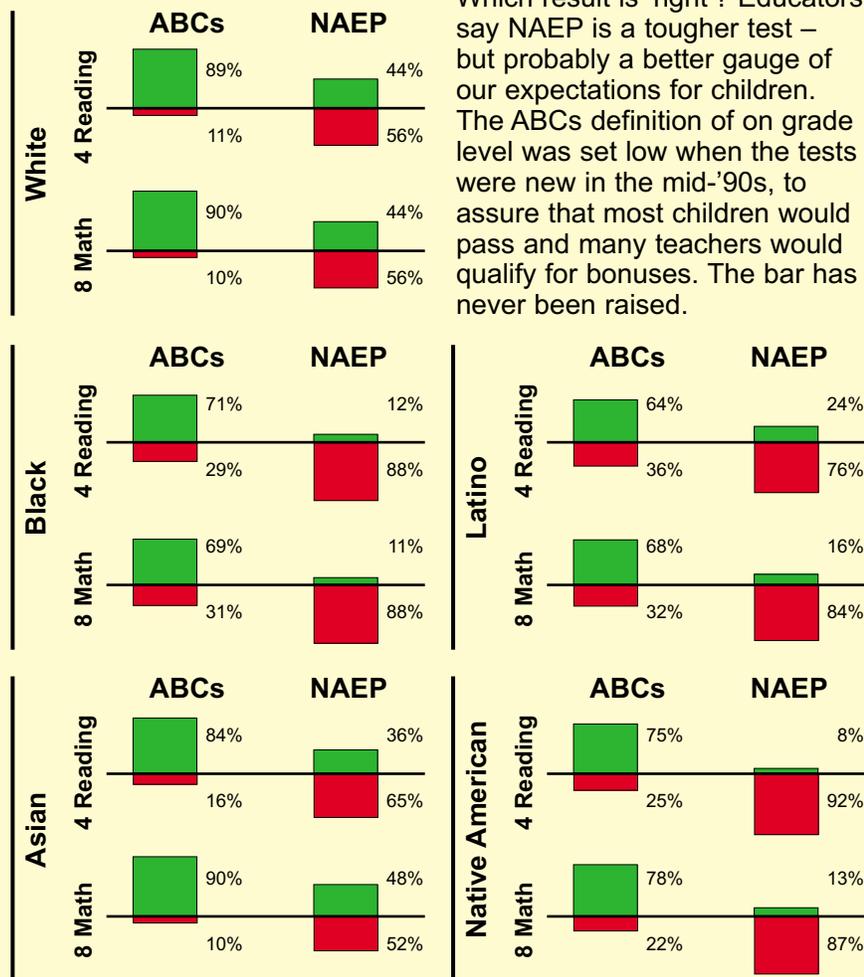


Dueling standards yield confusion

The Education Trust marked this week's anniversary of *Brown v. Board* with reports on the achievement gaps remaining 50 years after "separate but equal" was ruled unconstitutional. The N.C. charts below compare the vastly different 2003 results on the state ABCs and on the national NAEP. Percentages are for students at or above grade level on the ABCs, and proficient or above on NAEP.

Which result is 'right'? Educators say NAEP is a tougher test – but probably a better gauge of our expectations for children. The ABCs definition of on grade level was set low when the tests were new in the mid-'90s, to assure that most children would pass and many teachers would qualify for bonuses. The bar has never been raised.



Source: The Education Trust www.edtrust.org

No Child

N.C. hearing critiques federal law, its impact on N.C. classrooms

GREENSBORO – A national hearing here last week dissected No Child Left Behind. And by the end of the four-hour event, there was as much gore on the floor as in a biology lab back before the days of computer-generated frogs.

The sponsors, including the Public Education Network and the Public School Forum of North Carolina, appeared to be fishing for support for North Carolina's effort to get credit under No Child for its growth model of assessing student progress.

