

How'd your kids do on pre-test?

The ABCs tests each spring count for a lot. Judgments are made about which schools are excelling – or struggling. And at key grades, children are promoted or not in part on the results of the tests.

But the spring tests mean nothing without something to compare the results with. And with the ABCs, the comparisons are made to a pre-test conducted each fall. The spring test then gives some indication of how much has been learned during the school year.

The pre-tests have been completed and the results are in. The school system does not release that information, and there is not a routine for sharing the results with individual parents.

But as a parent, you should be able to gain access to them. And knowing the results might be helpful to you. You can then be directly involved at another level in monitoring your child's progress. And that, after all, is what education is all about.

Can children learn as much as we expect in the time given?

Can kids learn all we expect them to in the time they have in school?

Goerge D. Nelson, writing in the monograph Educational Leadership, tells of graduates of Harvard and MIT who, given a battery, a wire and a bulb, could not figure out how to create light.

And of an MIT graduate who couldn't explain photosynthesis, the ability of plants to take sun, water and carbon dioxide and create their own food.

Recalling the light bulb failure, or perhaps too many leaf collections, Nelson writes that too much of the school day is spent in classes "that substitute facts and vocabulary for understanding," he says.

And there isn't much time:

"In one school year of 180 days," he writes, "with time allocated for testing, assemblies, announcements and inservice training, 160 days may be left for teaching. Figuring three-quarters of an hour for each subject each day adds up to 120 hours of useful instruction in each subject each year, which ideally would be optimized for each student's developmental stage and learning style.

"Translate that into a typical adult context – three 40-hour weeks dedicated to each subject each year – and the problem becomes clear. Few of us would be able to master complex subject matter so quickly. How much can we reasonably expect students to learn in that time?"

Research, he writes, is persuasive

Schools in urban neighborhoods: A call for interconnectedness

Schools are expected these days to give every child a pair of bootstraps, so that all children can make of themselves everything they can be.

Perhaps the bootstrap is an inappropriate metaphor in an age of velcro clasps and tennis shoes.

Perhaps it's also an inappropriate expectation of the schools.

In Mecklenburg County, schools and social service agencies are working together as never before. At schools where next fall's assignment plan will congregate the children of poverty, a complex web of services is supposed to be in place. Will it be enough?

In an excerpt entitled "Dispelling Some Urban Myths," Stanford University education consultant Larry Cuban has this to say about the notion that "the schools alone can improve the life chances of poor children."

"Public officials, corporate leaders, and media scolds find it use-

ful to hold schools solely responsible for curing ills that are located in the larger society. The current concentration on accountability-driven school reform assumes that if students, teachers, and principals in big-city schools would work harder than they have in the past, then test scores would improve, more students would earn diplomas, and jobs in an information-based economy will await graduates.

"Certainly there is some truth in the assumption. Much has been written about the prevailing low expectations for academic performance urban principals and teachers have held regarding poor and minority students. Studies have shown again and again how children in large schools easily get lost in the impersonal throng of students and hectic schedules of overworked, underpaid staffs.

Other studies reveal that schools

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To new readers of *Educate!*

a free community journal
on public education in
Charlotte-Mecklenburg

Welcome to this week's edition. Our aim is to supply information useful to you in your role as student, parent or citizen interested in the welfare of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. To be removed from our mailing list, send a "Remove" message to SwannFello@aol.com

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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. Financial information about this organization and a copy of its license are available from the State Solicitation Licensing Branch at 1-888-830-4989. The license is not an endorsement by the state.

Election returns revisited

Six district seats were filled Tuesday, and you know the results. Here, however, are two additional pieces of information: the percentage of total potential votes actually received by each winning candidate, and the schools in their district.

Molly Griffin .. 17.2%

District 5 incumbent Molly Griffin was top vote-getter, with 15,258 of 88,708 voters in the district or 17.2003% of the potential vote.

Elementaries: Beverly Woods, Collinswood, Cotswold, Eastover, Greenway Park, Huntingtowne Farms, Lansdowne, Myers Park Traditional, Olde Providence, Park Road, Rama Road, Sedgefield, Selwyn, Sharon, Smithfield, Starmount.

Middles: Carmel, Alexander Graham, Quail Hollow, Randolph.

High schools: Myers Park, South Meck.

Larry Gauvreau .. 11.4%

District 1 newcomer Larry Gauvreau received 8,109 of 71,210 potential votes, or 11.3874%.

Elementaries: Blythe, Cornelius, Davidson, Huntersville, Long Creek, Mallard Creek, Oakdale, Paw Creek, University Meadows.

