

Right-sized budget?



"The amount per student we got locally in 2001 was \$2,306 and the amount the superintendent is requesting in this budget per student is \$2,370, which is a 2.8% total increase over that five-year period, per student.

"So that that's a much smaller increase than it appears. It's almost entirely driven by growth, from what I can see."

– Board member Lee Kindberg

Guiding principles

School board members outline issues they want to guide 2005 student assignment review

Charlotte-Mecklenburg's school board Wednesday took another turn away from the 2001 "choice" plan.

Facing the reality that overcrowded schools limit most parents to their assigned school, board members signaled interest in ending the annual student assignment lottery that for four years has asked parents to make three "choices," now called "options." As enrollment grew with each year, fewer parents received their first choice.

The lottery decision and other straw votes taken Wednesday could be reversed next week after board members hear from constituents. A full list of the topics discussed Wednesday is at the end of this article.

But in straw votes Wednesday, board members reiterated support for a home-school guarantee, for full utilization of schools and for strengthening of the magnet program.

They favored installing "merit-based" admission requirements in magnets that federal grants originally required to be open to all. They expressed interest in smaller attendance zones, which would cut transportation costs.

There was just a bare majority for guaranteeing siblings could attend the same school. Board members signaled no interest in enrollment caps, but agreed to consider balancing magnet school enrollments by socioeconomic factors to achieve diversity.

Nothing was on the table, however, that would break up the high-poverty schools that Supt. Jim Pughsley says are an academic threat to any child assigned to them.

Only 68% of African-Americans in January's lottery got their first choice, in large part because, in an effort to flee high-poverty schools, most chose magnet programs that ended up having no

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\$1,975,532,349 is true 10-year need

CMS on new tack as community gives no sign it will ante up for facilities

The first words out of buildings chief Guy Chamberlain's mouth last week were a reminder that state law binds school officials to regularly and accurately estimate the capital needs of each N.C. school system. The new estimate for CMS:

\$1.9 billion over 10 years. The full effort would send annual construction as high as \$287 million in 2011 and, if the county insists on using bonds to pay, would boost interest costs.

With everyone whining for new schools but no one willing

to pay, however, Supt. Jim Pughsley's administration took the unusual tack of identifying what \$170 million per year in new construction and renovation would allow. Results:

– Twenty-three new schools in

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seats to offer. Many low-income parents received none of their three choices (story, Page 7.)

In place of the districtwide annual lottery, board members expressed interest in allowing individual parents to request seats from a manual list of open seats. The district would still honor the federal No Child Left Behind mandate that parents at low-performing Title 1 schools be allowed to transfer out. And magnet programs presumably would return to the individual school lotteries that have been part of CMS assignment policy since the

mid-1970s.

The decision on the lottery, if ultimately approved in votes between now and October, would cut numerous administrative costs. Board members received a list of the types of expenditures incurred in the lottery, but no specific costs were listed.

Ending the annual district lottery might also end January's so-called School Information Fair, a Merchandise Mart event that saw staff and volunteers pitching brochures, freebies and schools' perceived strengths to passersby in crowded, noisy aisles.

The board reiterated that all parents should be guaranteed a seat at a nearby school. But the

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

Coach comments



Chairperson Joe White has begun closing school board meetings with a short speech on a topic of the day. His unedited comment from the board's March 10 meeting:

"I also want to thank the superintendent and the members of our staff who were in Judge Manning's court this week representing us, I think, very well.

"And I want the public to note that it is important what Judge Manning has to say. He can make our road much easier, or he can make our road much tougher and rougher; however, he cannot change the road we must travel.

"Regardless of what Judge Manning does, we still have approximately 122,000 children in this community that we must stay the course and continue to find a way to educate. And I can guarantee you that we have every intention of doing just that."



WHITHER CMS?

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Guiding principles

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majority also wanted a policy on overcrowding that, while not ending the home-school guarantee, might lead to, say, moving an entire grade to alternate quarters.

