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Educate! the weekly newsletter of
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Friday's Fellowship ad in The Charlotte Post:

Visitors from abroad are amazed at our peaceful handover of presidential power. Tolerance is a part of America's strength, and that's a lesson learned at school.

A THANK YOU TO CITIZENS

Teachers and all of our children thank 173,002 voters of Mecklenburg for supporting a bond issue that will build and rebuild schools. This is how community is built -- one brick, one human relationship, one life at a time.

REPORT FROM THE RETREAT:

The School Board you rarely read about

So you thought you knew the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school board. Contentious, divided, quarrelsome.

Then you wouldn't have recognized the group that met all day Thursday and half a day Friday at the CMS Leadership Academy in the Governor's Village school complex.

It was a relaxed, genial group whose members playfully teased and joked with each other.

Perhaps the overwhelming passage of school bonds two days earlier contributed to the mood.

The board was remarkably united about goals for CMS as it moves into the future. The top goals for the system, they agreed, are working to improve basic academic skills -- reading, writing, and math. In addition, the board members put a top priority on eliminating disparities related to race, gender, and socioeconomic status and on ensuring resource equity, including programs, media centers, and instructional materials, as well as equity in faculty and administrative experience and expertise.

And this interesting note, given recent community concerns about an integrated system and student assignment: the system's vision, according to the "balanced score card" presented to the board, remains "To ensure that the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School System becomes the premiere urban, integrated system in the nation in which all students acquire the knowledge, skills and values necessary to live rich and full lives as productive and enlightened members of society."

Board member Jim Puckett was especially cheery after winning a seat on the Mecklenburg County Commission. And another school board member who has regularly clashed with Puckett during the last year opined that Puckett's presence on the commission could turn out to be a plus for the school system, whose funding requests to that body are regularly slashed.

The differences of opinion among school board members hadn't disappeared entirely. Board members John Lassiter and George Dunlap tussled briefly over how important it is to raise students' SAT scores.

Educators agree that the relatively large percentage of CMS students who take the SAT tends to lower the system's average score compared with school systems where a smaller percentage of students take the test.

The Lassiter-Dunlap exchange was over the stated goal that "the average SAT score will meet or exceed the national average without reducing the percentage of students taking the test."

Dunlap indicated that he thought the goal was somewhat unrealistic and perhaps even not terribly important: "People are becoming more educated about the SAT," he said, adding that he thought many people understood that the CMS "population taking the test is different."

Lassiter, who frequently focuses on the importance of high and measurable academic standards, continued to insist that SAT averages are "a measure by which all schools are judged. Given the perceptions, that's just what it is."
-- Araminta Johnston

CHAIRMAN ARTHUR GRIFFIN'S NOTES AND COMMENTS

We discussed system priorities for the next several years. No surprises: We decided that students performing at grade level or above are the number one goal. There was quite a bit of discussion about the strategies to accomplish this goal. Great teachers at each school, technology, facilities, instructional leadership, parent and community involvement and support services were seen as necessary components for student success.

Having access to high quality education for every student is our goal. As you know, that has not always been the case. If the new student assignment process is upheld, it becomes paramount that resources are made available and sustained at each school. That will take a kind of courage never displayed in our local school history. We must fight to make sure all family

choices are great choices. That means resources. If schools were like grocery stores, we would want to have the best grocery store in every community.

In 1863, slavery officially ended in this great nation of ours, but not slave-like working conditions. We can't allow a potential court decision ordering an end to our policy of desegregation to mean a return to the old segregated like conditions in our schools.

At the retreat, board members got a chance to experience the Family Choice application process. Each member of the school board was given an application and telephone to make calls just as a parent would do to apply. As we followed each step of the process, it became quite evident that parents will need to know more about their options, if real and informed choices are truly to be made.

Information regarding the Family Choice Plan is being translated into the Spanish language. Other considerations are being made to make the process accessible to special needs populations. The Communications Department is available to talk with groups of people in the community on a timely basis. The biggest system challenge will be getting timely information to those families that are hard to reach, so that they can truly make informed choices.

The Showcase of Schools is scheduled for December 2nd from 10:00 am to 6:00 pm, at the Charlotte Merchandise Mart. Parents will be asked to make choices beginning as early as December 2, 2000 and ending on January 17, 2001. For additional information the Family Choice "hotline" is 343-6192.

Re-engineering of our budget process means having plenty of discussions by stakeholders of budget priorities before the budget is presented in March next year. That means you should see the Board of Education talking more about what successful schools should look like. Stay tuned for more discussions of budget issues.

Footnote: When the board members tried dialing the Family Choice telephone lines, some couldn't get disconnected from the Spanish-language version into the English they would understand. Somehow the phone system had been misprogrammed, and no doubt staff will make sure that never happens again. But the incident showed the value of board members being aware of the details. If there are problems at YOUR school that staff knows about but hasn't dealt with, call a school board member. They really do need to know!

OPEN HOUSES, AND MORE

The pace of school activity to reach parents about next year's assignments starts to take off this week, then winds down for Thanksgiving. The big push is in early December when holiday shopping will be at its peak. Will parents be shopping for schools?

Below is the schedule of events for this week and next. Each week through January we'll do the same. The schedule is an opportunity, not just for you to visit your own children's school, but to go to one you've never been to. It could even highlight a community duty: The more you learn about the schools, the better they will become, benefiting all children in that place and the larger community. Your visits will also be a morale boost to staff!

