

Woodward



Yancy

Mediate ... again? There's another way

In a broader effort, universities could build support for schools

Leaders of J.C. Smith University and UNC Charlotte have offered to sponsor a second effort at mediating differences among school board members over pupil assignment. (See story below.)

UNCC Chancellor Jim Woodward is a board member of the Charlotte Chamber. JCSU President Dorothy Yancy is a trained mediator. Their institutions have immense resources of talent and community commitment.

But mediation went nowhere

last year, arguably because the board's divisions reflect those in the broader community. And the board itself is not in a position to act now because of court stays.

We propose instead that these two educational leaders commit their prestige and the wealth of resources that their institutions

A Proposal

represent to the community at large. If the community can reach a greater degree of consensus on school assignment, then the school board

can more easily do the same.

We propose, then, a community-wide effort at mediation backed by UNCC and Woodward and J.C. Smith and Yancy. Its aim would be nurturing a broader community understanding of and commitment to the schools' vision of becoming "the premier urban, integrated system in the nation."

The community consensus of the 1970s that ended the violent opposition to forced busing emerged only after the courts

Continued on Page 2

University leaders' offer to mediate

In a letter to school board members Arthur Griffin and John Lassiter and to Superintendent Eric Smith, JCSU President Dorothy Yancy and UNCC Chancellor Jim Woodward suggest a "civil discussion" that would "assist decision making." The Jan. 18 letter reads:

"We join the large majority of citizens in Mecklenburg County in believing that the future well being of our community is principally dependent on the success with which the public school system carries out its responsibilities. We also believe that every member of the CMS Board of Education shares that view although strong differences of opinion exist about how such a goal can best be achieved.

"We therefore offer the resources of our two offices and, indeed, our two institutions to support a thoughtful and civil discussion of those differences within a setting that will assist decision making that results in equitable, quality education for our children and the organizational stability so necessary for the effective and efficient use of those resources made available by the public.

"Should your colleagues accept this offer, we further propose to involve a mediator whose reputation for fairness and professional competence would be recognized by all involved.

"Let us conclude by thanking you and other members of the CMS Board of Education for considering this offer. We look forward to your response."



Sloane Whaley/Myers Park Traditional

"Charmander"

Mediate again, or take broader tack?

Continued from Page 1

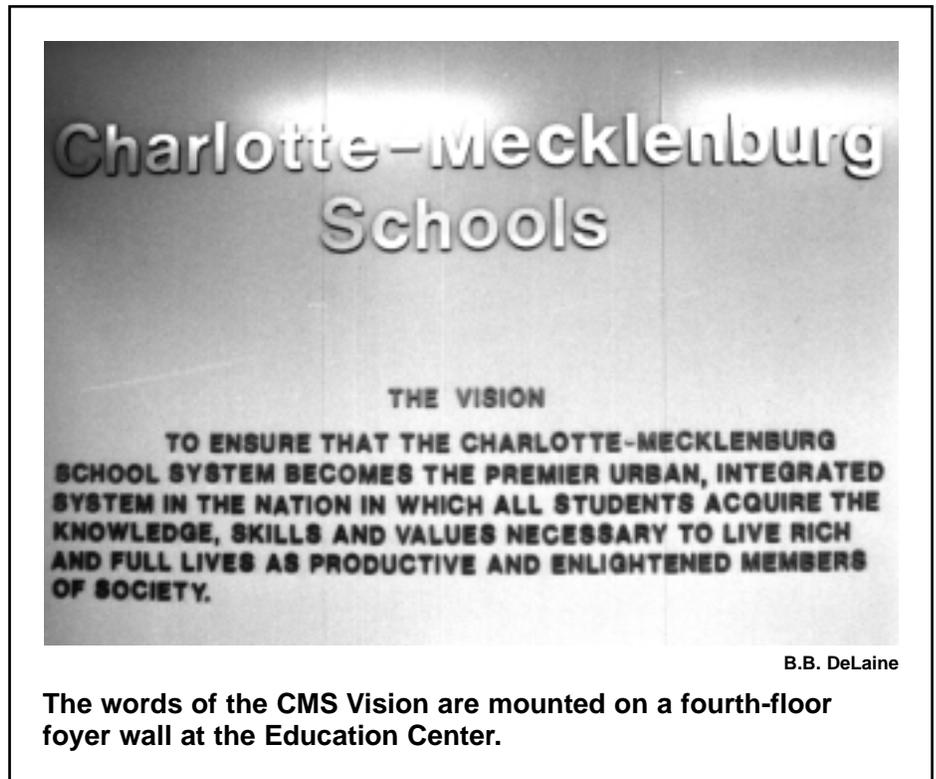
imposed a solution. Fashioning consensus will be more difficult right now, without the courts' final ruling on the schools' obligations.

But the 1970s consensus also took root in the community's goodwill, supplemented by a strong dose of concern for its image and economic vitality. Goodwill is clearly strained right now, but there remains a robust interest in image. The current proposal for mediation is grounded in concern for "the future well being of our community."

In his call for community dialogue on the schools Jan. 9, County Board Chairman Parks Helms said the discussion "will require each of us to expand our scope of thinking and embrace the possibilities before us" (Educate!, Jan. 14).

