Version 1.1

Every Student. Every School. Every Day.

A DISCUSSION OF POLICIES AND IDEAS TO DRIVE PUPIL ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT FOR CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG SCHOOLS

Information Compiled by: CMS Families United for Public Education

March 9, 2016

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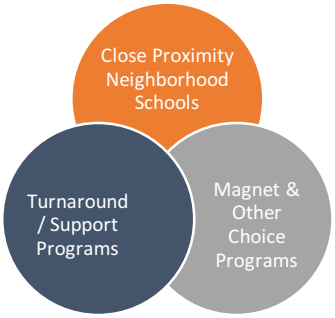
I. Introduction & Objectives

This document was prepared by a group of parents from different occupations, zip codes, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds who have come together around a shared purpose:

To ensure that CMS' student assignment plan review supports and preserves successful neighborhood schools, while providing access to excellent educational opportunities for our children and all children, in every neighborhood.

We believe that parents throughout the county love their children and want what is best for them. Starting from this commonality, we have developed a data-driven student assignment proposal that:

- Preserves existing neighborhood school assignments for those who prefer them
- Offers simple access to a robust menu of specialized magnet choices for those who seek alternatives, and
- Invests in proven and promising programs and partnerships to improve educational outcomes for students in our most challenged schools.



We have prepared this document unsolicited, unpaid, unaffiliated and without agenda. We are simply parents who met through our mutual passion for this issue and shared concern over the divisive tone of the conversation that surrounds it.

In response, we did what an excellent school asks of students. We embarked on an inquiry-based, self-guided educational journey. We've visited successful and struggling schools, and spoken with school leaders, teachers, parents and students in all districts. We've attended Board of Education meetings large and small, participated in community conversations and CMS chats in all districts, and gone to information sessions sponsored by organizations on every side of the issue. We've researched turnaround programs like Project LIFT and READ Charlotte. We've discovered innovative approaches other school districts have used to address the many issues faced by students living in poverty. We've read everything we could find. We've gathered and studied data on academic performance and graduation rates and the effect of all the variables under discussion regarding student achievement. Most importantly, we've stepped far outside the walls of our own schools with open minds and we have asked, listened, and learned, and allowed every answer to lead to new questions. Using a small, private Facebook page as our "office," we've engaged nightly in collaborative brainstorming and shared our individual research findings.

And the outcome of all of this work is even greater passion—to find an answer that really does maximize academic achievement by every child, every day, in every neighborhood.

We believe that nobody cares about education more than parents. We truly believe that by starting from our shared goal, we can change the tone of the conversation and have a positive impact on the course of this critical community decision.

We respectfully submit this paper for your consideration.

II. Mission, Vision, Goals & Diversity

Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools works toward a mission and vision that are unchanged by periodic reviews of student assignment. Every CMS initiative must ultimately be in support of and accountable to the following:

Mission

The mission of CMS is to maximize academic achievement by every student in every school.

Vision

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools provides all students the best education available anywhere, preparing every child to lead a rich and productive life.

CMS Goals

The following aspirational goals for student assignment were approved by the CMS Board of Education on February 23, 2016:

- Provide choice and promote equitable access to varied and viable programmatic options for all children
- Maximize efficiency in the use of school facilities, transportation and other capital and operational resources to reduce overcrowding
- Reduce the number of schools with high concentrations of poor and high needs children
- Provide school assignment options to students assigned to schools that are not meeting performance standards established by the state
- Preserve and expand schools and programs in which students are successfully achieving the Mission and Vision of the Board

We believe that the recommendations contained in this report support these aspirational goals, however we'd like to note that the fourth goal listed, *"Provide school assignment options to students assigned to schools that are not meeting performance standards established by the state,"* is redundant with the first, "*Provide choice and promote equitable access to varied and viable programmatic options for all children."*

Maintaining even one school that doesn't meet basic state performance standards is unacceptable. Raising the performance of all schools to meet or exceed basic performance standards is an achievable, measurable, and completely reasonable goal, and we respectfully suggest adjusting the fourth statement accordingly.

Defining Diversity

The benefit of a diverse student population has been a recurring theme throughout the discussion of school assignment. However, this conversation has been lacking the clarity of a consistent definition of the term.

We urge CMS to define diversity in an educational context that truly reflects both the composition of our city and the global economy into which our students will graduate. School populations reflect the ethnic, racial, cultural, religious, and socioeconomic diversity found in our neighborhoods, and we believe that the current measures of diversity used by CMS do not accurately reflect Charlotte's ever-evolving demographics.

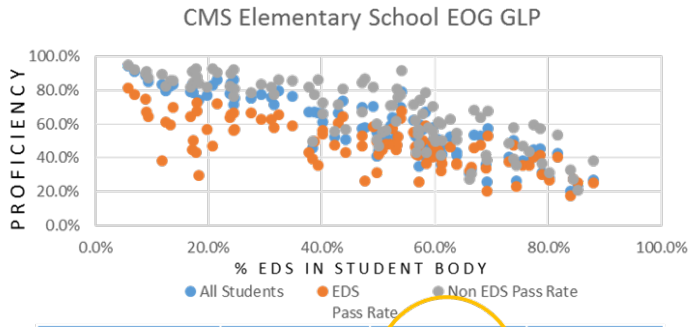
A More Diverse Experience

We do believe that a diverse classroom reflective of the greater community and the world is important. We urge CMS to recognize the diversity that already exists in our classrooms, and to use the even greater diversity that exists system-wide as an opportunity for shared learning for all students in all schools.

