

Success with real kids in real schools

Teach For America rookies reflect on lessons learned

The three first-year teachers sat before an audience that included their departing boss, their incoming boss, three school board members and a bunch of business executives.

And all that the Teach For America rookies had to do, said board member and Charlotte Chamber official Kit Cramer, was to tell the audience “the good, the bad and the ugly” of day-to-day life in CMS.

Pughsley: Stay vigilant or gains will be lost

On Tuesday, retiring Supt. Jim Pughsley returned to the Tuesday Morning Breakfast Forum, one of the first groups he met with after arriving in Charlotte. Excerpts from his response to speeches honoring his life's work in education:

“This has been a really interesting journey for me, and part of that journey has been here in Charlotte-Mecklenburg. But for me as an educator it started some 42 years ago.

“That’s when I first finished school at Northern Arizona University and took my first job as an elementary teacher in the Clark County school district in Las Vegas, Nevada. I spent some 27 years in Clark County school district, saw it go from a school district of some 40,000 to today a school district of 270,000. You know, when people talk about consolidation to me, and growth and all those things I don’t get

A first corps of 48 TFA recruits entered CMS classrooms last August. Tuesday, every one of them completed the school year, an endurance record reportedly unmatched by any other teacher preparation program. A new batch of 65 began training this week to be ready when schools reopen.

The three teachers who faced an early-morning Chamber audience Wednesday spoke of professional growth, of good support, of lessons learned, and of students whose progress rewarded their efforts.

Two of the three acknowledged they probably would not stay in

the classroom beyond their two-year commitment.

Teach For America-Charlotte Executive Director Melanie Byrd offered context:

Recruits entered some of the nation’s top colleges with an average SAT score of 1310. They left with an average grade-point average of 3.5. Nationwide, most serve in schools where, by age 9, students are already three grades behind, “and that achievement gap only continues to widen.”

Byrd said that in west Charlotte, where many of the TFA

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Supt. Jim Pughsley with former school board member Sarah Stevenson at Tuesday Morning Breakfast Forum.

Photo by Richard McElrath

excited because, like I said, that was a school district of 270,000, covers 8,000 square miles, borders on three different states. So it’s really interesting, the journey as I reflect on all the things, and all the comments that were shared this morning.

“... Attorney [Danielle] Obiorah... is the graduate of Carroll High School in Monroe, Louisiana. Now, I was the first African-American superintendent in Monroe, Louisiana. She graduated in 1986, and I started there in 1990. So it’s truly a small, small world.

“When I left Monroe I had the opportunity to go to Virginia

Beach, and I was in the Tidewater area, obviously, and that’s where Dr. [Eric] Smith was.

“Now, a lot of people think that Dr. Smith brought me here to Charlotte-Meck and that’s not the case. We knew of each other, we knew of each other. And I was actually here in Charlotte prior to

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Until August ...

The next regular edition of *Educate!* will be dated Aug. 26, with special editions as events warrant. Thanks for reading, and have a great summer!

Manning honored for Leandro work

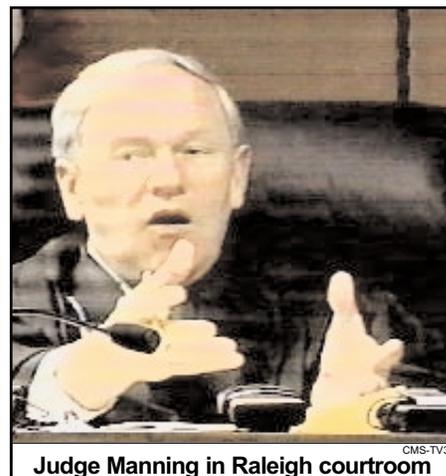
The 2005 recipient of the Jay Robinson Leadership Award does his own research. Crunches his own numbers. Takes his court on the road. And is a tenacious advocate for a better North Carolina.

The Public School Forum Monday named Superior Court Judge Howard E. Manning, Jr. the fifth recipient of the Jay Robinson Leadership Award. The award is named for a former CMS superintendent who later led the N.C. State Board of Education.

Manning has presided over the Leandro vs. North Carolina case since 1997. He had CMS Supt.