What the board discussed and voted on Wednesday was a compilation of individual members' views by categories.

District 5 board member Molly Griffin prepared "consensus" statements. She listed issues raised by fewer board members as "options." Griffin led the board through votes on each item, sometimes sentence by sentence.

The material approved Wednesday night will come back to the board Tuesday, probably in different form as Supt. Jim Pughsley and his staff remove duplicative material.

Assistant Supt. Susan Agruso said one document would collate all items on which there was consensus Wednesday, allowing the possibility of a single vote on the bulk of the material. Another document will include issues offered by individual board members by Friday noon.

Below are the eight topics discussed Wednesday. Changes to Griffin's original text have been made to reflect some word-editing made by consensus during the discussion. For the most part, however, board members left wording issues to be dealt with by staff before Tuesday.

Text of the principles is in sans serif type. Notes on board decisions or highlights of the discussion is in regular type.

I. Student Achievement

Consensus: Our focus must always be improving student achievement for every student in every school. We will provide the leadership, resources and innovative programming necessary for all schools to succeed.

Approved.

Option: We do not believe that the problems faced by low-performing schools can or should be

A stellar display of leadership

It was a miracle of meeting management: District 5 board member Molly Griffin Wednesday guided her normally cantankerous colleagues through a review of the entire realm of student assignment policy.

Cajoling, needling, even cutting colleagues off when 60-second (or, late in the meeting, 30-second) speaking limits expired, Griffin led the board through the up-or-down decisions needed by CMS administrators as they prepare for Tuesday's school board vote on a set of principles to guide this year's review of student assignment.

When there was a unanimous vote, the eight-year board veteran congratulated. When discussion suggested lack of consensus on a multipart policy statement, she would separate the parts, then force votes on the parts. When the board was spinning its wheels on a small-potatoes issue, she would end discussion by telling staff to write a Post-It to the "parking lot" for consideration later this year. And despite maintaining control, she spoke candidly on her own behalf, and remembered to vote, as the issues rolled by.

It was an unusual performance for a board member who says she hates board meetings and regularly says little during them, but who came away from recent Broad Institute training convinced that board meetings need to be, and can be, shorter. She won a round of applause from board members for Wednesday's work, and chairperson Joe White thanked her for "being willing to step forward and take on a very very tough issue." During the meeting, nobody seemed to know quite what to call the person standing in front of them for three straight hours. At one point Griffin joked that she was "king." White retained the gavel. But it was clear who was in charge.



www.advocatesfored.org
Griffin

solved through student assignment alone.

Approved.

II. Stability and Predictability

Consensus: The student assignment plan must provide our students and families with stability and predictability. This will require careful consideration of both expected growth patterns and additional planned schools in the area before home school boundaries are established.

Approved.

Option: New schools in high growth areas will reserve capacity for future growth. Consider placing special programs in new schools to utilize seats until needed for growth.

Approved.

Option: Home school boundaries will be changed only in accordance with a predetermined schedule or when necessary because of the opening of new schools.

Approved. Griffin mentioned a

three-year schedule. The idea appears aimed at neighborhoods that annually plead for reassignment.

III. Home School Guarantee (proximity)

Consensus: Every student will be guaranteed a seat in a school close to home. Home school zones will be logically drawn, compact and contiguous. To the extent possible, the boundary lines for such home school zones will incorporate whole neighborhoods, anticipate growth, and make efficient use of facilities.

Approved. The board declined to change "logically drawn" to "regularly shaped" as requested by District 1 member Larry Gauvreau.

Seats held for future growth might in the interim be used for other programs like "Transition 9."

IV. Utilization

Consensus: We will strive to make effective use of all of our

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school buildings. Determination of capacity must consider the need for room for differentiated staffing and special need and programs. We will consider smaller schools, schools within schools, innovative scheduling and different grade configurations as methods to utilize schools efficiently.

Approved.

Option: Manage school size to eliminate use of mobile units beyond 20% of normal school capacity.

Rejected.

Option: Develop a school overcrowding policy.