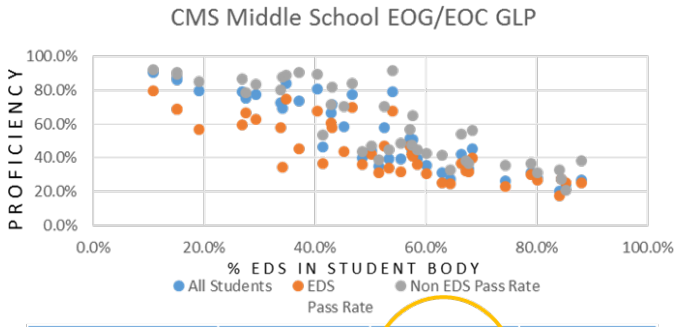
We recommend re-establishing and expanding partner school programs, and pairing schools in neighborhoods with different demographics. These pairings have historically been at the school level, and have largely revolved around sharing of financial and volunteer resources. By pairing grade levels, classrooms, and individual students we see an opportunity to develop meaningful educational opportunities through which students and staff recognize and appreciate one another's similarities and differences. Creative curriculums, shared research assignments, crosstown team projects, classroom video conferencing, shared field trips, even student and teacher exchanges and much more are possible at low or no cost with existing technology. We believe this approach is one step toward developing meaningful relationships between students from different areas of Charlotte while preserving the school assignments close to home that families throughout the county value.

Economic Diversity & Performance

Does economic Diversity in schools enhance performance of all students?

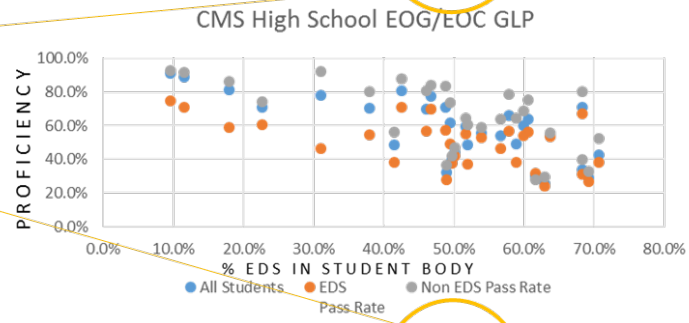


ES: Avg Proficiency	Higher-income	Mixed-income	Lower-income
Non-EDS	84.8%	69.1%	50.8%
EDS	58.6%	50.3%	38.8%



MS: Avg Proficiency	Higher-income	Mixed-income	Lower-income
Non-EDS	86.6%	65.5%	41.4%
EDS	61.3%	49.5%	31.2%

High Economic Diversity



HS: Avg Proficiency	Higher-income	Mixed-income	Lower-income
Non-EDS	86.1%	64.6%	55.7%
EDS	61.0%	49.6%	43.7%

Analysis

The data[1] above denotes three groups of schools, based on EDS[2] level:

- Higher-income schools (lowest percentage of EDS students)
- Mixed-income schools (roughly half EDS and half non-EDS students)
- Lower-income schools (highest percentage of EDS students)

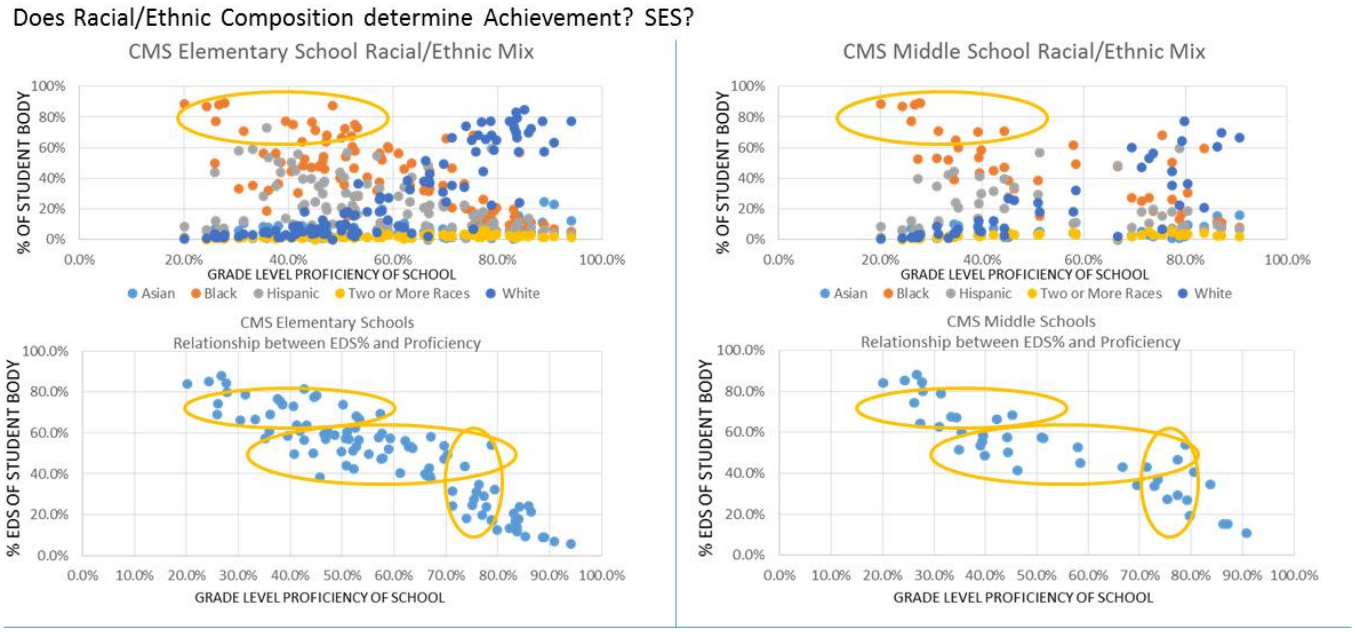
Both EDS and non-EDS students perform better in higher-income schools.