There was support for ditching the law's "annual yearly progress" assessment method. But comments ranged widely, and addressed other core issues about teacher quality, teacher retention and the negative impacts of the state's testing regimen.

A sampling of the comments:

Unintended consequences: About No Child, "I'm not even sure it's constitutional," said Sam Houston, president of the N.C. Science, Mathematics and Technology Education Center, a former superintendent of Mooresville City Schools and leader of the commission that devised the ABCs testing program.

"The way that it is tested is the way it is taught," Houston warned. Teacher creativity is discouraged. "I am even more fearful in the sciences" that the state will be "locked into a curriculum that is not easy to renovate and is not meeting the needs of children."

Full funding: The N.C. legislature must keep K-12 funding

Continued on Page 4

'I was wrong,' choice advocate says

The lawyer named to the school board in 2001 now says he was wrong to line up votes for a choice plan that resegregated schools.

Robert Simmons says he thought a 2000 bond vote signaled that Mecklenburg could "show the nation how to make the transition to unitary status work...." He now

sees the vote as "a temporary condition, not a lasting commitment."

"This community prefers to create, or at least to accept, segregation and socioeconomic isolation for our children, just as we choose it for ourselves."

Simmons' statement begins on Page 2.

Why are executives speaking now? Backer of choice plan now says, 'I was wrong'

The May 14 edition of *Educate!* carried an article headlined, "Execs seek higher school funding." The article begins with, "In a stunning reversal of roles, corporate executives said Tuesday the schools hadn't sought enough money to educate all children."

If these executives are interested in "educating all children," why didn't they speak up when board member Louise Woods said, "The choice plan will give choice to some and no choice to others"?

Why didn't they speak up when the board's own expert, Professor Gary Natriello, warned that, "CMS was not only creating schools where it would be difficult to educate children, but by isolating at-risk children it was choosing one of the most expensive methods of educating them."

Professor Gary Orfield, co-chair of the Harvard Civil Rights Project, was asked this question. "Here in Charlotte the school superintendent thinks he can make the system provide equal schooling even in a system that has schools that aren't integrated. What do you think?" Professor Orfield responded, "Almost every urban educator who has come out of court-ordered desegregation has said that. None has achieved it." Why are these executives coming forward now?

It has long been the dream of many of our citizens to have a "separate but equal" school system. In 1971, it was reported in the Charlotte Observer that the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education (CMS) had put forth the largest bond referendum ever put before Mecklenburg voters. A large portion of the bonds were going to be used to build schools in the inner city. The Observer also reported that the CMS Board of Education said that they would only build the schools in the inner city if the Supreme Court ruled that there can be some "all-Negro" schools in the system.

The idea of providing monetary support for a "separate but equal"

school system is not new. These executives may feel that their time has come. I hope not....

The citizens of Charlotte-Mecklenburg have two choices.

- 1) They can fulfill the promise of *Brown vs. The Board of Education* by supporting an assignment plan that results in no racially or economically identifiable schools or classrooms, providing equal resources to all schools and respecting the dignity and worth of all children.
- 2) Or they can continue to be in default and try to make "separate but equal" work by spending a lot of money doing what no one else has been able to do – use a segregated school system to prepare children to live in a multicultural, diverse society.

Richard A. McElrath, Sr.

Were there 2 meetings?

It is hard to image that you and the Business Journal were in the same room listening to the same meeting May 11. Your article talked about business support for CMS; the BJ front page article this week talked about how CMS isn't working.

Perhaps it is different slants on the same topic but in reading them it seemed like you all were at different meetings completely.

Bill James

As an appointed school board member in 2001, Bob Simmons played a key role in lining up board support for the choice plan.

In 2001, I thought our community was ready, willing and able to support an equitable school system without the coercion of the Swann desegregation order. As subsequent events have made clear, I was wrong.