Jim Pughsley on the witness stand in March when Manning was exploring low student achievement at N.C. high schools. His most recent report from the court advised state officials to “quit running away from the problem and utilize the great resources the State already has in place to solve the problem.”

Award committee chair and former State Board chair Phil Kirk said, “Judge Manning... is, like Jay, a true champion for fairness and equal opportunity... Judge Manning has left no doubt that North Carolina is responsible for



Judge Manning in Raleigh courtroom

providing a sound basic education for all of North Carolina's school-children.”

Manning declined the \$5,000 prize associated with the award.

Pughsley responds

Continued from Page 1

his arrival.

“I had been offered the superintendency in Virginia Beach, after having served as interim superintendent. And I was offered the permanent position there, but there was a lady here that I had been chasing – Joanne Pughsley, that's right. Actually I hadn't been chasing her, but she was here in Charlotte and I was in Virginia Beach and fortunately we have been together as a husband and wife for some 40 years now.

“So I didn't accept the superintendency there, and came here to Charlotte instead.

“And when Dr. Smith was appointed the superintendent, I was at home, received a call, he said, ‘I'd like to meet with you.’ Sure. I wasn't doing anything, quite frankly, wasn't doing anything.

“We met at the Holiday Inn on Woodlawn. We sat down and had breakfast together. And he indicated to me that he'd like to make me part of his administration. And I said yes. And that's how it all started. That's how it all started....

“I've only had one vision, one vision, and that is: All kids, and I

do mean all, receive a proper education, a proper education.

“How many of you are aware that, prior to Dr. Smith and my arrival, that there were two sets of goals for students – black and white.... Well... that was done away with immediately, so that we had one set of goals for all students, all kids.

“Now... this is a copy of an application that I made to become the superintendent of Charlotte-Mecklenburg in 1987, 18 years ago [the year Dr. Peter Relic was named superintendent].

“Destiny said no at that time. And destiny was right.

“But destiny did not forget, and my time was three years ago, three years ago.

“And yes, it has been painful at time, but now as I reflect on it, it's been good....

“And you know what gives me the greatest thrill? It's when I go someplace, and little black boys and little black girls know who I am, who I have never seen before, but they know who I am, and they know what I'm about. And their mothers and fathers are there with them, introducing them to me. Now, you know, that didn't happen by design. That happened because somebody feels good about something. And so long as they feel good, I'm all

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Pughsley responds

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right. I can deal with the pain.

“But I have to admit to you: The pain is becoming less and less as the days wear on, less and less. As I was coming to work today, this is the last “last day” for me as it relates to the closing of schools. But it’s not the last day as it relates to what I will be doing with regards to education.

“And I will be associated with a national foundation, the Stupski Foundation, out of Mill Valley, California. That’s just across the Golden Gate Bridge there from San Francisco. And their sole purpose, their sole purpose, has to do with working with urban school districts to build organizational leadership capacity having to do with student achievement and closing the achievement gap. That’s all they do, and they are well financed.

“So, I love you, board members, but I’m going to be doing my work without any boards. Those Tuesday night board meetings are over. I’ve got two more, but they’re over. It has truly been good, and I have been blessed....

“You need to know, though, as one of the speakers indicated, this is really just the beginning.

“And if you’re not diligent, what has been gained will slip away.

“And there have been some significant gains, but they will slip away if you’re not on your job.

“Don’t think that won’t happen now. Don’t think that for these last three years there haven’t been attempts at that. Let me cite an example for you.

“We all know that funding has not been in place these last three years from the county. Certainly there’s a tremendous possibility that there will be monies available for next year. For these last three years, not so. Let me share with you how that plays out.

“We have redirected in three years some \$75 million so we could continue the march. But in that process, in that process, I indicated that the classrooms be

Magnets, ‘other ways’ toward diversity

From Supt. Jim Pughsley's last appearance June 3 on Upfront, a studio show on CMS-TV3 hosted by Moira Quinn. In this sequence, Pughsley answers a question raised during an on-the-street interview.

Q: I know that the main way that we have integrated the schools in the past was using busing and transportation, and that’s not been very well-received. How would you suggest that we can go ahead and re-integrate the schools so that they are more diverse, not only racially but also from an education standpoint, when busing does not seem to be a very popular option.

