include coaching, mentoring, tutoring, summer school, Saturday school, and extended days. Local school administrative units shall provide these activities free of charge to students. Local school administrative units shall also provide transportation free of charge to all students for whom transportation is necessary for participation in these activities.

Parents should be included in the implementation and ongoing review of personal education plans.

There is no CMS-wide oversight of implementation of personal education plans. Schools are left to develop and implement the plans. Most of the schools do not implement any sort of personalized plan. In many instances in which a PEP is prepared, the PEP consists of a paper form upon which items representing components of the plan are checked. In the instances reviewed for this paper, none of the measures to be taken in the “personalized” plan represent anything that would not be done in the ordinary course of the academic program, and most of the items are vague and platitudinous. Students are rarely assigned for tutoring, and there are no innovative measures that appear calculated to motivate or inspire the failing student.

The State Board of education has described a PEP as:

focused intervention to all students who do not meet statewide student accountability standards. This intervention shall involve extended instructional opportunities that are different and supplemental and that are specifically designed to improve these students’ performance to grade level proficiency.

If every failing student had *extended* instructional opportunities that were *specifically designed* to improve *that* student’s performance to grade-level proficiency, then the failure rate would decrease dramatically. Unfortunately, CMS lacks the resources to develop a personalized plan to improve each student, much less to undertake the substantial effort that a plan designed to succeed would entail. Accordingly, it is not surprising that most CMS schools treat the PEP statute as merely requiring that a form be filled out, if they even do that.

Reasons to start at the elementary level

Most children from economically poor homes start school with several disadvantages that will impede their learning, relative to other children. They frequently have less exposure to reading, have fewer adults with time to reinforce lessons from school, have poor nourishment, and have disciplinary issues attributable to the limitations of caregivers who are themselves burdened with the disadvantages and challenges of poverty.

If the children are reached and successfully taught at the elementary level, they have a chance to succeed in middle school and high school. If a child falls significantly behind before leaving elementary school, all of the difficulties with which teachers would normally contend in educating the child in middle school are compounded by the academic hole from which the child must be pulled while he or she simultaneously learns more advanced material. Absent the rare gift of a Dr. Moss, or a philanthropist who provides a package of remedial help and inspiration, it does not happen. The child continues to sink, justifiably loses hope and likely becomes a permanent burden upon the community. In short, the educational process in middle-school and high-school is tough enough without having to start from far

behind.

Additionally, from a cold, utilitarian cost-benefit analysis, an effort applied at the elementary school level can potentially produce an educational benefit that extends over more years of school. Additionally, intensive effort at the elementary level will likely produce more benefit than a comparable effort in high school, because the elementary educators contend with fewer adolescent-onset problems and with less effect of peer influence. According to a study by James E. Ryan, a University of Virginia law professor, “a growing body of research confirms that peers generally exert a strong influence on student performance and that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds in particular suffer from being surrounded solely or primarily by students from similarly impoverished backgrounds.”¹⁰ There is generally less effect of peer influence at primary levels.¹¹ Accordingly, efforts to instill values and academic work ethics may encounter less resistance in early years.

Entire community suffers when CMS fails to educate a student

The cumulative effects of isolating high-poverty students are far greater than the readily apparent inability of the student to perform basic academic tasks like reading and simple math calculations.¹²

Nationwide, improving graduation rates would reduce the costs of crime, health care, and poverty to the tune of \$200 billion annually.¹³

A school dropout is more than eight times as likely to be in jail or prison as a high school graduate and nearly 20 times as likely as a college graduate.¹⁴ For each additional year of schooling, the odds that a student will someday commit a crime like murder or assault are reduced by almost one-third.¹⁵ Each year, the United States spends \$9,644 per student compared to \$22,600 per prison inmate (although the disparity in Charlotte is even greater).¹⁶ Increasing the high school completion rate by just 1% for all men ages 20-60 would save the U.S. up to \$1.4 billion per year in reduced costs from crime.¹⁷ In fact, increasing the nationwide graduation rate and college matriculation of male students by only 5% could lead to combined savings and revenue of almost \$8 billion each year.¹⁸

Also, school dropouts are 25 times more likely to be on Medicaid than college graduates, costing states over \$8,000 per dropout per year.¹⁹ Single mothers who are high school dropouts are almost 40% more likely to need family assistance than those mothers with a high school degree; compared to mothers with more than a high school education, that number rises to over 96%.²⁰ If one-third of all Americans without a high school education were to get more education, the savings would range from \$3.8 billion to \$6.7 billion for family assistance, \$3.7 billion for Food Stamps, and \$400 million for housing assistance.²¹

These are national statistics, but it does not take a calculator to interpolate the numbers and realize that educational failure correlates in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg community directly with higher crime and greater tax burdens.