Based on CMS performance as reported by the Public Schools of NC Analysis & Reporting Section, an EDS student relocated from a low-income school to a mixed-income school could be expected to achieve between 6 and 18 points grade level proficiency growth on average, while the performance of a non-EDS student moved from a higher-income school to a mixed-income school could be expected to slip 16 to 22 points.

[1] Note: All data analysis contained in this report was performed using published NC public school accountability data, available at http://www.ncpublicschools.org/accountability/reporting/. While the focus of this data analysis has been on 2014-15 CMS Performance results, initial review of 2012-13 and 2013-14 data has shown consistent themes.

[2] Economically Disadvantaged Student

Racial/Ethnic Composition in our Schools



Analysis

Racial and/or socioeconomic composition of the student body are not reliable predictors of school performance.

In high EDS elementary schools (65% - 88%) with similar racial, ethnic and socioeconomic composition, grade level proficiency for EDS students ranges broadly from 18-53%. For non-EDS students, achievement ranges from 21% to 68% in those same schools. With such a broad range of performance and achievement in schools with similar racial, ethnic and socioeconomic composition, it is impossible to establish racial, ethnic or socioeconomic diversity as determining factors in the performance of a school. Overall Grade Level Proficiency ranges from 20% to 57% in schools with effectively the same "low-income" composition.

The analysis holds in the mixed- and higher-income elementary schools. Although performance improves in these schools, the wide distribution signals that achievement cannot be predicted solely based on student body composition. The most diverse schools both socioeconomically, racially and ethnically do not deliver the highest achievement. They only improve on what the low income schools deliver and reflect the wide range of scores in all the CMS schools.

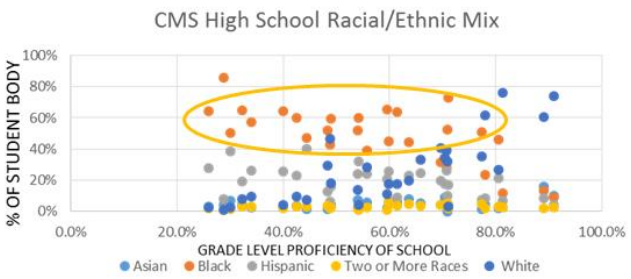
The more affluent schools, some of which are highly diverse racially and ethnically, perform best across the board, with in excess of 80% and in some cases 90% proficiency while still claiming up to 40% non-white student populations.

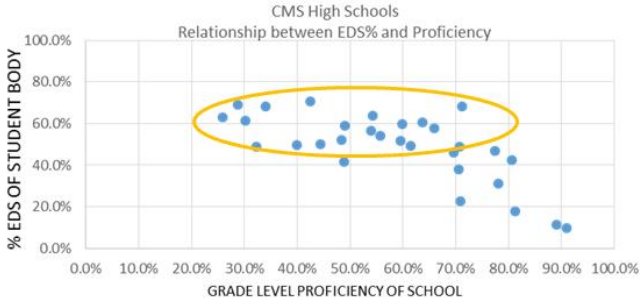
This data suggests that factors other than racial/ethnic classification and SES[3], likely both internal and external to CMS, have greater influence on a successful environment for learning.

[3] Socioeconomic status

Racial/Ethnic Composition in our Schools (Cont'd)

Does Racial/Ethnic Composition determine Achievement? SES?





Analysis

The most striking observation from the CMS High School performance charts is the tremendously wide distribution of achievement scores by schools with comparable student body composition. Given this extremely broad distribution, neither the racial/ethnic nor the SES composition can be decidedly determinant of academic outcomes or student/school proficiency.

Looking at either racial composition (roughly 80-90% Black and Hispanic) or socioeconomic composition (50-71% EDS), results vary from 26% to 71% grade level proficiency, showing we have a very wide distribution of performance by these students, and as such schools.

The highest achieving and performing schools are the most affluent, however, they too demonstrate high diversity with up to 39% non-white students. One of only four high school programs delivering over 80% proficiency, a CMS option program, is 73% non-white, and 43% EDS.