Although I disagreed completely with Mr. Gauvreau and his fellow white suburban plaintiffs in their cynical inversion of the racial remedy for a racial wrong, and although I believed that Judge Potter's ruling was not supported by the facts or the law, I realized that we had to be ready for the inevitable political result from the full Fourth Circuit upholding the finding that CMS is unitary. I believed that we needed to take the initiative to craft and adopt a race-neutral assignment plan before we had one forced on us by the courts through continuing litigation; I believed that we would be better able both to minimize resegregation and to protect against socioeconomic isolation.

I understood that a new assignment plan with choice and with contiguous home school bound-

Continued on Page 3

Educate! is a journal on public education focusing on Charlotte-Mecklenburg and N.C. Our aim is to supply information useful to you in your role as student, parent or citizen.

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People: Leonard R. (Deacon) Jones, president; Lucy Bush Carter, vice president; Steve Johnston, executive director and *Educate!* editor; Beth Kinny, outreach director. Assisting with this edition: Kathleen McClain, Stephanie Southworth.

Arguments swirl over bond reallocation

Advocates of switching bond money from promised renovations to new-school construction found their “business-sense” arguments Tuesday countered with another “business-sense” argument:

The efficient thing to do would be to assign children from new neighborhoods to the 4,000 seats that stand vacant elsewhere.

Arguments that the predominantly black audience was responding only with emotion were met with counterarguments that the emotions of suburban parents who chose to crowd into nearby schools were more valued than the emotions of center-city parents who had been promised that their nearby schools would be raised to standard.

Critical renovations will be completed, school board vice chair Kit Cramer argued. “We’re still going to do the projects. We’re still attempting to meet the students’ needs.... I wish we had the dollars to do everything.”

“How could you change my vote,” said one participant at the Tuesday Morning Breakfast Forum.

“I can understand you being upset, but situations have changed,” offered Bond Oversight Committee member Fred Warren.

The discussion reviewed recommendations from the oversight committee that will be before a public hearing Tuesday. School board members present included Kit Cramer, Kaye McGarry and Vilma Leake. Committee members present included real estate agent Warren, IBM lawyer Norm Gundel and new member Mary Gill, a retired CMS educator.

Gundel said there were about 4,000 empty seats in the county, a third each at elementary, middle and high school levels. About 20,000 students do not have a seat in a brick-and-mortar classroom. The district had about 560 mobile classrooms in use this year, and expects to have 1,200 in

use within 10 years.

Warren said he knew that filling empty seats wouldn’t solve all problems. “But if we’ve got empty seats at Oaklawn and Byers and several other schools, why couldn’t we make some shifts in the assignments so some kids could go to these schools?”

“If the situation were reversed and we had seats available in the suburbs, these kids from the inner city, they’d have to go – and there wouldn’t be a whole lot of discussion.”

The recommendations are at www.cms.k12.nc.us/includes/gfi.asp?fileHandle=1871.asp

At the Forum, Vilma Leake acknowledged being part of the 8-1 majority that in 2001 approved a choice assignment plan that has resegregated schools.

“It has not worked and I admit that,” Leake said.

See related letter from Robert Simmons, Page 2.

Choice plan backer says, ‘I was wrong’

Continued from Page 2

aries would create some degree of these negative results, and I understood that such a plan could risk even more – that it could open the door to the high level of segregation and isolation that would be the inevitable result of neighborhood schools in our community.

But I believed that the unitary ruling could be an opportunity as well as a threat; I believed that Charlotte and Mecklenburg County could show the nation how to make the transition to unitary status work, just as CMS had shown the nation how to make the transition to desegregation work. I believed that Charlotte and Mecklenburg County were ready to move forward from the Swann desegregation order.

Why did I believe that? I saw the community commitment

demonstrated in 2000 by the overwhelming support at the ballot box for a very large bond referendum – the first equity bond referendum in county history, directing funds to build new schools and renovate old schools in predominantly poor and minority neighborhoods.

I saw the County Commission’s willingness in 2000 and 2001 to stretch closer to funding the full amount of the CMS operational need, responding in particular to the requests for a new literacy program and additional services in the neediest schools.

