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Educate! a newsletter of
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BOND ISSUE TARGETS 14 SCHOOLS FOR REBUILDING

You know the big picture: Of Charlotte-Mecklenburg's 138 public schools, 60% are 30 years old -- or even older. In the \$275.5 million school bond proposal on the Nov. 7 ballot is \$143.8 million to substantially replace 14 schools.

The money for those schools is as follows: Barringer \$7.8 million; Billingsville \$10.5 million; Eastway Middle \$10.6 million; First Ward \$11.3 million; J.H. Gunn \$10.4 million; Lincoln Heights \$9.2 million; Marie G. Davis \$18.4 million; Merry Oaks \$9.9 million; Myers Park Elementary \$6.7 million; Oakhurst \$9.7 million; Piedmont Middle \$8.2 million; Sedgefield Elementary \$8.8 million; Selwyn \$5.2 million; Sterling \$8.4 million. (For those keeping score, the remaining \$8.7 million goes for inflation contingency.)

The school system says these schools were built an average of 55 years ago. "The educational needs when Harry S. Truman was president and IBM had just introduced the world's first supercomputer are vastly different than in today's digital economy." So are our expectations of what schools should look like, and what roles they should play in the education of our children. Two other thoughts:

Half of the schools on the list are now magnets, places where parents chose to send their kids because of the educational program offered. They made the choice, often in spite of leaky roofs and cramped quarters. For these buildings to serve and be attractive to a more general population, they need to be up to date.

More than half the schools on this list are in minority neighborhoods. Their decrepit condition is an indictment of our community's ability to deal equitably with all families, and all children. There are many inequities in life, and a community often can only offer love and comfort and support to the victims of some of them. But inequitable school buildings? This is one inequity our community surely CAN fix.

FOLLOW-UP ON HOUSING POLICY DEBATE

Peter Hubicki, a developer of affordable housing, writes in response to the recent review of city housing policy. Earlier, Nancy Pierce Shaver rallied supporters to urge Charlotte City Council to reject proposals that would allow low-income housing projects with more units, and that would allow such projects into areas that are now off-limits because low-income people are already clustered there. Peter argues two points:

(1) "An affordable housing development of 50 units (the maximum size permitted by city policy) is too small to have full-time employees. As an owner, I am forced to make do with a part-time resident manager. One hundred units would permit more staff, more supervision and more on-site control."

(2) "A mixed-income development is an economic blend of market rate apartments with affordable to low-income family apartments. This type of development in prohibited areas, I believe, would lead to economic diversity and increased stabilization in low-income neighborhoods."

Nancy replies: "100 units may make it economically feasible for 24-hour on-site supervision, but there is no guarantee that this supervision will occur for the entire life of the project. The proposed change would allow development 'of any size.' Does this mean 200? 300? 450?" About economic diversity, she says: "In a poor economy, a 'mixed-income' development in a low-income community would be the first to fall below market rate or to accept many Section 8 vouchers. This would create concentrations of low-income persons, thus stressing the schools etc."

A YOUNG VOICE ON THE VALUE OF DIVERSITY

Swann member Nora Carroll graduated in June from North Meck High. Here are excerpts from her salutatory address.

Most of us share fond memories of teachers or students that touched us in some way. For me, one of those memories is of Joey Hill, an English teacher at North who moved away after our sophomore year. I credit Mr. Hill with teaching me an appreciation for diversity, and how to accept people regardless of their race, creed, or gender.

Using the word "diversity" to describe Mr. Hill's impact on me is perhaps inaccurate because "diversity" is one of the most overused words in education. It's used so often that it's easy to forget what it means or why it's important.

Simply put, "diversity" means "variety." Diversity among people does not simply refer to a variety of skin tones, but to a variety of religions, a variety of ideas and dreams, a variety of family backgrounds, a variety of lifestyles. Our class of 2000 is a diverse one in all these regards, and I believe that has been for the best.

Some people might dismiss the notion of diversity as politically correct or trite, but I would like to set aside such labels to analyze why diversity in schools is important in the first place. I'm trying to relate the idea of human kindness to accepting and appreciating diversity. This is deeply rooted in many religions. From the "Golden Rule" in Christianity, to the teachings of Buddha on compassion for all life, the idea of respect for all people is universal.

People have always grouped with those similar to themselves, developing strong community

ties to these people. Perhaps this is why we so often find ourselves divided over what seems to be an inability to accept our fellow classmates, or parents, or humans. I am reminded of the recent community uproar regarding Judge Potter's court decision to end race-based student assignment.

Many types of diversity are readily available at any high school, such as a diversity of extracurricular interests. However, Potter's decision-if upheld-will mean a serious decline in the exposure of Charlotte-Mecklenburg students to two very important kinds of diversity, racial and socioeconomic. Children of the same racial and cultural backgrounds tend to live in the same area and at similar socioeconomic levels, so these kids all end up at the same schools if race is not taken into account during assignment.

Aside from the potential and actual problem of basic inequality among schools, this is a problem that prevents kids from being exposed to people outside their own culture. Such a learning experience cannot be taught from a textbook. This is not to say that if a school is racially diverse, all the cultural groups will fully integrate themselves and everyone will love everyone else. It is also not an attempt to destroy the unity of cultural groups and communities.

I think the important thing is that classes coming after us be allowed to cultivate an appreciation for diverse groups of people just as that opportunity was presented to me and the class of 2000. To some people, these ideas reek of social control and get in the way of quality education. To me, these ideas represent the reality of life in the United States, with its great variety of races and cultures. If kids do not learn an appreciation of cultural differences in school, there is no guarantee they will learn this lesson at all.

Paul Tillich said, "Acceptance of diversity is a risk rooted in the courage of being free." I hope that our schools continue to take that risk of encouraging interaction between different kinds of people, and that future graduates emerge ready to face the challenge of living in a diverse, free society. I'm proud to be graduating today from a high school in a school system that has been committed to these values.

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 this publication. Your comments and contributions are also welcome.

THE SWANN FELLOWSHIP

The name:

The Swann Fellowship was named for Darius and Vera Swann, who on behalf of their son James became the lead plaintiffs in Swann vs. Mecklenburg in the 1960s. Darius Swann was the first African American Presbyterian missionary ever assigned outside of Africa. His experiences in India led him to appreciate the value of an integrated society for human development.

The vision:

As people of faith, our vision is that all children in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School System will have excellent educational opportunities which are both equitable and integrated.

The background:

Formed in 1997 out of several Charlotte religious congregations, the Fellowship focuses on being a witness to the value of diversity, and educating the public on public school issues as they relate to this and allied subjects. The Swann Fellowship is a nonprofit organization exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code 56-2106776. The Fellowship does not solicit funds via e-mail but, for the record, a copy of the license to solicit charitable contri-

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