Approved. District 6 member Lee Kindberg offered a number of examples of how overcrowding might be dealt with. Among the examples: giving higher priority in a lottery to students at an overcrowded school; assigning subdivisions yet to be built to another school; revising attendance lines; temporary alteration of grade structures, as the board did with Community House Middle, which will open with a fifth grade; and use of more mobile units.

Griffin ruled that a complete definition of what would constitute an overcrowding situation should be left to the administration to recommend later.

V. Diversity

Consensus: We believe that a diverse educational environment enhances learning. Therefore, diversity should be fostered, although it cannot be forced.

Approved after a final sentence was eliminated. The sentence read, "In particular, the opportunity for diversity will be encouraged within the magnet program."

Option: Consider a goal of increased diversity with the placement of new schools and the development of home school boundaries.

Rejected. "People don't want to go there," Griffin summarized.

Option: Focus on strengthening schools in naturally diverse areas.

Approved.

Option: Maintain choice priorities that support economic balance.

Griffin ultimately sent the issue to the "parking lot" while staff prepared data on how current choice priorities have been used.

VI. Magnets

Consensus: The magnet program should be strengthened. Magnet schools should offer academically distinct programs. Ineffective magnet programs should be eliminated, and additional strong magnet programs should be introduced. Magnets should be strategically placed to make effective use of facilities and offer reasonable access to students from all parts of the county.

Approved. During discussion the board took a separate vote by which it approved the words, "additional strong magnet programs should be introduced."

Option: In order to offer diverse learning environments, limit the number of free and reduced lunch students in a magnet school.

Approved.

Option: Consider prerequisites and/or merit admission to some magnets.

Approved unanimously.

Option: Consider magnet zones and do not allow a student to choose a magnet outside of his or her zone.

Approved after word change from "establish" to "consider." The effect of this change would give all magnets a geographic zone similar to ones now used for International Baccalaureate magnets.

Option: Continue the sibling guarantee except for merit based admission.

Approved by a slim 5-4 majority. Some members want to open more seats in high-achieving schools. Others apparently worry that the guarantee honors parental convenience over appro-

priateness of the curricular program to the student. Others worry that the guarantee is an impossible promise given growth-mandated assignment boundary changes in the suburbs.

VII. Non-magnet Choice

Consensus: The choice plan should be simplified. The relevant costs and benefits of the student assignment plan must be carefully weighed, and costs should be reduced if at all possible. Minimize transportation costs and time of travel for students.

Approved.

Option: Consider reducing the size of the zones and eligibility for transportation.

Approved 5-4.

Option: Because actual non-magnet choice options have been limited, consider providing non-magnet choice only through NCLB and a staff operated transfer process for open seats.

Approved 5-4.

Option: Eliminate continuation guarantees but keep sibling guarantees.

Separated for votes, the continuation guarantee was sent to the "parking lot" while the sibling guarantee was approved 5-4.

Option: Any plan should provide an alternative school assignment choice for underachievers in a school/feeder school with student achievement levels significantly below the system average, into high achieving, low-poverty schools.

Sent to "parking lot."

Option: Set aside seats at high-achieving schools for low-achieving students, wherever they are (i.e., even low-achieving students at high-achieving schools to move to another high-achieving school.

Sent to "parking lot."

VIII. Exceptional Students and LEP Students

Consensus: To the greatest extent possible, exceptional students and ESL students will be offered the same assignment opportunities as other students.

Approved.

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the 10-year capital plan, most of which are needed today, would be delayed another one to three years. The list includes 16 elementaries, five middle schools and two new high schools.

– The 10-year plan would take 13 years to complete.

– School board members' fond hopes for putting virtually all teachers and children into brick-and-mortar classrooms would be dashed. The growth in mobiles would be slowed, but there would be more trailers 10 years from now than there are today.

– Forty of the 70 schools needing renovations would remain untouched.

The plan, whose bottom line has risen from \$1.4 billion to \$1.9 billion, adds additional schools and adjusts for a 25% increase in construction costs over the last 12 months.