Pughsley: Certainly diversity is important, and I’m hoping that we can facilitate more of it as compared to now. One way of accomplishing that would be by way of magnet schools, and we are looking more and more at the magnet schools as part of our comprehensive review of the student assignment plan. There are other means as well, and we need to take a close look at those.

But again: Diversity is important. It enriches everyone’s life, from my point of view. And again, magnet schools are a primary vehicle, but there are other ways as well.

Quinn: You know, in Charlotte, that’s a million-dollar question.

Pughsley: Million-dollar question, but one we have to come to grips with and make some tough decisions about, because we need to position this school district not just for today but the years ahead.



CMS-TV3

protected, the school would be protected, and the equity initiatives would be protected.

“But all did not feel that way within my own administration. There were opportunities, had they been granted, for some of the equity monies to be redirected as well. I’m just talking straight to you this morning.

“There were those efforts, had I not established those expectations, that would have caused equity monies to some degree to be redirected. OK?

“You have to stay on the job. You have to stay on the job.

“Now there was a price paid in relation to that. And when I say there was a price paid, protecting the classroom and protecting school and equity initiatives, that meant that to get that \$75 million we to go in the infrastructure and tear some of that out.

“What I’m saying is, we had to cut a lot of positions out of central office, and now we’re paying a price for it in some of the stuff you hear about this year.

“And that’s why it’s so significant what the county commissioners are doing with regards to funding for next year. Stay on your job, and Charlotte-Meck will continue to move forward, ‘cause it’s a tremendous system. It has a very solid foundation.

“We do have some problems. We do have some challenges. But we also have the expertise.

“What we need now is the will to make the difference. That’s a resource that you can’t go to any store and buy. That’s a resource that has to come from within: the will to make a difference. The will to stay the course. And only you, and others such as yourself, can provide that....”

Making it work

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recruits work, children are seven times less likely to get to college than students 18 miles south in Ballantyne.

Corps members served in 16 high-needs schools. Three-quarters taught in secondary schools, not elementaries.

The best

Anna Mallett graduated in psychology a year ago from Davidson College. Teaching seventh-grade exceptional children this year at Albemarle Road Middle, the best part of the year was near the end, "seeing how many grade levels they could improve.

"I was so proud of them," Mallett said. "Seeing them really get into it was the best part of it."

Jennifer Pohl was an archaeology major at the University of Wisconsin-LaCrosse, but had worked for four years as a research analyst for four years before joining TFA. In teaching ninth-grade English this year at West Meck High, she said she found positive feedback daily.

"Every day, no matter what I go through with those students, there's at least one of them that makes it worthwhile."

Maria Gonzales was an anthropology major at Colorado College. This year she taught kindergartners at Byers Elementary. She mentioned the children's excitement on awards ceremony day. "They are really smart."

Mallett also mentioned that she and other EC teachers would share dinner and talk about "challenges, and also things that were going well."

The worst

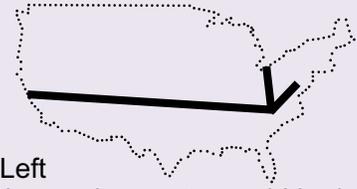
Mallett said that on day one she set up discipline rules and expectations. "We practiced and modeled them," she said.

"After about two days I was ready to start making those significant gains in achievement.... In about two weeks I realized that not many of my kids remem-

DidYaHear?

✓ Look for incoming Interim Supt. Frances Haithcock to signal a new level of front-office openness to community voices by her personal participation in the Charlotte Chamber's annual InterCity visit. The group visits Tampa June 27-29.

✓ Supt. Jim Pughsley got his new assignments this week, and it looks like most of his "retirement" travel will be along the flight paths at right. The Stupski Foundation will have him one week a month at headquarters on the Left Coast. He said Wednesday his consulting assignments would be in Cleveland and Baltimore.



✓ Mecklenburg Ministries this week accidentally sent out e-mail with the subject line, "Executive Director Opening At Mecklenburg Ministries." And while no decisions have been announced, a female ordained Methodist minister is reportedly in the wings to take over at the interfaith group. Of the 49 groups and congregations Meck Min claims on its Web site, 15 are Presbyterian and nine each are Methodist and Baptist.