Meanwhile, the etiology of the problem is not hard to figure out. Sixteen- to 19-year-old human beings, with practically no employability, little money, weak impulse control and no expectation of a future – but with a surplus of time on their hands – will more than likely make some bad choices.

Comfortable citizens in southeast Charlotte, enjoying the high-performing schools in their neighborhoods, may choose to not think about the failure of CMS to educate children in high poverty schools. However, it is ironic when the same citizens respond to burglaries and car break-ins with an eagerness to hire off-duty police officers and an overwhelming willingness to pay higher taxes for law enforcement, prosecutors and repayments of ever more jail bonds. They will complain about the long waits in emergency rooms and the cases that could have been abated by prudent primary care; meanwhile, they will pay more for the delivery of that slow emergency room care, because somebody must bear the cost of the people who cannot pay. They do not realize that, putting aside ideological and moral issues, it is all a very bad deal. Although it will cost the community a lot of money to educate children from poverty, it costs a far greater amount not to do so.

Although the role of selfishness and poor analysis should not be underestimated, some of the reluc-

tance to pay more for CMS to educate children in high-poverty schools comes from a perception that CMS would not know what to do with the additional money.

We need a package deal: CMS must commit to a strategy of intensive, personalized education, combined with some means of instilling positive expectations of a future. Again, it is important to start with elementary schools, changing from the approach to education almost entirely to make it holistic and personalized, fine-tuning it for a few years and figuring out how to maintain the benefit of success as the high-poverty students move up into middle and then high schools.

We need the right teachers in high-poverty schools

We believe that, although high-poverty schools tend to have faculty with fewer academic credentials, academic credentials for teachers are not so important. Instead, the high-poverty schools need teachers with at least a modest amount of experience, who crave a challenge, and who are enthusiastic about teaching disadvantaged children.

Additionally, CMS now has the metrics to identify teachers who achieve growth in the performance of students from one year to the next. CMS should use such data to identify teachers who obtain academic growth, and it should use the resulting data to assign the most effective teachers, or entice them, to the high-poverty schools.

CMS should NOT pay large premiums for teachers to go into difficult, high-poverty classrooms. But CMS or somebody else SHOULD pay exceptionally large amounts to teachers who go into difficult, high-poverty classrooms and highly succeed.

For example, we could reward the 20 teachers in the system who achieve the largest improvement with a very large bonus (e.g., \$100,000). Allow the next tier of 200 teachers to obtain bonuses of \$20,000. Use as a baseline the students' previous year's percentile scores. Perhaps have larger prizes that are awarded every five years based on cumulative success over a five-year period. Apparently, CMS currently generates the necessary data to track the improvement of each student from one year to the next with regard to each subject. Teachers in schools that perform so well that the teachers have little room for growth could request to be moved to another opportunity for high growth. The system could also allow for some subjectivity in judging the teachers (which CMS seems to abhor), e.g., by setting aside a few prizes for teachers who perform in unique situations that require a measure of subjective allowance.²²

Charlotte's business community could fund the prizes, much like many members of the Charlotte business community fund endowed chairs at their universities or fund scholarships for athletes at the university level. The Milken family provides such awards on a national level to excellent teachers. Our community could step up with its own version of such awards, with criteria supported by CMS data.

Again, the focus should initially be at the elementary level.

Conclusion

The community suffers from our collective failure to provide a sound, basic education for high-poverty students. Nevertheless, the CMS assignment patterns combine with ineffective teaching measures to produce concentrations of academic failure in our high-poverty schools.

The CMS failures tend not to hold jobs or participate productively in the community as young adults. They frequently lack the impulse control skills that successful students learn in the course of their schooling. After leaving school, most of the academic failures stay around and stay active. Perhaps for lack of alternatives, they frequently engage in activity that is costly and burdensome, showing up in criminal statistics, drug abuse, and other costly social problems.