Chamberlain called the \$287 million annual spending required to meet the plan "the troposphere."

"I am not saying this is realistic. I am saying that these are the needs that we assessed. We think these are valid needs.

"I think our bond rating... at least would show that the bond agencies aren't flinching at the amount of debt we are projecting over the next 10 years." Three agencies projected continued top bond ratings.

But Chamberlain acknowledged that if bonds alone are used to finance schools, "it's going to put a burden" on the property tax.

"Other counties use sales tax. There are impact fees, transfer taxes, none of which seem to be too palatable." A statewide bond referendum would help, but Mecklenburg's share of the last such referendum was just \$119 million.

"What can we do realistically?... Clearly we need to state what the needs are, but what we would like to do is propose a plan which we

Continued on Page 6

DidYaHear?

✓ Will the city explode over a few chickens in the yard? NCCJ's Alex Wagaman says the group's neighborhood organizing team has come across 911 calls made to complain that Asians, in keeping with their cultural traditions, were keeping chickens in their yards. Harassment over this and other issues led one family simply to walk away from a mortgage. From schools to neighborhood conditions to political power, low-income folk across Mecklenburg have "so many common issues," Wagaman says. "If only they can resolve" their minor differences, she says, "their potential power could be amazing."

✓ The Gates Foundation-funded New Schools Project in Raleigh recently slapped its copyright on state-published data and called it the "North Carolina High School Yearbook 2005." The document says "the time for change is now" and concludes that the state's "steady improvement will not catch up with the quickly changing global marketplace." The Philanthropy Journal reported that the yearbook suggests high schools "make dramatic changes, including...finding creative ways to keep students from dropping out." How? The Yearbook does indeed say, "High schools must find creative ways to keep students in school and graduating." How? "The New Schools Project believes that quality high school education in the future lies within the three R's – relevance, rigor and relationships. Specifically, smaller, more personalized high schools should be firmly connected to workplace knowledge and skills, while simultaneously preparing all students for the challenges of higher education. Further, these schools are more successful when they consider the needs and abilities of individual students." How? The full 38-page document is at www.newschoolsproject.org.

✓ Making a more substantive contribution this week, Charlotte Advocates for Education published "What Matters Most: Student Postsecondary Success," which segues off state data on how each N.C. high school's graduates perform at UNC system campuses. The report suggests the need to refocus on college success rather than college access because, for example, nearly 16% of CMS students don't return for a second year of college. The report also recommends the community college work might land some students in "a very lucrative career," and advises a study of Advanced Placement coursework. As more CMS high school students are steered into taking at least one such course (now 56%), the proportion scoring a Level 3 on AP or Level 4 on IB has declined (now 46%).

✓ Longtime education watcher Tom Bradbury at Atlanta's Southern Regional Education Board says his views on school organization have changed some since he left Charlotte in 2002. Research, he says, uniformly points out that "low-income schools get worse teachers, the newest teachers, have the highest teacher turnover and the lousiest resources." To fix those problems he says, "you need to have rich parents in each school. For one, they can give money, but for another, they can lobby very, very effectively" for that school's needs.

– Send intelligence to swannfello@aol.com

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think is more reasonably executable” of \$170 million annually. Given inflation, that figure nearly matches the spending level recommended last year by the Citizens Capital Budget Advisory Committee, he said.

“What’s the impact?... The mobile growth will slow but it will not stop and it will not reverse the trend we are on. We will continue to add mobiles each year to varying degrees – and will bring only 30 schools of the 70 we talked about last year... up to current standards.”

School board member Louise Woods objected to Chamberlain’s list below because it scoots many projects ahead of seven “critical needs” projects promised to voters in a 2002 bond referendum. That referendum, slashed by county commissioners before it went to voters, provided only enough money to design the projects.

Chamberlain said Sedgfield Middle would be moved up. The rest would take longer than earlier forecast because there were no temporary sites to move students to during construction.