Our Proposal

Based on the research we have completed to date, we recommend an assignment plan organized around three basic tenets, which correspond to the goals recently approved by the Board of Education:

School Board Goals	Proposed Tenets		
	Close Proximity Schools	Simple Access to Specialized Magnets	Turnaround / Support Programs
1 Provide choice and promote equitable access to varied and viable programmatic options for all children		X	
2 Maximize efficiency in the use of school facilities, transportation and other capital and operational resources to reduce overcrowding	X	X	
3 Reduce the number of schools with high concentrations of poor and high needs children		X	
4 Provide school assignment options to students assigned to schools that are not meeting performance standards established by the state		X	X
5 Preserve and expand schools and programs in which students are successfully achieving the Mission and Vision of the Board	X		X

III. Close Proximity Neighborhood Schools

Every student deserves a stable, excellent school close to home

Across all six districts, a majority of families have expressed a strong preference for neighborhood school assignments. Proximity-based assignments with clean boundaries feed entire neighborhoods into single elementary schools, entire elementary schools into middle schools, and entire middle schools into high schools. In keeping with CMS' current guiding principles, these schools are the foundation of the school assignment plan.

Efficiency	• Minimizes transportation time and cost • Buses run multiple routes • Easy drop off and pick up for illness, emergency
Engagement	• Easy access encourages participation in after-hours school events • Convenience encourages volunteerism, caregiver/teacher meetings, presence at school events • Strong family engagement, in any form that is practical for all, is key to success
Community	• Area businesses, faith-based organizations, etc. can provide volunteers, in-kind donations, and fundraising partnerships that are mutually beneficial • School becomes a hub of community activity, shared investment and a source of neighborhood pride
Localization	• In education, one size does not fit all • Each neighborhood school reflects the community in which it sits • Empower principals to adjust academic instruction, operations and programs to suit the needs, strengths, and challenges of the neighborhood • Empower principals to seek out partnerships with local businesses and organizations to meet student needs

The Challenge

Although a majority of families strongly prefer a close proximity neighborhood school, some schools are significantly underperforming and this drives those who can to seek alternatives. The families who opt out are often those most likely to have the capacity to improve the neighborhood school.

Recommendations

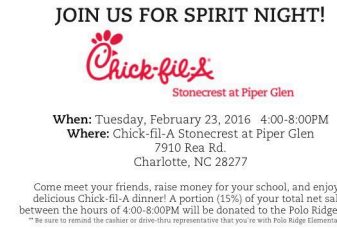
What makes a neighborhood school successful? How can we support the continued success of high performing neighborhood schools and provide the tools needed to bolster underperforming schools?

- Strengthen neighborhood schools with *enrollment from the entire attendance zone*. Shamrock Gardens is a successful model of turnaround. CMS can support similar efforts by partnering with neighborhood organizations, area preschools and daycare centers to actively invite families from neighborhoods who have historically opted out of their zoned schools to take another look through open houses and informational events. An excellent, parent-led example of this approach is currently in progress, initiated by the Huntingtowne Farms Parent Group. This group brings together parents of preschoolers zoned for Huntingtowne Farms Elementary School in a playgroup that mixes monthly activities with opportunities to learn about the school, meet prospective students and families, and participate in activities of HFES. This volunteer, parent-led effort has already resulted in increased enrollment and engagement

of non-EDS families. See: https://www.facebook.com/groups/HFPreschool/?fref=ts

- *Empower principals* to make operational decisions that facilitate greater connections between school, families, and the neighborhood. By considering the needs, cultural norms and past experience of students' families, each school can create an environment that welcomes and simplifies family engagement at school, and strengthen communication and mutual support between school and caregivers. A district-wide example is Jennings, MO. Partnerships with social service agencies, an in-school food pantry, thrift shop, parenting classes, medical clinic, laundry room, even a foster home for homeless students, have removed some of the barriers to learning that poverty creates, and in three years the district has gone from a score of 57% on state educational standards (at 50% they'd lose accreditation) to 81%, and a 92% four-year graduation rate. See: http://www.npr.org/2016/01/03/461205086/the-superintendent-who-turned-around-a-school-district

- *Seek neighborhood partnerships* to augment the school's volunteer base and fundraising capacity. These investments of time and resources from community members generate familiarity and confidence from the neighborhood in the school's success.
    - Partnerships with area restaurants and businesses drive customers to a neighborhood establishment and in exchange that establishment returns a percentage of the profit to the school.
    - Area churches or other organizations can provide regular volunteers.
    - Neighborhood library branches can gather and reserve materials to augment classroom activities.
    - In-kind gifts from community members can blend learning opportunities for students with facility improvements for the school.
    - These could be almost anything – from gardening to mural painting and everything in between.



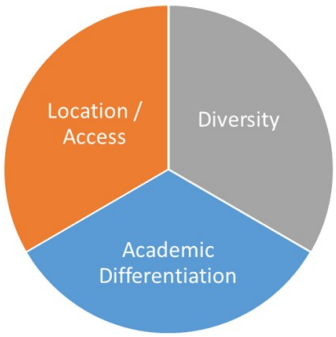
- *Bolster all schools* through strong, supported leadership and inspiring teachers who are fairly compensated and receive ongoing and relevant professional development. Look to successful neighborhood schools as models and expand, replicate and adapt proven strategies. Mentorship programs between principals, teachers, and PTA groups can facilitate the sharing of ideas, and allow stronger leaders to emerge in every school.

- *Invest with confidence.* The way facilities are equipped and maintained sends a strong message to the students inside. Provide an environment for learning that demonstrates an expectation of success every day, in every school, for every student.