THIS WEEK:

Nov. 13 Monday
8:30-10:30 a.m. Blythe Elementary open house

8:30 a.m. Hornets Nest Elementary magnet coffee and school tour
 8:45 a.m. Bruns Avenue Elementary open house
 9 a.m. Alexander Graham Middle meet with principal, school tour
 9:30 a.m. Elizabeth Lane Elementary school tour
 6:30 p.m. Nathaniel Alexander Elementary open house
 6:45 p.m. Blythe Elementary information meeting on choice plan

Nov. 14 Tuesday

7:45 a.m. Mallard Creek Elementary open house
 9 a.m. Greenway Park Elementary family choice presentation
 9:30 a.m. Lincoln Heights Elementary coffee and school tour
 9:30 a.m. and 2 p.m. McClintock Middle open house
 5 p.m. Mallard Creek Elementary open house
 6 p.m. Harding University High prospective student night
 6:30 p.m. Hidden Valley Elementary parent seminar
 6:30 p.m. Rama Road Elementary open house
 6:30 p.m. Randolph Middle PTSA meeting and open house
 7 p.m. Coulwood Middle "Choice of Schools" meeting

Nov. 15 Wednesday

8, 9, 10 a.m. Blythe Elementary school tour
 9 a.m.: Alexander Graham Middle meet with principal, school tour
 9 a.m. Collinswood Elementary - Spanish Immersion open house
 9 a.m. Oakhurst Elementary open house and tour
 9:15 a.m. Elizabeth Traditional Elementary school tour
 9:30 a.m. and 2 p.m. McClintock Middle open house
 9:30 a.m. Myers Park Traditional Elementary tours

Nov. 16 Thursday

9 a.m. Beverly Woods Elementary tour
 9 a.m. Greenway Park Elementary family choice presentation
 9 a.m. Piney Grove Elementary open house
 9:15 a.m. Morehead Elementary open house
 9:30 a.m. and 2 p.m. McClintock Middle open house
 11 a.m. Albemarle Road Elementary open house
 12:30 p.m. Crown Point Elementary parent informance
 6:30 p.m. Morehead Elementary open house
 6:30 p.m. West Charlotte High open house
 7 p.m. East Meck High open house

Nov. 17 Friday

8 a.m.-1 p.m. Huntingtowne Farms Elementary open house
 8:45 a.m. Bruns Avenue Elementary open house
 9:30 a.m. Northwest School of the Arts open house

Nov. 18 Saturday

10:30 a.m. Lincoln Heights Elementary coffee and school tour

NEXT WEEK:

Nov. 20 Monday

8:30 a.m. Hornets Nest Elementary magnet coffee and school tour
 9 a.m. Lansdowne Elementary tour
 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Clear Creek open house

6:30 p.m. Nathaniel Alexander Elementary open house
7 p.m. Lansdowne Elementary tour

Nov. 21 Tuesday

9:30 a.m. Lincoln Heights Elementary coffee and school tour

MEETING THIS WEEK ON HOW STATE ASSESSES WRITING

The State Department of Public Instruction's Writing Assessment Task Force will hold a meeting Thursday in Charlotte to receive comments on the state's writing assessment program. The meeting is from 4 p.m.-7 p.m. at University Hilton, 8629 J.M. Keynes Drive off Harris Boulevard.

The Task Force is interested in two main questions:

1. In your opinion, what are characteristics of effective and competent writing?
2. What changes in the statewide writing assessment program would you like to see and why?

Currently, student writing is assessed in the fourth and seventh grades and for English II in high school. Adequate progress in writing is one of the items considered for student promotion for grades five and eight. The Writing Assessment Task Force was created to advise the State Board of Education on how writing should be assessed in North Carolina public schools.

Individuals who wish to speak will be requested to sign up at the meetings. Comments will be limited to three minutes per presenter. Representatives of the Task Force will be present to hear and record comments to bring back to the full committee.

Written comments also are welcome and should be sent to the attention of Louis Fabrizio, Director of Accountability Services, NC Department of Public Instruction, 301 N. Wilmington Street, Raleigh, NC 27601-2825. The deadline for submission of comments is Dec 7.

Send us e-mail addresses for people you think would like to receive this publication. Your comments and contributions are also welcome. To write about your school's activities, just do it -- then send it to us.

THE SWANN FELLOWSHIP

Lucy Bush, president

B.B. DeLaine, vice president

The name:

The Swann Fellowship was named for Darius and Vera Swann, who on behalf of their son James became the lead plaintiffs in Swann vs. Mecklenburg in the 1960s. Darius Swann was the first African American Presbyterian missionary ever assigned outside of Africa. His experiences in India led him to appreciate the value of an integrated society for human development.

The vision:

As people of faith, our vision is that all children in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School System will have excellent educational opportunities which are both equitable and integrated.

The background:

Formed in 1997 out of several Charlotte religious congregations, the Fellowship focuses on being a witness to the value of diversity as an integral part of children's education, and educating the public on public school issues as they relate to this and allied subjects. The Swann Fellowship is a nonprofit organization exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. A copy of the license to solicit charitable contributions may be obtained from the N.C. Department of Human Resources, Solicitation Licensing Branch. Registration does not imply endorsement, approval or recommendation by the state.