Proposed delivery

The administration’s delivery schedule, which is premised on annual capital spending of \$170 million, includes the following projects, listed by year of occupancy. Projects in regular type are funded; those in *italic type* are not. Most but not all projects would be occupied in August.

2005

Billingsville ES renovation
 Eastover ES renovation/addition
 New Community House Road MS
 New Lambeth Drive MS
 New Ranson Road ES
 Pinewood ES replacement
 Windsor Park ES replacement

2006

Hickory Grove ES replacement
 Metro replacement
 New Ardrey Kell Road HS
 New Bailey Road MS
 New Highland Creek ES

New Winget Park ES
 Oakdale ES renovation/addition

Tuckaseegee ES renovation/replacement

Winterfield ES renovation/replacement

2007

Albemarle Road ES renovation/addition

Berryhill ES renovation/addition

Butler HS addition

Cotswold ES renovation/addition

Hopewell HS addition

Huntingtowne Farms renovation/addition

Marie G. Davis MS replacement

New Flat Branch Park ES

New Idlewild Road Area ES

New Mallard Creek Park HS

New Westmoreland Road ES

2008

Alexander MS renovation/addition

Carmel MS renovation/addition

Clear Creek ES renovation/addition

Harding University HS addition

New Bradley ES

New Hucks Road Area ES

North Mecklenburg Phase II renovation/addition

Quail Hollow MS renovation/addition

Reedy Creek renovation/addition

2009

Alexander Graham renovation/addition

Amay James renovation/addition

Cochrane MS renovation/addition

Garinger HS addition

Idlewild ES renovation/addition

Independence HS addition

New Elon Park ES

New Matthews-Mint Hill Area HS

New Ridge Road Area MS

Northeast MS renovation/addition

Randolph MS renovation/addition

South Mecklenburg HS renovation/addition

Vance HS addition

2010

Long Creek ES replacement

Full 10-year capital needs

GROWTH AND REAL ESTATE

| | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|
| 34 new elementary schools | \$542,936,000 |
| 6 new high schools | 325,692,000 |
| 7 new middle schools | 179,669,000 |
| 20 additions to existing schools | 112,325,000 |
| Real estate | 83,360,000 |
| 2 Pre-K centers & 3 additions | 32,782,086 |
| Expansion of support facilities | 23,550,000 |
| Subtotal | \$1,300,314,086 |

MAJOR RENOVATIONS

| | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------|
| 12 middle schools | \$169,930,924 |
| 21 elementary schools | 149,904,763 |
| 7 high schools | 143,492,644 |
| 6 Pre-K, alternative schools, etc. | 23,893,989 |
| 1 K-8 school | 14,337,389 |
| Subtotal | \$501,559,709 |

LIFECYCLE REPLACEMENTS

| | |
|-------------------------|----------------------|
| HVAC | 32,293,200 |
| Stadiums | 26,677,550 |
| Plumbing | 16,152,800 |
| Roofing | 10,060,623 |
| Wood bleachers & floors | 9,118,000 |
| Auditoriums | 7,125,000 |
| Windows | 5,584,500 |
| Tracks | 4,775,000 |
| Electrical | 4,500,000 |
| Paving | 3,695,250 |
| Subtotal | \$119,981.923 |

MANDATES AND INITIATIVES

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|
| Asbestos/indoor air quality | \$18,800,000 |
| Technology infrastructure | 11,175,700 |
| Structural evaluation and repair | 10,289,000 |
| High/middle surveillance upgrades | 4,331,983 |
| Disabilities Act compliance | 4,000,000 |
| Intercom integration | 3,201,000 |
| Fire alarm upgrades | 1,878,947 |
| Subtotal | \$53,676,630 |

– Source: CMS

New Belmeade Road Area ES
New Belmeade Road Area MS
New Dixie River Road Area ES
New Monroe Road/Sardis Road Area ES
New North Tryon St. Area ES
New Providence Road West Area ES

2011

New Hucks Road Area MS
Ranson MS renovation/addition
Sedgfield MS renovation/addition

4th assignment lottery another sign of unrest

Last week's results from the fourth annual student assignment lottery showed that the system continues to work best for the white, nonpoor children who are already guaranteed the district's best schools.