I saw the success of the efforts of Dr. Smith and the CMS staff to design and deliver with those increased dollars a curriculum that provided an increasingly effective education to all of our children in all of our schools. And I saw a fractious Board of Education ready to be brought together to implement a race-neutral assignment plan that allowed parental choice within a structure built to minimize resegregation and socio-

economic isolation.

Unfortunately, it appears that what I saw was a temporary condition, not a lasting commitment. After the hopeful years of 1999, 2000 and 2001, it seems that we have returned to our old ways of conflict and separation.

Immediately after the election of 2001, the Board of Education again became fractious. Personal agendas and partisan politics again ruled the day, and conflict was restored as the order of business in place of cooperation and compromise.

Then Dr. Smith departed in a difficult and drawn-out process that left the bickering Board to control the initial implementation of the new assignment plan, resulting in the allowance of exceptions and qualifications that undermined the plan’s delicate balance of promises and priorities – producing an acceleration of resegregation coupled with unbalanced utilization of facilities.

Continued on Page 6

Hearing critiques No Child Left Behind

Continued from Page 1

intact, and the federal government should fully fund Title I programs aiding low-income schools, said Cisco Systems executive Ed Paradise.

“We have made great progress... since the introduction of the ABCs. No Child Left Behind raises that bar.”

Paradise called on N.C. businesses to share resources with the schools and redouble mentoring and tutoring efforts.

Teacher quality: Parents’ income is the best predictor of educational outcomes, but “the whole point of schools is to mitigate what children bring to schools,” said Sheria Reid, director of the education and law project at the N.C. Justice Center.

To improve student outcomes, she said, North Carolina must raise the quality of teachers. Teacher quality is not a predictor, but a determiner, of outcomes, she said.

“Without that we can do nothing to mitigate that factor of family background.... We need to live up to that promise and, quite frankly, stop whining.”

Transfer provisions: No Child’s promise of “transfer and choice is a sham,” said Sandra Mikush, president of a Forsyth County Community Alliance for Education and assistant director of the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation.

Rural school systems can’t offer transfer options, and urban parents will risk transferring from a Title 1 school where they know how their children are doing to a non-Title 1 schools that may not be required to release scores that might show it actually has a worse track record educating poor or minority children.

“We will run off the best [teachers]...,” she added, “by a high-stakes testing climate that takes the fun out of teaching.”

Student achievement expecta-

‘State must role up its sleeves’

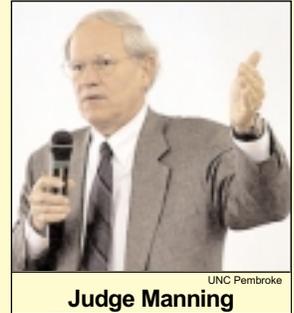
The Greensboro hall had been cleared of the press May 13 at the request of Superior Court Judge Howard Manning, when the judge was speaking to an annual conference of a unit of the N.C. Public Forum. But *Educate!* reader Bill Fletcher was in the hall. And the Republican candidate for N.C. Superintendent of Public Instruction filed this comment via a campaign e-mail the next day:

“In *Leandro v. North Carolina*, the state Supreme Court defined the constitutional requirements for a free, public education. Superior Court Judge Howard Manning has issued numerous rulings clarifying ‘findings of fact’ and concluding that there are significant gaps in educational quality across the state. He has concluded that there are three essential factors to success in our schools and that it is the state’s responsibility to assure that these factors are in place in every school in the state:

- “1. A competent principal-leader in every school;
- “2. A competent, qualified teacher in every classroom; and
- “3. Sufficient support resources for the teacher and principal to be effective.

“Judge Manning has exercised great restraint in not imposing specific financial remedies, and has been patiently waiting for state leaders to craft remedies. Manning recently said that the State must roll up its sleeves and get the job done.”

After his address, Manning, also a Republican, said he expected the next, long-anticipated N.C. Supreme Court decision in the *Leandro* case to be delayed until late summer.