Middles: Alexander, Bradley, Coulwood. Davidson IB.

High schools: Hopewell, North Meck.

Vilma Leake .. 11.2%

District 2 incumbent Vilma Leake received 7,277 of 64,743 potential votes, or 11.2398%.

Elementaries: Allenbrook, Amay James, Barringer, Berryhill, Bruns Avenue, Greenville, Lake Wylie, Lincoln Heights, Montclair, Nations Ford, Oaklawn, Pawtucket, Pinewood, Reid Park, Steele Creek, Sterling, Tuckaseegee, University Park, Westerly Hills.

Middles: Marie G. Davis, Kennedy, Smith, Wilson.

High schools: Harding, Olympic, E.E. Waddell, West Charlotte, West Meck.

George Dunlap .. 11.2%

District 3 incumbent George Dunlap received 7,258 of 64,585 potential votes, or 11.2379%.

Elementaries: Ashley Park, Briarwood, Clear Creek, Craighead, David Cox Road, Derita, Druid Hills, First Ward, J.H. Gunn, Hidden Valley, Highland, Hornets Nest, Irwin Avenue, Morehead, Nathaniel Alexander, Newell, Reedy Creek, Statesville Road, Thomasboro, Villa Heights.

Middles: Hawthorne Traditional, Martin, Northridge, Piedmont Open, Ranson, Spaugh, J. T. Williams.

High schools: Garinger, Vance.

Louise Woods .. 10%

District 4 incumbent Louise Woods received 6,715 of 67,255 potential votes, or 9.9844%.

Elementaries: Albemarle Road, Billingsville Montessori, Chantilly, Devonshire, Dilworth, Elizabeth Traditional, Hickory Grove, Idlewild, Merry Oaks, New Grier Road, Oakhurst, Piney Grove, Shamrock Gardens, Winding Springs, Windsor Park

Middles: Albemarle Road, Cochrane, Eastway, McClintock, Sedgefield.

High schools: East Meck.

Lee Kindberg .. 10%

District 6 newcomer Lee Kindberg received 7,877 of 78,922 potential votes, or 9.9807%.

Elementaries: Bain, Crown Point, Elizabeth Lane, Hawk Ridge, Lebanon Road, Matthews, McAlpine, McKee Road, Pineville.

Middles: Crestdale, Northeast, South Charlotte.

High schools: Butler, Independence, Providence.

Cuban on myth that school can do it all

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that seldom meet academic standards suffer few consequences. This research gives credibility to the belief that harder work and higher standards will translate into higher student academic achievement.

“What weakens the assumption, however, are other facts that policymakers, business leaders, and journalists neglect to mention.

“Anyone who has visited an urban elementary or secondary school for at least one week (not a drive-by visit) to sit in classes, listen to teachers and students, and observe lunchrooms, playgrounds, corridors, and offices would begin to appreciate a simple but inescapable truth: an urban school is deeply influenced by the neighborhoods from which it draws its students.

“Also of importance is that tax-supported public schools in a democracy are more than training grounds for future employees. Schools are expected to instill in students civic and social attitudes and skills that shape how graduates lead their lives in communities. Schools are expected to build respect for differences in ideas and cultures. These are historic aims of public schools that have been largely neglected in the rush to direct schools to be engines for the larger economy.

“Yet the present agenda for urban school reform, narrowly concentrating on raising test scores and getting jobs, largely ignores the pervasive influence upon the school of the community’s particular racial, ethnic, and social class strengths and limitations.

“In middle class and wealthy neighborhoods, focusing only on what the school can do is reasonable since these families have the money and networks to provide help for their children with academic, health, or emotional prob-

lems and to live in communities where civic institutions thrive.

“That is not the case in poor communities. Families lack personal and institutional resources. They depend upon the school and other public agencies. In short, in cities, schools can’t do it alone. This fundamental fact is ignored in the popular accountability-driven reforms.

“A reform agenda focusing on pressing students, teachers, and principals to work harder is rational in the sense that these are precisely the ones who work in schools.

“There is also a political calculus that restricts the reform agenda to schools. To pledge school improvements by including families and neighborhoods would entail major expenditures by cities such as reconceptualizing schools as youth-serving agencies rather than places where the single most important job is to produce higher test scores. It would mean reorganizing existing city cultural, civic, and social services. Reformers stammer when faced with the scale of such changes.

“Of course, broadening the urban agenda to encompass a community-based strategy to school improvement does not

mean that students, teachers, and principals should be held less responsible for working hard to achieve their goals.