IV. Magnets and Other Options

A robust menu of choices for every family

All parents want the best possible education for their children. For most, an excellent neighborhood school is the natural first choice. But for some students, the curriculum or instructional style of a neighborhood school is not an ideal fit. These families want a menu of options from which to select a better match. Current choices include private schools, faith-based schools, charter schools, and CMS magnet and partial magnet schools. Our focus here is primarily on magnet schools, although all of these options affect an evolving educational landscape in terms of student population size and demographics, school funding, and geography.



Academic Differentiation	• Magnets are meant to provide specialized instruction for students who show interest or aptitude in the subject of specialization, or whose learning style is a match for the school's style of instruction • Families do not always understand how each program differs from a traditional curriculum, or how to assess whether a particular magnet is a good fit for their child • Continuity of curriculum is unclear, particularly for neighborhood students in a partial magnet
Access / Location	• Families accept that a longer commute is a reasonable tradeoff for a specialized program of their choosing • Shuttle stops and common stops are a relatively cost- and time-saving transportation option, where feasible • Transportation zones limit access for some
Diversity	• Specialized programs bring together students from many neighborhoods and zip codes, with a common interest, talent, or learning style • Partial magnets bring together students drawn to the specialized program and students for whom the facility is a close proximity school • Magnets and partial magnet schools may be located to intentionally diversify an otherwise homogeneous neighborhood

Accountability

CMS magnets promise to provide a personalized environment of academic excellence that prepares every child, every day, for a better tomorrow.

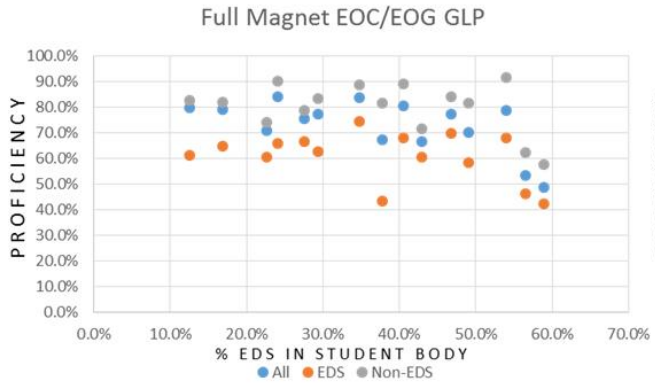
Vision: CMS magnet students attain the highest levels of academic preparation and achievement within carefully tailored learning environments crafted to maximize opportunities for personal cognitive growth and skill development.

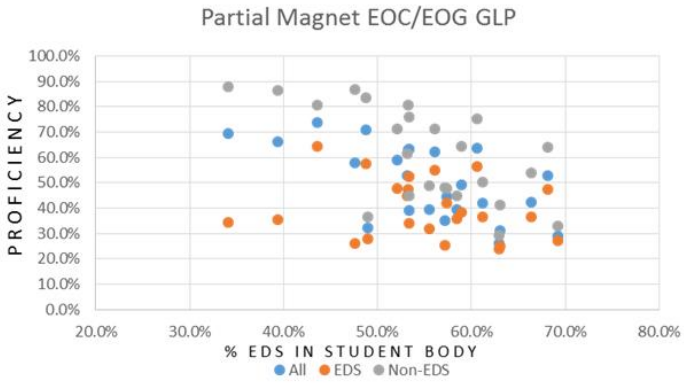
Mission: CMS Magnet Programs provide public education options emphasizing specialized learning environments and innovative instructional programs to promote excellence in student achievement and growth. This is accomplished by attracting students to unique and distinctive, diverse, and engaging theme-based learning environments specifically designed to capitalize upon and to nurture and enhance students' abilities, aptitudes, interests and talents.

Data illustrates the academic outcomes of magnet and partial magnet schools.

Magnet Performance

Do Full and/or Partial Magnets deliver the desired academic achievement, and close the achievement gap?





- Performance and EDS/Non-EDS achievement gap consistent
- Notable anomalies include:
  - High-performance and low achievement gap
    - Piedmont Middle (35% EDS)
    - Collinswood Language Academy (54% EDS)
  - High achievement gap or Low-performance
    - Myers Park Traditional (38% EDS)
    - First Ward Academy (57% EDS)
    - University Park Elementary (59% EDS)

- All subgroup performance declines as EDS % grows
- Notable anomalies include:
  - High achievement gap
    - Alexander Graham Middle (34% EDS)
    - Cotswold Elementary (39% EDS)
    - Barringer Academic Center (48% EDS)
  - Uncharacteristically low performance
    - West Mecklenburg High (49% EDS)
    - Coulwood Middle (53% EDS)
  - Uncharacteristically high performance
    - Statesville Road Elementary (68% EDS)

Analysis

With a few exceptions as noted, full magnets are enhancing academic achievement for all students, while partial magnets are doing little to enhance overall achievement or to reduce the achievement gap.

The Challenge

A May, 2015 assessment by Magnet Schools of America goes into detail about the challenges facing CMS schools, and makes some important recommendations. For our purposes, we will consider magnets from the perspective of providing excellent schools for every child, every day.