✓ Banker and Charlotte Chamber leader Ernie Dehnert, who's spent years lobbying for quality education in Mecklenburg, reflected Wednesday on commissioners' decision to give the schools more money, their first additional local support in four years: "While we didn't get all we'd like to have seen, there will be a 10.6% increase.... That's a start in the right direction. There is still room to grow in terms of funding for education in this community."

Dehnert said a group of architects and other business leaders were meeting with school construction officials to pilot some modular building techniques that could help cut the need for mobile classrooms. "That effort is under way and Guy [Chamberlain] and his crowd have been very encouraging."

– Send intelligence to swannfello@aol.com

bered" the rules. "Middle schoolers do not have a very large memory." Next year, she said, she will set up the discipline rules as before, but also concentrate on "making them part of the process going along."

For Gonzales, teaching kindergartners at Byers, "student motivation at the beginning of the year" was the biggest challenge.

Some of the parents "I really needed to have engaged" did not get involved as school began. Next year she will focus on "not having a month or two slip by" before engaging them.

Pohl taught regular language arts classes at West Meck High. Few of her students had distinguished themselves academically

in years past.

"With my population of kids, they are not primarily motivated by grades." Indeed, some had no motivation at all. Pohl took the dicey step of, initially at least, making pleasing the teacher the motivation.

"I decided to make them believe in myself so that they will work for me. At least for the 90 minutes I have them each day, they will work for me." To be successful, the strategy required that teacher and students come to know and respect each other.

"There were a few that were guarded, but for the most part they want you to know them. They were not wanting to keep

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Making it work

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me out. They were waiting for me to ask.”

Mallett said that when the children saw her achieving her goals, they were inspired to reach for theirs. Mallett’s goals included overcoming obstacles, “and there are so many facing my children.” During the year that meant getting one student into eyeglasses, and another’s entire family into a home relocation agency because they had become homeless.

Things to do differently

Gonzales’ kindergartners experienced the following routine, perhaps for the first time: Set a goal (say, learning all the alphabet); learn specific information; meet a goal; celebrate success of meeting the goal. Gonzales told the business executives that her children responded with great enthusiasm once they understood the system. Not only that, they would take ownership of the system: They would want to know how they were doing towards their goals, and what was next to be done.

To help the children understand this system and take ownership sooner, Gonzales said she would begin next school year with “investment folders” in which children could see physical evidence of their progress. “Maybe the motivation won’t be so hard next year,” Gonzales said.

To motivate disinterested learners at West Meck, Pohl created multiple versions of reading passages in ascending levels of difficulty. Unmotivated students first received the easiest version and got the answers right. Then they received a more difficult version. The key to the system: When students realized that Pohl would not be satisfied until they mastered the most difficult version, they started asking to tackle the most difficult version first.

“I introduced that in the fourth quarter,” Pohl explained. “They did phenomenally.”

The value of citizen auditors

Having a second set of eyes on a document always makes it more likely that errors will not get in print. Similarly, there’s value in having citizen committees review the work of government to be sure that what was sought is in fact implemented.

This latest example is from the Education Budget Advisory Committee’s annual report to the Board of County Commissioners. The text is part of an addendum reviewing the board’s “Funding Framework,” a scheme designed by former commissioners chairman Tom Cox to rationalize the annual debate over CMS funding.

“The capital component of the Framework consists of allocations for three purposes: (1) a part to cover the cost of seats for new students; (2) a part for rehabilitating existing schools; and (3) a part to eventually replace the existing fleet of mobile classrooms....

“The third and final part of the capital component is the desire to eliminate mobile classrooms over time. Principle 1 of The Funding Framework Principles in Action calls for eliminating all mobiles over 10 years. But, a look at the formula indicates it is actually eliminating 80% of mobiles over 20 years, a far different rate. The Framework is using 14,340 as the starting point for current mobile seats. The actual number of mobiles in use for 2005-2006 will be 839 or approximately 20,975 mobile seats (which assumes 25 seats per mobile unit). Using the concept of replacing 80% of mobile seats over twenty years would yield an allocation of \$15.9 million per year, \$5 million more than the Framework amount. If the mobiles are all eliminated over the original ten-year period the allocation would rise to \$39.9 million annually, \$29 million more than originally projected.”