There is no simple prescription to educate students in the high-poverty schools. However, the required effort is different from that which has been tried. Teaching children in the high-poverty schools requires that enthusiastic teachers have the time and resources to work with students intensively and in-

dividually. The results will be further enhanced if the children are given a realistic expectation that academic success will lead to a better life.

CMS should ascertain policies, strategies and resource allocations by working backwards from a determination to reach and then teach individual students, and to make each student believe in the power of education to provide a better life. This paper suggests some strategies, but plenty of room remains for other creative solutions.

CMS should commence its efforts methodically at the elementary level.

Taxpayers and county commissioners must understand that public education underpins many other aspects of our community. Effective CMS strategies will entail more support from taxpayers. However, failing to fund effective strategies will cost much more tax money in the long run, and there will be social costs in the form of losses due to crime, unfunded emergency and medical care, homelessness, and the effects of living among more adults and children who lack the means to survive without assistance.

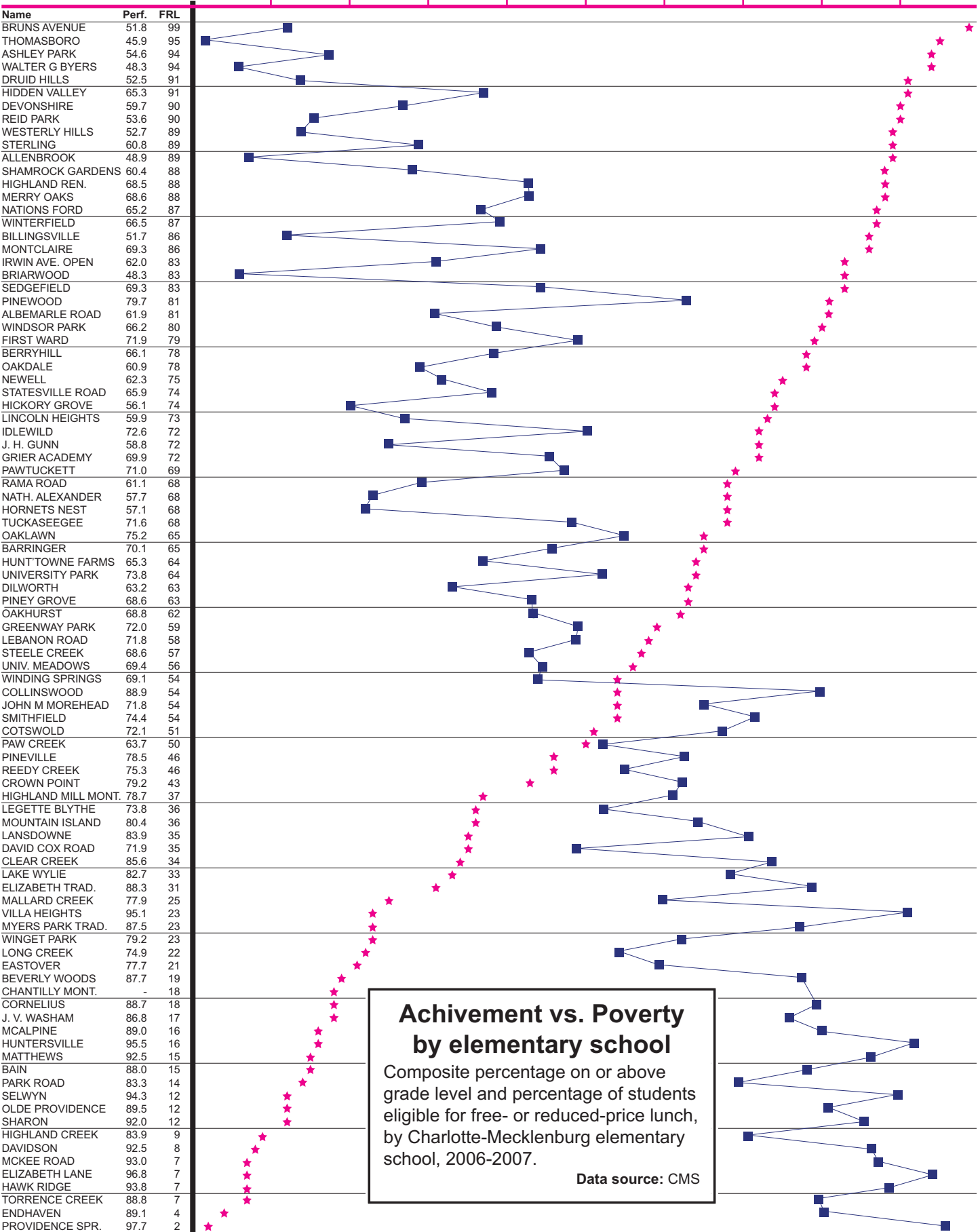
Ultimately, if CMS focuses relentlessly on the need to educate and inspire individual children, it can devise effective strategies. If this occurs and the community leaders marshal the political will to fund such strategies, everyone will benefit.