“Nor does this recognition of a school being nested in the larger community suggest that there should be different standards for those who are well off and those who are poor. The obvious fact that schools are entangled in their communities only makes clear the tasks that face urban school leaders.

“They need to mobilize civic and corporate elites and educate these opinion setters to the plain fact that raising academic achievement in big-city schools involves far more than designing merit pay plans, threatening teachers and principals, or withholding diplomas for students who failed a graduation test. Few suburban or rural superintendents face such tasks.”

—
“Leadership for Student Learning: Urban School Leadership – Different in Kind and Degree” was written by Larry Cuban of Stanford University and published in September by the Institute for Educational Leadership. Single copies may be downloaded at www.iel.org

Sound off! for quality education

Your words in support of a quality, equitable, integrated education can help make the case for community support of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. Pick up your pen! Or get your mouse in motion! Here's information on how to submit your letters to area media.

The Charlotte Post: By e-mail: thepost@clt.mindspring.com; by fax: 704-342-2160; by mail: Editor, The Charlotte Post, 1531 Camden Road, Charlotte, NC 28203-4783.

The Charlotte Observer: By e-mail: opinion@charlotteobserver.com; by fax: 704-358-5022; by mail: The Observer Forum, The Charlotte Observer, P.O. Box 30308, Charlotte, NC 28230-0308.

The Charlotte World: By e-mail: warren.smith@thecharlotteworld.com; by fax: 704-503-6691; by mail: 8701 Mallard Creek Road, Charlotte, NC 28262-9705.

The Leader: By e-mail: editor@leadernews.com; by fax: 704-347-0358; by mail: 800 E. Trade St., Charlotte, NC 28202-3014

Creative Loafing: By e-mail: charlotte@creativeloafing.com; by fax: 704-522-8088; by mail: P.O. Box 241988 Charlotte, NC 28224-1988.

Inside 4 zones, parents have some options

This article is republished for those unable to open Educate!'s Nov. 4 edition.

School officials call it a "Family Choice Plan," and one of the simpler elements is this: Within some zone, if you want to enroll and there's space, you should be able to "choose" that school.

In the 1999 plan, choice zones were two contiguous high school areas, which meant seven choice zones. Today's four zones mean more choice – and potentially longer bus rides. But the concept hasn't changed much.

But for parents considering their options, the key is space. The charts below reflect the schools' Oct. 29 revised projec-

tions of how full those "choice" schools might be. The projections are only that: If Hawk Ridge parents get disgusted at 175% overcrowding and apply to be "choice-bused" to Sterling and Sedgefield, then space might open up at Hawk Ridge.

Transportation is to be provided to any school within the choice zone. So, for example, a McKee parent who works uptown could use choice to enroll a child at Irwin Avenue near work, take the child to school each morning, be close to the child for lunch and emergencies, then have the bus transport the child home in the afternoon. The possibilities for use of this option are endless.

Except, of course, that many schools are full. And many schools with low enrollment may have severe difficulty attracting students not already assigned.

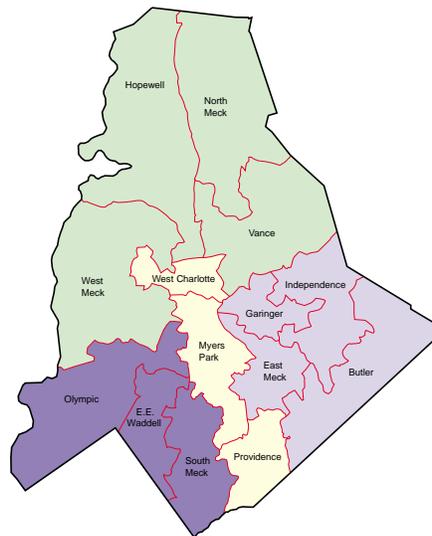
If this element of choice is used by parents, it will likely be used mostly for elementary school. The data shows most middle schools, and most high schools, at or near capacity.

And other "choice" parents have higher priority for open seats. Among them: Students enrolled this year; students who've attended in the past but whose move took them out of the "home school" area but not outside the "choice zone" area; and siblings of students already admitted.

The Choice Zones

The four zones are at right. Within a choice zone, a parent may apply for admission of their child to any schools listed. Applications will be accepted only if there is room after seating all children for whom the school is their "home" school.