Suggestions

Cramer, a school board member, put the rookies on the spot by asking for “one suggestion” they would want to give CMS and its school board.

“We get a lot of bad publicity and it weighs heavily on the kids,” said Pohl. “Please come into our school and look at the brilliant things” students are doing.

About bad publicity, she added, the students “might not read the newspaper article, but they know it is there... they look at me ... we need positive press.”

Offered Cramer, “As a former school public relations officer I offer a resounding amen to that.”

Mallett at Albemarle Road Middle said her school “could use some more reward systems for those who are doing well, rather than having punishments for those who are struggling.”

Gonzales said it would be nice if visitors to her high-poverty school

checked their “preconceived notions” at the door.

“Even before they meet my students they [think they] know what’s going on” and expect bad behavior and low achievement. “I don’t know how you change the culture,” she mused.

CMS support

Byrd said CMS provides “materials and resources and mentors that other corps members across the nation do not have.”

She joked that the Charlotte corps might even be “slightly spoiled.” Not only is there more support, training and in-classroom mentoring than in other cities, but there was that visit to Wachovia’s executive dining room before school opened last fall

“We’re supposed to be working in low-income communities and here we are eating at Wachovia,” Byrd said.

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Making it work

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Pohl was assigned a desk next to a new teacher hired through the traditional pipeline. Both benefited from CMS-provided mentors. But Pohl said she had more “one-on-one attention” because of the additional TFA support. She could call on TFA mentors and content coaches. “My content coaches have been incredibly important.”

Asked what Teach For America needs, Byrd said the program needs additional community and business partners. “We are not fully funded by Wachovia.” The program also accepts individual sponsorships for corps members.

“We need recognition within the community to let the community know that we are making tremendous gains in schools that need it.”

The data to support Byrd’s point may not be long in coming. Byrd offered the group some preliminary data, but assessment of gains made under TFA teachers in Charlotte is not yet complete.

Safety

The teachers were asked if they ever felt unsafe in their classrooms. The answers were complicated.

“It is a problem,” Pohl said, “but it’s not 30 kids sitting in front of you that are disruptive. It’s two kids.”

She said that her high school students “have tremendous problems respecting one another and their education, but I have never seen them disrespecting a teacher. They definitely draw a line.”

But she also told a story about a senior barging into her ninth-grade classroom insisting that he join her class, getting in her face and cursing – then later in the day coming back to apologize.

Byrd said four of the 48 TFA teachers were involved in student-initiated physical altercations during the year. “Usually school officials were incredibly

Explaining Charlotte’s housing disparities

From “Disparities in Housing Between African Americans and Whites in Charlotte,” by the Institute on Race & Poverty at the University of Minnesota Law School Twin Cities Campus.

“Charlotte is an area of promising economic growth, low unemployment and relatively low economic and racial segregation. The cluster pattern of income and racial groups, likely makes it easier for people in poverty and African Americans to access opportunities across geographic space. Charlotte also has a modest-size black middle class and lower poverty rate than most U.S. metropolitan areas.

“Though Charlotte has great potential to have economic and social stability in the future, a number of concerns remain. Charlotte continues to have segregation patterns similar to the past. The cluster patterns of areas with large proportions of African Americans tend to intersect high poverty rates and lower property values. Even when controlling for income and monthly mortgage payments, African Americans are much less likely to own higher value houses than whites.

“Though many possibilities could explain these differences, different markets geographically and financially between African Americans and whites, past and present discrimination and intergenerational wealth creation remain leading candidates for explaining these disparities.”

– www1.umn.edu/irp/maps/charlottenc.html

supportive,” she said.

Retention

The teachers were asked if they would stay.

“I definitely want to stay a third year at least,” Gonzales offered. “I am so invested in their families.” A student’s new bed was proudly showed off during a home visit, she said.

Mallett said that after two years in the classroom she would return to school for training as a school psychologist. Pohl said she hopes to enter school administration.

Teach for America claims 3,000 corps members serving in more than 1,000 schools. The program, initiated in 1990, claims 12,000 recruits, and 9,000 alumni who served out their two-year commitments.