Many families choose a magnet option not because of the program it offers, but because it is perceived as "better" – i.e., safer or higher-achieving, than their neighborhood assignment. When applying to programs through a lottery system highly perceived as complicated and somewhat arbitrary, parents are advised to prioritize choices based on their likelihood of acceptance (after neighborhood students and sibling enrollments) and transportation zone, rather than to choose based on suitability of the program for their child. Positioning and filling magnets this way is a disservice to the potential excellence of magnet programs. It minimizes the public's perception of them each as uniquely specialized academic environments, and diminishes the potential to bring together students with common academic interests. Furthermore, allowing magnets to serve as an "escape" from an underperforming neighborhood school is a disservice to the schools from which these students depart.

Recommendations

What makes a magnet school successful academically, diverse in population, and "magnetic" to students and families?

- *Emphasize academic specialization.* Magnet schools serve a critical academic purpose, one that is sometimes overlooked when the public perceives magnets primarily as "better" alternatives to "worse" neighborhood schools. Instead of appealing to students who are running *from* a neighborhood environment, magnets should attract (and recruit) students who are drawn *to* a specific area of specialization. Students should come to magnets even from excellent neighborhood schools, because the specialization is a draw. By bringing together students from many zip codes around a shared strength, talent or interest, strong magnet schools will be naturally diverse in terms of race, ethnicity and socioeconomic measures. Academic commonality of the students allows for targeted instruction, suited to the school's area of specialization.

- *Simplify the application process.* Magnet admission is perceived as complicated, and selection by lottery is somewhat arbitrary. This system discourages applications from families for whom a neighborhood assignment is "good enough," who don't feel their chances of admission are worth the effort, or who simply miss a deadline or don't understand the process or the options. We suggest a much simpler, rolling admission process, managed at least in part at the school level, where a principal or admissions counselor can assess the fit of an individual student (based on interview, test scores, and/or audition) to the school's curriculum. Create and implement a marketing program that explains the purpose of magnet schools, the areas of specialization within CMS, and how to visit and apply to each school. Also, cultivate a climate of cooperation between neighborhood schools and magnets so teachers and guidance counselors can comfortably refer and recruit promising students within the CMS system.

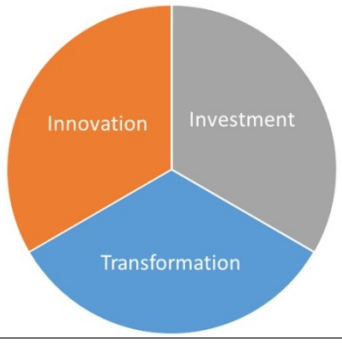
- *Strategically locate magnets in all transportation zones.* Some magnet locations are determined by the program, for example a school of the arts should arguably be near uptown's cultural venues. But some programs can be located with flexibility, and popular magnets could be replicated in multiple locations throughout the county. This approach would provide academic options within a reasonable distance to students in all transportation zones, provide additional seats in popular programs, and ease the challenge of overcrowding in all neighborhood schools.

- *Consider the goals and continuity plan of partial magnet programs.* Partial magnets have historically been positioned in struggling areas, and provide a local alternative for neighborhood students in a more diverse student body comprised in part of students "magnetized" from other areas. These succeed to some degree with the goal of diversity, but seem to vary in academic achievement. Many offer the same specialized curriculum to all students, but do not offer a clear plan for continuity as the students graduate from elementary school to middle school and beyond. Please consider, when placing and filling partial magnet programs, how students who enter as neighborhood students and are successfully engaged in the magnet curriculum can continue these studies as they proceed through the later grades.

V. Turnaround and Support Programs

Improve educational outcomes through investment in proven and promising programs

CMS is currently engaged in many turnaround programs, meant to improve academic achievement in high-poverty and low-performing schools. Project LIFT, the Beacon Initiative and Northstar Reading Partners come to mind immediately but there are many others. The fact that so many of these programs are in progress, often funded by private grants or sponsorships, or made possible through the efforts of thousands of volunteers, speaks to the commitment of the community at large to improve our most challenged schools.



Innovation	• There are creative, promising initiatives in CMS and elsewhere • Look to models in other districts for ideas • This is an area where a consultant, with broad exposure to the national and global educational landscape, may provide valuable examples
Investment	• Funding, partnerships and volunteers come from all parts of the community. Example is McPIE program at McClintock Middle School, see http://www.charlotteobserver.com/news/local/education/article36858798.html • Encourage, reward, celebrate and reinvest in successful turnaround progression
Transformation	• Needs and solutions extend beyond school walls • Systemic change is needed. See Harlem Children's Zone, http://hcz.org • Change can be incremental • Sustainable change requires ongoing attention • Engage and support whole families, communities

The Challenge(s)

Turnaround programs address some challenges and introduce others. The students these programs are meant to serve are often transient, making progress difficult to track. For example, only 37% of the students who were in Project LIFT schools when the program began three years ago are still enrolled in those schools. This is a disadvantage to the student, and skews assessment results depicted as an aggregate of the same student population over time. Assessment overall is a challenge, as realistic goals are hard to determine at the outset of any new initiative. And the biggest challenge may be sustainability. Transformation requires intensive, ongoing work and investment. Too often, innovative programs are abandoned or funding is exhausted before their fullest potential is achieved.

Recommendations

How can CMS better support programs intended to improve academic achievement?

- *Share best practices.* Within a large district like CMS, there are schools with similar demographics that show vastly different levels of achievement and college/career readiness. This suggests that the variable isn't the students, but something else. We recommend identifying what is working best for similar communities and expand upon those programs and policies that prove most successful.