Judge Manning

tions are unrealistic, Mikush said. “There is no one-size-fits all. That is just now how human brains are made.”

Later she added that educators in rural schools “feel absolutely under siege” by all the No Child rules. A principal said the survivors “will be those who are left standing.”

Highly qualified: Guilford grandparent and school tutor Ed Whitfield told a story to illustrate how the No Child credentialing of “highly qualified” teachers is an inadequate tool.

A landscaper at a school where Whitfield tutors latched onto a child who found science class boring. So boring that he was disciplined with a task of changing the order of sentences on a worksheet. The man protested, saying the child needed to go outside and pick up some dirt.

Whitfield recounted that the

three of them went outside. As the child squeezed dirt through his fingers, the two men talked about the organic and inorganic components of the soil.



Whitfield

“He was fascinated by the whole process,” Whitfield said of the student, asking those at the hearing, “Now, who was a highly qualified person at that moment” – the landscaper or the

teacher back in the classroom?

“The world is full of people that can play a role in motivating children to move forward,” Whitfield said.

One thing that would really help children’s education, Whitfield said, would be for teachers to visit students’ homes. But “How feasible is that? I don’t

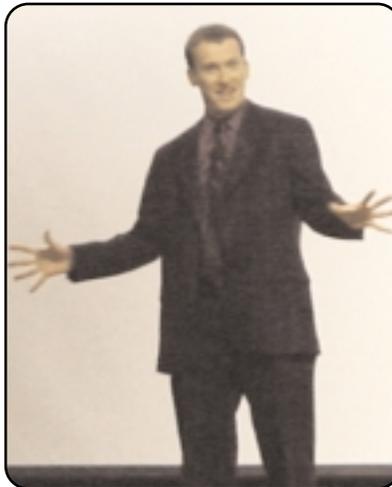
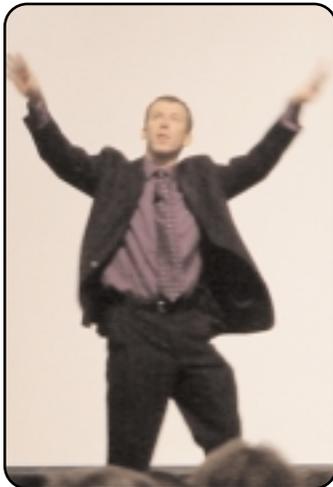
Continued on Page 5

Teach manners, raise sights, and every child will excel

Ron Clark, the 2001 U.S. Teacher of the Year, repeatedly leaped between stage and floor, or stood on chairs to deliver a message of hope to fellow teachers Thursday in Greensboro. Clark's stories draw on his work in low-income schools in coastal Aurora, N.C., and Harlem, N.Y. Assigned to classrooms with the lowest-

achieving students, Clark sparked achievement gains with a probably unique blend of high standards for behavior, academic rigor, charisma, unending belief in the children, and a talent for community fund-raising that gave his students access to a world sometimes just blocks away that they'd never seen. In Harlem, he

overcame resistance to doing homework by placing a sign outside the classroom announcing the number of days straight the entire class had done all their homework. Clark said the sign stayed at zero for a long time – until students started supporting each other so they could be proud of their joint achievement.



Hearing critiques No Child Left Behind

Continued from Page 4

know what is the comfort level of people to do that.”

Calculators too soon: Guilford parent Sharon Shepard said testing-mandated use of calculators by 7-year-olds was “morally wrong and detrimental to education.”

“This generation will be mathe-

matically handicapped.”

The bottom line: What will it cost to achieve No Child’s mandates? asked Margaret Carnes, managing director of Charlotte Advocates for Education. “I’m not sure we’ve had the discussion on that issue that we need to.”

Until the total cost is estimated, “proclamations of increases of X amount are useless.”

Carnes reported “a low level of enthusiasm around funding parent development programs, “as if that is fluff.... That is the piece

from home that will push children up.”