While TFA has been embraced by urban districts eager for the skilled young people TFA delivers, the program has been criticized for doing little to end high turnover at high-needs schools.

Stanford University School of Education researcher has said most Teach for America veterans leave the profession after their two-year hitch. CMS has said it costs \$10,000 or more to replace a teacher.

Teach For America areas include: Atlanta, Baltimore, Bay Area, Charlotte, Chicago, Eastern North Carolina, Greater New Orleans, Houston, Las Vegas Valley, Los Angeles, Miami-Dade, Mississippi Delta, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York City, Philadelphia, Phoenix, Rio Grande Valley, South Dakota, South Louisiana, St. Louis and Washington D.C.

Briefly...

Class rank: Prestigious public high schools are less likely to put student's individual class rankings on their transcripts, the Chicago Tribune reported. Class rank at competitive high schools often is an unclear indicator of a student's ability because if that same student had attended a less competitive school, his or her standing might be much higher. Class ranking also appears to be less significant to college admissions officers than it was in the past. In 1993, 42% said they placed "considerable importance" on class rank, but in 2004 the figure had dropped to 28%.

www.chicagotribune.com

Lure to teach: California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger plans to double the number of math and science teachers graduating from the state university system by 2010, the Los Angeles Times reported. His plan would forgive up to \$19,000 in student loans and shorten the time necessary to graduate and complete board certification. In addition, future teachers would be offered paid internships.

www.latimes.com

Antidote to fights: The Baltimore County Schools are seeing an increase in girls fighting at school, but funding is often cut for successful programs aimed at reducing such fights. The Baltimore Sun reported that at one school, the employment of a crisis intervention counselor appeared to help, until the position was cut. The former counselor stated, "When the girls have the opportunity to talk things through, they would rather talk things through."

www.baltimoresun.com

Calendar

JUNE

13 School board's Policy Committee, 3:15 p.m., Room 414, Education Center.

14 School board meets, 6 p.m., Government Center Meeting Chamber.

15 School board's Safety Committee, 3:15 p.m., Room 414, Education Center.

16 School board's Personnel Committee, 2 p.m., Room 414, Education Center.

16 Finance, Capital & Facilities Committee, 4 p.m., Board Conference Room, Education Center.

26-July 1 or July 31-Aug. 5 "Anytown Summer Leadership Program" for high school students, first week at Blowing Rock Assembly Grounds, Boone; second week at Kanuga, Hendersonville. Fee of \$350 includes transportation; financial aid available. Information: Alex Wagaman at 704-334-0053 or awagaman@nccj.org

28 School board's Curriculum Committee, 3 p.m., Room 414, Education Center.

29 School board meets, 6 p.m., Government Center (Moved from June 28).

JULY

10-14 "Bring It On: Rising to Meet the Challenge of High School," an NCCJ residential summer program for rising ninth-graders, held at The Summit at Browns Summit, N.C. Register by June 10. Fee of \$300 includes transportation; financial aid available. Information: Alex Wagaman at 704-334-0053 or awagaman@nccj.org

20 School board meets, 6 p.m., Government Center (Moved from July 26).

Charter costs: A report by the Texas Center for Educational Research states that charter schools in Texas receive more money than traditional schools, the Dallas News reported. The finding is surprising because charter schools are often touted as a low-cost alternative to mainstream public schools. Critics of the study say a one-time federal grant during the year studied skewed results, and that PTA money was included for charters but not the traditional schools.

www.dallasnews.com

Links to parents: Developing a parent partnership program may take three years. Setting

aside a room for parent volunteers brings benefits. Hospitality is important. Those and other pointers were in an Education Week story on building bridges to home that focused on a middle school in Georgia. Teachers use phone messages and the Web to share scores and information with parents, but students also have an old-fashioned "agenda book" listing the same information that must come back to school with parent signatures. Helping parents of new sixth-graders get comfortable with a new and usually bigger school helps. And telling parents exactly how they can be involved also helps, officials said.

www.edweek.org

Until August, then ...

The next regular edition of *Educate!* will be dated Aug. 26. Between now and then, special editions may be published as events warrant. Thanks for reading, and have a great summer!