- *Coordinate efforts.* There are many programs in place with overlapping missions serving similar populations. We suggest creating a position to oversee the progress of all of these programs, identify areas to expand or consolidate, and track and share progress so turnaround efforts throughout CMS can efficiently share resources, data and best practices.

- *Recognize that transformation requires time and consistency.* Long term improvements can happen in small increments, and small steps forward are still progress. The goals set at the outset of a new program may not be realistic—celebrate and analyze all progress, learn from and expand what is working to support continued improvement. It may be more important to move forward steadily and continue progress toward an aspirational objective than to necessarily achieve it.

- *Plan for continuity*. Transformation programs don't happen in isolation. Consider every new program as a phase one, and anticipate building on success in phases two, three, four and beyond. This requires an ongoing commitment of financial and human resources.

- *Empower and support school and program leadership.* There are multiple programs and partnerships already in place throughout CMS. Each demands the flexibility and responsiveness of confident, visionary leadership. Provide those leaders the resources and authority they need, and anticipate that needs will change as the program evolves. Establish a culture of innovation, cooperation and experimentation, one that expects and forgives missteps along the way, as these are a necessary part of transformation.

- *Invest in readiness.* Studies have clearly shown that high EDS students begin kindergarten with a "pre-achievement" gap already, compared with non-EDS peers who may have attended preschool for several years, may have had more exposure to books and other pre-literacy experiences, and may be up to a year older as the trend of "red-shirting" grows in popularity. Explore ways to close this school readiness gap through partnerships with existing organizations like READ Charlotte, Get Ready with Words, and expand CMS pre-K programs in all schools, or at minimum in all Title 1 schools.

- *Invest in After School and Out of School.* These programs foster an environment that encourages academic socialization and can serve as a safe, positive bridge between school and home, increasing a sense of community in all schools. Statistics from After School Alliance suggest that 39% of CMS students would participate in after school programs if they were made available. See http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/documents/NC-afterschool-facts.pdf. Additionally, year-round schools may help to prevent the "summer slide" in academic performance.

- *Invest in Expectations.* Data in this report shows that socioeconomic status is not a direct determinant of achievement, but other environmental factors inside and outside of school appear to have influence. Create a physical environment and a culture that supports and sets an expectation of achievement through rigorous performance and behavior standards for everyone – students, teachers and administration. Emphasize a path to the future through college and career readiness programs like partnerships and internships with area businesses, place college guidance counselors in all high schools to help students navigate application and financial aid processes, advertise summer employment opportunities at school and offer students and their families resume-building workshops and other job help support. Change the perception of school for students, so they see it not as an end in itself, but as a path to a better future that is truly within reach.

Ideas

Throughout our research process, many ideas for school improvement have arisen. Some are original ideas and others are replications or adaptations of initiatives in other districts. This is by no means an exhaustive list, and some of the following have been mentioned throughout this document but we believe it may be useful to list them here again.

CMS (whole district) initiated	• Assign sister school relationships or revive and expand the School Mates program, and support them with communication and transportation services as required to facilitate a range of academic, social, and school support partnerships. http://www.cms.k12.nc.us/…/Pag…/SchoolMatesPartnerships.aspx • Invest in universal (available but optional) Pre-K to ensure all students are prepared for kindergarten. If universal Pre-K isn't possible, perhaps begin this effort in Title 1 schools. • Consider year-round Title 1 schools, to help address the summer slide shown in these areas. • Offer Academic Labs at low performing schools where students can receive homework or study help. Staffed by teachers, parents, community volunteers, college students or older students from other schools.
School Initiated	*With a partner school: Every school can offer something. Find what each partner excels at and create a mutual atmosphere of giving, receiving, sharing and appreciating similarities and differences. These could include:* • Joint field days, etc. • Teacher exchange • Student exchange • Shared projects • Shared book clubs, discussion, ultimately meeting • Partner kids from different schools for projects • PTA partnerships for fundraising, organization-building, volunteer sharing
Community Partnerships	• Approach Google Fiber, Microsoft, or Time Warner to seek assistance with technology in schools and connectivity at home for EDS students • Social service partnerships with the most fragile schools. Assist the whole family, see Jennings, MO school: http://www.npr.org/2016/01/03/461205086/the-superintendent-who-turned-around-a-school-district • Partner with and promote early literacy initiatives like www.getreadywithwords.org and www.readcharlotte.org • Partner with and help to promote grassroots efforts like the Forty Book Project, started by a former CMS teacher http://obsyourschools.blogspot.com/2014/05/teacher-creates-home-libraries-for-kids.html, and https://www.facebook.com/The40BookProject/timeline • There are many simple fundraising opportunities like VIC card links or sharing a percentage of profit from a local business at a school-promoted event, like a family-night at an area restaurant. Area service businesses may provide in-kind donations, especially if the owner has a connection to the school.
PTA Initiated	• PTA Thrift shop to raise money to support "extras" in schools that do not have an active PTA fundraising group. This effort is underway in Charlotte, see https://www.facebook.com/thekeyresaleshop/?sk=timeline&app_data See Carrboro/Chapel Hill model: http://ptathriftshop.org.
Neighborhood Initiated	• Preschool playgroup to introduce families with young children to their zoned school, as is underway in the Huntingtowne Farms neighborhood. See https://www.facebook.com/groups/HFPreschool/ In some neighborhoods, this may require more facilitation from CMS, in partnership with HeadStart, area daycares, churches and preschools.