New GI Bill: School districts need a federal GI-style bill to attract teachers to challenging classrooms, said Charlotte Chamber executive and CMS board member Kit Cramer.

Give teachers tax credits. Offer college tuition reimbursements for teachers’ children, she said.

No Child has “more favorables than flaws” and she is “a supporter, despite the complications it

Continued on Page 8

Choice plan backer says, 'I was wrong'

Continued from Page 3

Then the very parents who produced the overcrowding of their suburban schools with the white flight of the new millennium began to fume about the CMS capital improvement plan, which was prepared for a community committed to making community schools work, rather than a community scrambling to impose a selfish, segregated and isolated structure of de facto neighborhood schools on a system built over many years to a desegregated model.

Then the newly Republican County Commission set about realizing their dream of defunding public education by funding the CMS operational budget not only far below the system's needs, but below even the system's growth, and by choking the flow of the capital dollars through delaying the issuance of bonds authorized in the referenda.

And now we see the coup de grace being delivered to my belief that this community is ready to function equitably without the constitutional supervision of the Federal courts: the reallocation of bond money from equity projects in predominantly poor and minority neighborhoods to a new elementary school at the edge of suburban development and to expansions of relatively very new suburban high schools.

There's no question that we don't have enough school seats for our children, and there are far too many in temporary or mobile classrooms, congesting the common facilities in the schools and making teaching and learning both more difficult and more dangerous. But that problem is largely a function of three realities:

(1) This community undersized and withheld bond funding from needed construction for too long as the forces of growth and resistance to desegregation mounted from the late '80s into the '90s;

(2) Schools in predominantly

'Main culprits' in student discipline

From "Teaching Interrupted: Do Discipline Policies in Today's Public Schools Foster the Common Good?" from Public Agenda:

"Topping the list of causes of behavior problems in the nation's schools is parents' failure to teach their children discipline (82% of teachers and 74% of parents). Second on the list is: "There's disrespect everywhere in our culture – students absorb it and bring it to school" (73% and 68%). Other Public Agenda research shows that only about a third of parents say they have succeeded in teaching their child to have self-control and discipline, while half say they have succeeded in teaching their child to do their best in school.

"Along with inattentive parents and an overall culture of disrespect, teachers and parents also attribute behavior problems to overcrowded schools and classrooms (62% and 54%); parents who are too hasty in challenging school decisions on discipline (58% and 42%); districts that back down from assertive parents (55% and 48%); teachers who ease up on discipline because they worry they may not get support (52%)."

– Downloadable at www.publicagenda.org/research/research_reports_details.cfm?list=3

poor and minority neighborhoods were allowed to fall into both physical and educational decline as the magnet program exploded into the suburbs under political pressure; and

(3) Suburban parents have taken advantage of the new assignment plan and of a willing Board of Education to pull their children out of the schools built for the desegregated system and to enroll them in the closest school they can choose to their homes.

But the easiest and least expensive solution to this problem doesn't involve the reallocation of bond money, and it doesn't necessarily involve the immediate construction of new schools:

It involves the adjustment of the new assignment plan, as anticipated by both the resolution that created it and by the policies and procedures that implemented it, to change the home school boundaries to reallocate children among the existing schools.

The original boundaries were never intended to be the boundaries that would persist through all time, and it is the conduct of parents in their choices and in their requests for exceptions that has produced the need to adjust the boundaries a year ahead of

schedule, and ahead of the construction of new schools. But it doesn't seem that the Board of Education, the County Commission or any of the parents' groups have considered this obvious alternative.

And they won't, because this community doesn't want community schools. This community prefers to create, or at least to accept, segregation and socioeconomic isolation for our children, just as we choose it for ourselves.

All of our talk about the value of diversity and the need for education to include learning to accept the differences among us is nothing but talk. It is by our selfish actions and by the circumstances we are willing to accept that we are truly to be known, not by our fine words.