Endnotes

1. The percentage of free and reduced lunch students generally understates the level of poverty because it fails to account for students who would be eligible but fail to apply or submit the necessary proof of eligibility.
2. *Weighted Student Funding Report*, League of Women Voters of Charlotte-Mecklenburg, 29 March 2007.
3. *Weighted Student Funding Report*, League of Women Voters of Charlotte-Mecklenburg, 29 March 2007, p. 5.
4. The Fellowship celebrates that many parents and caregivers of FRL students are supportive of their students' education, and that some manage to volunteer in the schools and enhance the educational environments of their schools. Nevertheless, as a matter of demographic reality, as seen in participation rates of PTAs, school leadership teams, and parent-sponsored programming, a high-poverty school receives far less parental support than an affluent school.
5. <http://www.ihaveadreamfoundation.org/html/history.htm>.
6. Dale Mezzacappa, "Pieces of an Educational Dream," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Sunday, June 24, 2007.
7. Dr. Peter C. Gorman, Commencement speech at Queens University, Charlotte, NC, May 3, 2008.
8. Ibid.
9. Dr. Moss's achievements merited a promotion to an administrative position; it seems unfortunate but expected that she is no longer in the classroom.
10. James E. Ryan, "Schools, Race, and Money," *The Yale Law Journal*, Vol. 109, No. 2 (Nov., 1999), pp. 249-316.
11. Michael Windle, et. al., "Transitions Into Underage and Problem Drinking: Developmental Processes and Mechanisms Between 10 and 15 Years of Age," *Pediatrics*, Vol. 121 Supplement, April 2008, pp. S273-S289.
12. See Ryan, "Schools, Race, and Money," note 10.
13. *Strong American Schools*, (a project of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors), "Improving Education Leads To Huge Savings for American Taxpayers," citing Richard, A. (2005, Nov. 2), "Researchers tally costs of education failings," Bethesda, Md., *Education Week*, 25(10), 6-7.
14. *Strong American Schools*, citing Harlow, C. W. (2003, January. Revised April 15, 2003), "Education and Correctional Populations," Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. Accessed at www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/ecp.pdf.
15. *Strong American Schools*, citing McKinsey & Company, (2007, May), "Education: The Global Challenge 2007," London: Author.
16. *Strong American Schools*, citing Alliance for Excellent Education, (2006, August), "Saving Futures, Saving Dollars: The Impact of Education on Crime Reduction and Earnings," Washington, D.C.: Author.
17. *Strong American Schools*, citing Moretti, E., (2005, September), "Does Education Reduce Participation In Criminal Activity?" Univ. of California, Berkeley.
18. Ibid.
19. *Strong American Schools*, citing The Alliance for Excellent Education, (2006, November), "Healthier and Wealthier: Decreasing Health Care Costs by Increasing Educational Attainment," Washington, D.C.
20. Waldfogel, J. Garfinkel, I., & Kelly, B. (2005, October), "Public Assistance Programs: How Much Could Be Saved with Improved Education?" Paper prepared for the symposium on "The Social Costs of Inadequate Education," Teachers College, Columbia University.
21. Ibid.
22. A long discourse on how a result-based incentive compensation scheme could be structured is peripheral to this paper. There would need to be allowances for kindergarten and other primary teachers who take children without prior metrics, for specialty-area teachers who obtain visibly extraordinary results, etc. The structural impediments can be overcome.

■ Academic performance

★ FRL (poverty indicator)



**Achivement vs. Poverty
by elementary school**
Composite percentage on or above
grade level and percentage of students
eligible for free- or reduced-price lunch,
by Charlotte-Mecklenburg elementary
school, 2006-2007.

Data source: CMS