Data includes: "Percent full," a projection of space used for "home school" children; and "Percent FRL," the percentage of home-school children who are on free- or reduced-priced lunch, an indicator of low family income. Schools with star() available only to students for whom it is their home school.*



Myers Park, Providence, West Charlotte

	% Full	% FRL
ELEMENTARY		
Cotswold	100	47
Olde Providence	100	8
McAlpine (east)	98	7
McKee	99	2
Elizabeth Lane	98	3
Sharon	94	24
First Ward	86	88
Providence Road	85	1
Irwin Avenue	84	67
Thomasboro	82	91
Selwyn	75	23
Lincoln Heights	74	69
Druid Hills	73	89
Allenbrook	72	80
Eastover	71	30
Bruns Avenue	57	92
Billingsville	56	97
New Greenville	55	92
Oaklawn	50	89

Olympic, South Meck, Waddell

	% Full	% FRL
ELEMENTARY		
Hawk Ridge	175	3
Smithfield	114	33
Huntingtowne Farms	113	60
Steele Creek	103	39
Beverly Woods	100	4
Lake Wylie	99	16
McAlpine (west)	98	7
Pineville	85	36
Montclair	74	72

	% Full	% FRL
Pinewood	73	63
Nations Ford	71	86
Sterling	69	68
Sedgefield	68	84

	% Full	% FRL
MIDDLE		
Kennedy	102	39
Quail Hollow	100	37
Sedgefield	100	54
Carmel*	96	25
South Charlotte*	95	6
New Cato*	94	3
Marie G. Davis	77	92

	% Full	% FRL
MIDDLE		
Wilson*	102	57
Crestdale*	100	9
Carmel	96	25
Alexander Graham	95	32
South Charlotte	95	6
New Cato	94	3

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Can children learn in time allotted?

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that understanding concepts for life, not just vocabulary, takes far longer than today's curriculum allows.

In one study, it took six weeks for 6th-graders to truly understand that all matter is really composed of atoms that are in constant motion. No, correct that: Only half of the 6th-graders had "gotten" it in six weeks.

In another study, after 13 weeks, most 8th-graders grasped the difference between heat and temperature.

Nelson, who heads a reform project for the American Association for the Advancement of Science, believes the schools are caught in a cycle of repeating last year's lessons because they didn't take hold the first time. He quotes a teacher involved in the AAAS project this way:

"I'm trying to teach so my stu-

dents really get key concepts. As a result, I'm way behind.... Because I haven't become the master teacher of my dreams yet, I'm spending significant amounts of time reteaching skills and content and am frustrated at how little my students actually understand.

"Had I used the old model exclusively, I would have had a more predictable year, and I could have soldiered along never knowing how little my students actually knew. This frustration and lack of success is a good thing.... Seeing the truth of my students' understanding can be the start of my own classroom reform efforts."

Nelson indicts the "mention-and-move-on instructional strategy." He impugns textbooks that "ignored or obscured the most important ideas by focusing instead on technical terms and trivial details."

The solution? "Coherence."

"Reducing the number of major topics, subtopics, and technical vocabulary taught, and eliminating needless redundancy can free valuable time for students to learn more

important ideas and skills.... Paring down the content and focusing on achieving a common set of learning outcomes does not in any way prescribe a boring, back-to-basics curriculum. There are many ways to get at the important ideas."

CMS is committed to building two teach-the-teachers programs, at Garinger and West Charlotte high schools. The programs, to be operated in conjunction with area colleges and universities, might help overcome another of Nelson's concern: "There is a disconnect between what we know about effective teaching and learning and the policies that govern them."

Refocusing on teaching concepts, Nelson insists, won't just help create the basic literacy that all students need. "Our best students will also benefit," he says. "There is no excuse for an engineer who can't light a lightbulb."

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Nelson's article can be read at www.ascd.org/readingroom/edlead/0110/nelson.html

Consultations to begin on 2002-2003 calendar drafts

Speaking of there not being enough time for learning:

One way or another, school will start later than usual next August.

The reasons: Construction and all the changes to be made over the summer for the choice assignment plan.

Two draft calendars are going to the school board Tuesday for information. Consultations with staff run through early December. A final proposal is scheduled to be back before the board on Dec. 11.