So, Arthur Griffin was the only one of us on the Board of Education that was right when he voted against the new plan. Just as he predicted, the money has dried up, the support has evaporated and we're once again leaving the same children with the dust of broken promises in their teeth.

What should we have done instead?

Perhaps we should have done

Continued on Page 7

Briefly...

Performance pay: Denver teachers became the first in a major city to approve teacher pay being tied to student performance, the New York Times reported. Under the proposal, teachers will be rewarded for working in high-poverty schools and if their children meet academic targets. The pay could decrease if students do not meet their goals. The plan goes to voters this fall.

www.nytimes.com

Unhealthy: Nearly twice as many Stanford University students were treated by the university health center for managing drugs for psychiatric problems in 2002 as were treated in 2000, the San Jose Mercury News reported.

www.mercurynews.com

Segregation spillover:

Children prefer to socialize with students they're in class with, and with few black students in Advanced Placement classes, the segregation spills over into social situations, the Seattle Times reported. While many Seattle schools are integrated, AP classrooms tend to be less integrated.

www.seattletimes.com

Brown goals met: In an online poll, 65% of public school teachers agreed that the goals of Brown v. Board of Education have been met, Education Week reported. Yet there was wide disagreement: 63% of white teachers, 39% of Hispanic teachers and 23% of black teachers agreed that all students have equal opportunities.

www.edweek.org

No enforcement: The Department of Education has released "nonregulatory guidance" on parental involvement in Title I schools, Education Week reported. The goal is to better educate low-income parents on their rights under No Child Left Behind. The guidance lists ways for states and districts to better inform a parent but includes no way to enforce the

Calendar

20 School board Finance, Capital & Facilities Committee, 4 p.m., Board Conference Room.

20 Parent Power meeting, 7 p.m., First United Presbyterian Church, 406 N. College St.

24 School board visits Sharon, Reedy Creek, Marie G. Davis, Berryhill – schools that could lose renovation money.

25 School board Curriculum Committee, 3 p.m., Room 414, Education Center.

25 School board meets, 6 p.m., Board Room. Meeting includes public hearing on proposals to move bond money to new construction projects.

requirement.

www.edweek.org

Adequacy suit: A Kansas court decision, stayed pending appeal, orders that all Kansas K-12 schools be shut down June 30 unless legislators reallocate state funds, the Kansas City Star reported. Annual spending per pupil in Kansas districts ranges from \$6,349 to \$16,793.

www.kansascity.com

Fat: The International Obesity Task Force estimates that at least 10% of children age 5-17 are overweight, the Atlanta Constitution told its readers. The report said 25% of South African and American girls and 36% of 9-year-olds in Italy, are overweight.

www.ajc.com

IDEA overhaul: The Senate approved an overhaul of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the New York Times reported. The bill would increase spending on special education, cut paperwork for teachers, and increase monitoring from state and federal officials. The act also tries to limit lawsuits by implementing a two-year deadline for parents who have complaints.

www.nytimes.com

Choice plan backer says, 'I was wrong'

Continued from Page 6

what I exhorted the Board of Education to do when I was a PTA president the first time they adopted and nearly implemented an earlier version of a choice plan with home schools; we should have thanked the Fourth Circuit for their ruling declaring CMS unitary and then left the assignment plan as it was – not because it was race-based, but because it was working academically, because leaving it unchanged would have maximized stability and minimized disruption and because it was a more effective and efficient utilization of facilities and resources.

But we were afraid of continuing litigation in unfriendly courts. We were afraid of losing our superintendent, our funding, our community support and our momentum. How ironic. The only reason that some momentum has continued is that the loss of the superintendent was not as great a loss as we had feared, and the ability of Dr. Pughsley and the continued efforts of his able staff have made the most of what is left.

But they are fighting a battle they ultimately can't win against dwindling dollars and dwindling community support.

Maybe there was nothing else to do at the time we did it. Maybe the plan can still be turned around by a community that demands performance of commitments and promises from the Board of Education and the County Commission.