VI. Operating Budget and Capital Investment Priorities

COMING SOON

VII. Conclusion

It is our fervent hope that this document is received in the spirit in which it was created – as a sincere effort by interested and engaged citizens and parents to advance, if not reset, the conversation about K-12 education in Charlotte.

We strongly believe all students deserve excellent educational environments in which to pursue their dreams and passions, and that all parents seek the best possible schools for their children. We are confident that the goals approved by the Board, combined with the tenets presented in this document, can bring these aspirations closer to reality, and translate academic achievement into college and/or career success for every CMS graduate.

We have included examples of successful turnaround programs, options and school choices to address the needs of specific communities, and we've addressed the risks of aspirational mediocrity through hard data.

CMS families are personally and deeply invested in school success. It is because our children's education is at stake that we've come together and invested hours and days (and long nights) and weeks conducting this research and compiling this report. We hope you agree that our perspective is valuable, and we strongly urge the board to create a seat at the table for a parent advisory committee representing all districts as this process proceeds. We believe that families and CMS leaders must work together, united in the best educational interests of all of our students, in every school, every day.

This report is intended as a first step. Thank you.

VIII. Appendix

Contributor Bios

Kim Anslow is a CMS graduate and has a CMS 1st grader and rising kindergartner. She is an active volunteer at school and a Girl Scout leader. Kim is a marketing manager for an international company based in Charlotte.	**Bridget Martin** is a CMS parent with a first grader and 4-year-old future CMS student (District 6). Bridget and her husband, Jason, have lived in Charlotte for 14 years. Bridget works as a business manager in the financial services industry and is an active classroom volunteer and room parent.
Melanie Baron holds a Master's degree in Leadership in Museum Education from Bank Street College in New York. A strong believer in educational partnerships, she relocated from Boston to Charlotte to become part of the staff that opened ImaginOn. She is a former teacher, and today is a museum and library consultant, freelance writer and a proud parent of a CMS second grader.	**Rodger and Melinda Nolden** are residents of District 2 and the parents of two elementary-aged sons. Rodger is an accredited disability representative who serves on the Mecklenburg County Parks and Recreation South Region Advisory Council and the board of directors of GBIS Disability, Inc. Both are active volunteers and advocates for schools and non-profits.
Shawn Belcher is an outside sales exec whose strength is bridging the communication gap between executives and their employees. An active school volunteer in CMS with a 2nd grader and upcoming kindergartner in the proposed reassignment year. A native Charlottean who is diplomatic, pragmatic and comfortable speaking in different arenas	**Christine Runyan** has been living in Charlotte for 7 years and is a proud parent of 4 children, including a rising Kindergartener, 1st grader, and a 3rd grader. She has a Masters degree in Public Administration and a background in higher education admissions, recruitment and judicial affairs. Christine also spent many years working in a crisis shelter for homeless youth.
Christiane Gibbons is a former teacher with a Masters in Educational Leadership. She taught in a Title I school in Phoenix, AZ, where she was a 21st Century Community Learning Center coordinator for her middle school. She is a CMS parent to a 1st grader at Polo Ridge Elementary, with a 2016-17 rising kindergartner, and an infant.	**Jeremy Stephenson** practices labor and employment law and volunteers as a pro bono attorney for the Council for Children's Rights. He is a past president of the Charlotte Area Society for Human Resource Management and is currently the Government Affairs Director for the NC chapter. Jeremy ran for school board in 2015 and remains committed to the success of CMS. He is the proud father of a rising kindergartener.
Ashley Hall is a proud CMS parent to a first and third grader and 2-year-old future CMS student. Ashley received an exemplary education in North Carolina public schools. She has lived in Charlotte for 14 years and is a Clinical Research Scientist for GlaxoSmithKline. Ashley champions girls in STEM and is involved in Project Scientist.	**Sean Strain** is a CMS parent and SLT member. A resident of Charlotte for nearly 15 years, he has 4 children in CMS (2 in middle school and 2 in elementary school). Sean's educational background is through various public school districts, including DoDDS, both in the US and Europe. He works for IBM in a worldwide business management role.
Maurice Jones is a longtime Charlotte resident and leader in our community, mentoring and training our youth to succeed upon graduation. A tradesman and educator, Maurice has served his community over two decades and is the President/Owner of his own electrical and HVAC company, as well as the CEO of RL Jones Vocational Training, Inc.	**Rachael Weiss** is a future CMS parent, with a toddler in preschool and a second child due in May 2016. Rachael and her husband have lived in Charlotte for five years, originally hailing from Chicago. Upon relocating to Charlotte, she left her career as a commercial real estate broker to focus on her passion for helping children. She became a certified children's yoga teacher in 2013 and uses yoga play to work with kids ranging from 2 months of age to 18 years.
Kim Kolb is a CMS parent and former teacher. She was a reading specialist in Hillsborough county, FL, working to bring students up to grade level. She holds a Master of Business Administration degree with concentrations in market research and technology management. She has lived in Charlotte for 1 ½ years and is an active scout volunteer and room parent at PSE.	

Resources

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Augustine Literacy Project

Beacon Initiative, http://www.cms.k12.nc.us/cmsschools/beacon/Pages/default.aspx, http://thebeaconinitiative.weebly.com

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