Among the differences between the calendar proposals:

Calendar A closes for Presidents' Day. Calendar B closes for students for both

Presidents' Day and the Islamic holiday Eid-al-Adha, which commemorates Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son and closes the

Calendar A	Calendar B
Aug. 19: School begins	Aug. 19: School begins
Sept 2: Labor Day	Sept 2: Labor Day
Sept. 16: Teacher workday	Sept. 16: Teacher workday
Sept. 27: Teacher workday	Sept. 27: Teacher workday
Oct. 28-29: Teacher workday	Oct. 28-29: Teacher workdays
Nov. 5: Teacher workday	Nov. 5: Teacher workday
Nov. 11: Teacher workday	Nov. 11: Teacher workday
Nov. 27-29: Thanksgiving	Nov. 27-29: Thanksgiving
Dec. 23-Jan. 3: Christmas	Dec. 23-Jan. 3: Christmas
Jan. 20-21: King birthday	Jan. 20-21: King birthday
Feb. 17-18: Presidents' Day	Feb. 13-14: Teacher workdays
March 28: Teacher workday	Feb. 17: Presidents' Day
April 21-25: Easter	March 28: Teacher workday
May 26: Teacher workday	April 14-18: Easter
June 10: End of school	May 26: Teacher workday
	June 10: End of school

annual Hajj or Pilgrimage.

Calendar A includes Easter Monday off. Calendar B closes for Good Friday. Most of the other

days remain the same.

In the lists above, school will be closed for students on the designated days after Aug. 19.

Briefs

No 5-day week: Private schools in Japan are mostly opting not to adopt the public schools' five-day-a-week calendar, Yomiuri Shimbun reported. School officials reportedly fear that their schools' education will deteriorate if they cancel Saturday classes. The public schools move to the new calendar in April. The country's education ministry has cut 30% of the material out of its new course of study.
www.yomiuri.co.jp

Test results delayed: Maryland school officials have delayed release of last spring's testing after seeing big changes, both up and down, in school systems' scores from a year earlier, the Baltimore Sun reported. Testing officials say other states have occasionally reported swings one way or the other from year to year, but rarely in both directions. While how students took the test and how teachers scored them last summer will be examined, the main focus of inquiry is the so-called "psychometric review," which involves "statistical steps to ensure that this year's exams were as difficult as last year's."
www.sunspot.net

Budget cuts: The Buffalo, N.Y., school system has a \$28 million budget gap, and may close some of its 80 schools to make ends meet, the Buffalo News reported. Layoff notes have been sent to 190 teachers, and parents have been told some classrooms will be combined to form, for example, first-second grade units.
www.buffalonews.com

No to Bush: A trade group of 14,000 school superintendents has opposed President Bush's education bill, The San Francisco Chronicle reported. The group says schools can't deliver on the bill's requirement of having all

public schoolteachers certified by 2005. The group also objects to a part of the bill that, according to the Chronicle, would withdraw federal money from all of a state's schools serving low-income students if any of those schools' tests show poor academic performance.
www.sfgate.com

Reassign: On Monday, Wake County Schools release details of a reassignment proposal that is six times as big as last year's, the News & Observer reported. About 5,800 children would be transferred, some to populate newly constructed schools, but many others to fill underutilized buildings and to meet diversity goals. School officials said the plan will include two potentially controversial categories of change: Some upper-income parents will see their children transferred to

schools with many lower-income children; and some lower-income children will be involuntarily transferred to the system's year-round schools that lag the system's target of 40% enrollment by low-income children.
www.newsobserver.com

Renovate: And catching up a bit, the Guilford school board voted last month to renovate rather than replace Dudley High, Greensboro's first public high school for black students. A review of the original building's condition rated its structure sound, which lowered renovation costs more in line with replacement costs. The city's black community has been outspoken in support of renovation. Charlotte architect Harvey Gantt in leading the reconstruction effort.
www.newsrecord.com

Calendar

- 13** School board meeting, Education Center, 6 p.m.
Community information session on choice plan, 6:30-8 p.m.,
First Baptist Church-Huntersville, 119 N. Old Statesville Road.
- 14** Education Budget Advisory Committee, Government Center,
11th floor conference room, 7:30 a.m.
- 15** Information session on Berry Academy of Technology, 6:30-8:30
p.m., East Meck High.
Community information session on choice plan, 7-8:30 p.m.,
Moore's Sanctuary A.M.E. Zion Church, 4101 Morris Field
Drive.
- 19** District 3 meeting, St. Paul Baptist Church, 1401 N. Allen St.,
7:30 p.m.
- 20** Bond Oversight Committee, Building Services, 7:30 a.m.
- 27** School board meeting, Education Center, 6 p.m.
Information session on Berry Academy of Technology, 6:30-8:30
p.m. Waddell High.
- 28** Finance, Capital & Facilities Committee, Education Center,
Room 408, 4 p.m.