But I don't hear that demand – I hear a cry for relief from the suburban overcrowding inflicted by parents on their own children, and I hear the familiar sound of promises breaking to the accompaniment of justification and denial.

I was wrong to push the new assignment plan to adoption. I should have listened to Arthur. I should have listened to myself.

Bob Simmons

Is 'good' good enough?

From a May 14 *Business Journal* cover story on CMS and Supt. Jim Pughsley:



Pughsley

"Pughsley shows little interest in leading a no-holds-barred debate over CMS's future, though. His view is that CMS is outperforming most public school systems.

"What the community is looking for is a good product, and we are turning out a good product," he says. "We haven't received full recognition of that on the home front, but on the national level, people recognize we have a good school system, good results and a good product."

– www.bizjournals.com/charlotte/stories/2004/05/17/story1.html

Hearing critiques No Child Left Behind

Continued from Page 5

brings."

Limited instruments:

Harvard lecturer Robert Schwartz headed Achieve Inc. in 1997 when it evaluated North Carolina's testing program. The Achieve audit found the N.C. program "rigorous and quite ambitious," but added that "we didn't think the test tested the depth of the curriculum."

More time needed: Maybe he's a Cary business consultant, a former AT&T lobbyist and a onetime student of Middle East history, but former N.C. state senator Clark Plexico still has one boot in the pasture.

"If we spend all the time weighing the cows, we won't have enough time to feed the cows," Plexico said.

Creative teachers' hands-on projects "take time to do right" – time No Child won't reward.

And "what's the incentive to move advanced students ahead?" – well beyond the achievement levels captured by standardized tests.

As for struggling students, Plexico said, No Child offers "no reward for what may have been tremendous progress."

Building up teachers: "We know that the quality of the school ultimately depends on the quality of teachers and the principal," said Union County school board member and longtime science teacher Carolyn Lowder.

"We can't continue to depend on heroes."

Lowder recommended paid teacher internships through the university system; professional development "as part of every work day and every year;" and fast-track courses in classroom management for teachers lacking those skills.



Lowder

DidYaHear?

✓ School board members gave their Equity Committee a thumbs-up this week to continue their work, but the committee itself may adjust their agenda after getting members' feedback. Committee members may enmesh themselves in the school board's own committee structure so they can be clued in to policy issues as they are in the making. And the committee might revamp its schedule of work so its reports are more timely. Budget suggestions need to get to the board long before the budget gets set in stone, for example.

There seems to be agreement that all schools need quality teachers, but the meeting yielded little evidence that the board is any closer to assigning teachers where they are needed. There seems to be great faith in dangling carrots.

✓ Speaking of carrots, Vilma Leake observed this week that if a bank branch is in trouble, the folks at headquarters don't send their most inexperienced staffers to the branch to square things away; they send their most seasoned staff. "We're paying teachers to be national board-certified, but we're not designating those individuals to go where they need to be."

✓ The county manager's office began preparing the budget by cutting all budgets by 2%, then making adjustments for growth etc. What did CMS do to deserve being cut 2%? Nothing, says one staffer. It's just the "only fair way" to deal with various county responsibilities when county commissioners won't create revenues appropriate to the county's needs. When everybody's cut equally that's fair.... On a quality management scale of excellent, good, fair and horrid, perhaps that method does indeed rate a "fair."

✓ After motions and substitute motions, the school board last week voted against touring schools that might lose renovation money. But by Wednesday, Molly Griffin had scheduled visits for next Monday at four such schools, and Louise Woods added six stops for Wednesday where renovation designs might be delayed. In accordance with N.C. law, the tours were publicized because a board majority may be present at some visits.

The about-face looks odd, but this decision-making model has real potential. Would that the board could set a bare-bones budget to appease the county, for example, then proceed to hire all the teachers it really needs to educate all children.

– Send intelligence to swannfello@aol.com