CMS said 64% of black families, 76% of Hispanic families and 78% of white families received their first choice. About 67% of low-income students received their first choice.

Blacks are most likely, officials said, to seek through the lottery to escape their assigned neighbor-

hood school, either by choosing a magnet school or another regular school in their zone. Because so many blacks' first choices are for schools that are already filled, the rate of success is low.

Given the neighborhood base of the assignment plan and the community's racial and socioeconomic isolation, blacks' neighborhood schools tend to be low-performing and high-poverty.

Of the 3,323 children eligible for transfer from low-performing schools under No Child Left Behind, 43% sought a transfer,

and 31% or 447 of those 43% got none of their three choices. Those children were transferred to a school of CMS's choice.

Only students entering kindergarten, sixth grade and ninth grade, and those caught up in assignment change boundaries, were required to participate in the lottery. But only 70% of those required to participate applied in the first round. Parents were notified of results last week. Requests for reassignment from the choices made in the first lottery are due to CMS on Friday, March 18.

Briefly...

Another way: A Massachusetts coalition is calling for a state of emergency and \$30 million a year to be pumped into underperforming schools, the Boston Globe reported. The coalition, comprised of civic, education and business leaders, is reacting to dismissal by the state's top court of a lawsuit seeking additional funding for poor schools.

www.boston.com

No carrots: Fewer women from prestigious colleges are becoming teachers, the Christian Science Monitor reported. A new study, published by Stanford University's Hoover Institution, cites pay compression as one of the factors involved in fewer high-aptitude teachers. According to the study, teachers with high aptitude are not likely to earn more than those with low aptitude. Aptitude is defined by college prestige and test scores.

www.csmonitor.com

Better predictor?: Robert Sternberg, a Yale University psychologist, has developed a test that evaluates creativity and problem solving, rather than the analytical skills most often measured on standardized tests, the San Diego Union Tribune told its readers. Preliminary studies show

that the test, which asks students to outline problem solving or write cartoon captions, has been a more accurate predictor of college

grade-point averages than the SAT.

www.signonsandiego.com

Calendar

MARCH

- 16-18** Quad State Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity Conference, Adam's Mark Hotel. Keynote: Scott Syphax, CEO of Sacramento's Nehemiah Corp. of America. Info: Renee Thompson at 704-336-2424 or rthompson@ci.charlotte.nc.us
- 17** School board's Personnel Committee, 2 p.m., Room 414, Education Center.
- 22** School board's Curriculum Committee, 3 p.m., Room 414, Education Center.
- 22** School board meets, 6 p.m., Government Center Meeting Chamber.
- 23** What's Working Community Forum, 7:30 a.m.-11:30 a.m., TIAA-CREF Auditorium, sponsored by Charlotte Chamber. To participate: Kit Cramer, 704-378-1301.
- 24** School board budget work session, 5 p.m., Board Room.
- 24** Parent meeting on comprehensive review of student assignment plan, Ranson Road Middle, 6-8 p.m. Subject: Magnet programs.

APRIL

- 12** School board public hearing on staff effectiveness; staff recommendations on magnets, boundaries and feeder patterns.
- 19** Parent meeting on comprehensive review of assignment plan, Waddell High, 6-8 p.m. Subject: Boundaries and feeder patterns.

MAY

- 10** School board public hearing on magnets, boundaries and feeder patterns; additional information about priorities.
- 11** School board work session, more discussion of magnets, boundaries and feeder patterns.
- 24** School board vote on magnets, boundaries and feeder patterns.

JUNE

- 14** At school board meeting, annual staff report on end-of-grade test results and their implications for student assignment.
- 28** At school board meeting, staff recommendation for lottery priorities; annual staff report on end-of-grade test results and their implications for student assignment.