JCSU and UNCC are well placed to shelter, lead and nurture public discussion that leads to a new community consensus on the schools. A number of the propositions on which consensus must be built are already clear. Here are a few of them:

❑ **Separate will never be equal.** So long as most of our neighborhoods are segregated by race or economics or both, nearest-school assignment (last used in the mid-'60s to block desegregation) will, over time, leave schools in poor neighborhoods without the experienced teachers, equipment, buildings, PTA parents and community leaders they need. This will happen not because public officials want it to be so, or because the governmental bodies could not write policies and procedures opposing it; it will happen because it is human nature to do so, for rich to ignore poor, for the comfortable to shun the afflicted. We are called to do better, but any public policy that does not start from an under-



The words of the CMS Vision are mounted on a fourth-floor foyer wall at the Education Center.

standing of the human condition is destined to fail.

❑ **The unknown breeds fear.** Fear dominates much of the discussion of pupil assignment. Fear of "bad" teaching, or "bad" children. Rebuilding the community consensus in support of schools will require that we all know much more about each other, and about schools on the other side of town.

❑ **Civility is not just for the office.** Some of the tone and content of public debate over the schools would be unacceptable as part of a workplace discussion. Focusing the school debate on nine school board members is particularly disingenuous, for their views merely reflect splits in the community. The civility that builds understanding and joint action must be more broadly rooted.

❑ **Courts must have their say.** It will be years before the courts have clarified fundamental legal issues. Even a unanimous board could not settle the issue. Groups of people with differing views may – no, should – seek common ground, but only with an understanding of the primacy of

the rule of law and our constitutional system of governance.

❑ **Equity will take years.** The Chamber of Commerce wants to know what it will take to become "unitary," a ruling that court orders will end because all vestiges of segregation have been eliminated. Numerous lists already exist in the court record. School bond issues have put us on the way to achieving the required capital investments. But the work will take years, not months.

❑ **Slashed budget requests must end.** The county board had a short string of years when it funded the full operating expense request from the schools. Last year, commissioners fell back; the consensus to solve school problems had eroded. A revived consensus must take visible form annually in the county budget.

The Yancy-Woodward team should have many ideas on how to bring the community together around fundamental beliefs like those above. The process itself will no doubt build on this vision.

President Yancy and Chancellor Woodward deserve the community's praise and cooperation if they take on such an effort.

Briefs

R. Hood plays Vermont: Test scores of lagging students in poor towns are rising in Vermont in the third year of a school finance revolution that has rich towns paying up to \$6 for each \$1 they get back from a state fund. The New York Times reports that the testing gap between rich and poor has narrowed by 26 points. But all is not well. Sixteen of 80 wealthy towns have opted out of the state fund, funneling their local dollars exclusively to themselves via a foundation.

www.nytimes.com

McCull on Schools: In his Blumenthal appearance last week, outgoing Bank of America CEO Hugh McColl offered this comment on local schools, as transcribed by wbtv.com:



McColl

"I would like all my grandchildren to walk to school so I favor neighborhood schools. Having said that, I understand the people who say, 'but not if my neighborhood school's no good.' So I think we should bite the bullet, spend the money, have equity in the schools.....and we ought to do tha first.

"Then we can build parks and arenas and baseball fields and what have you, but that we ought to do that first."

www.wbtv.com

Whole Education: Rudy Crew, fired by NYC Mayor Rudolph Giuliani in 1999, has resurfaced at the Institute for K-12 Leadership on the University of Washington campus. His mission, according to the Seattle Times: End the achievement gap, and do it in three years. He believes the answer lies in two places:

With the children, "he says schools must teach 'personal adequacy,' or how to make friends or

'Come forward and lay an egg on the altar'

A year ago, Gary Gloster, a bishop of the Episcopal Church and former rector at Charlotte's Christ the King Center and Christ Church, offered his flock these words:

...We often take our selves too seriously. Laughter and joy leave and seriousness unto death stalk in because we cannot laugh at ourselves. In this blindness we cannot see that "...we are bloopers every last one of us." That's a rough translation of Paul when he said, "...all have sinned and all have fallen short of the glory of God..."

One congregation really capitalized on that when they announced in their bulletin: "The senior choir invites any one who enjoys sinning to join the choir." We being an Easter people, joy is our thing to celebrate. One congregation announced, "This being Easter Sunday we will ask Mrs. Lewis to come forward and lay an egg on the altar." One congregation in order to show its inclusive and blind love for everyone, printed the list of homeliests for the Lenten season instead of homilists. Outreach is a vital part of our tradition and that calls us to some difficult places. The outreach committee of one church enlisted twenty-five people to make calls on people who were not afflicted with any church.

George McDonald said, "Sometimes I think that it is only laughter that saves us. It is the heart that is not yet sure of its God that is afraid to laugh in his presence." If we are sure of our God we are free to laugh at ourselves.

Laughter is of great spiritual value because it self-distances us especially when we laugh at ourselves. When we do this our eyes are taken off of ourselves. Viktor Frankl said that when people have a cataract, they cannot see others clearly because they see a part of themselves first. Laughter removes the cataract of "self-spectating" and allows us to transcend self. Self-distracting is the first step of learning to love.

keep yourself physically fit; occupational adequacy, or what you need to do to join the working world; and civic adequacy, or how to become part of a larger society.

With adults (and he believes the achievement gap is a problem created by adult miseducation) he wants to teach educators what researchers already know about "skills and strategies that can help every child learn and achieve."

"We can reverse this,' Crew said. 'We know how to do this,'" he told the Times.

www.seattletimes.com

Building Bridges: Imam E. Abdulmalik Mohammed of the Muslim American Society will hold three events Feb. 10-11. They include a Saturday 3 p.m.

discussion with students at Queens College, a speech at International House Saturday 6 p.m. entitled "Building Good Relations Between Muslims and Their Neighbors," and an address Sunday 3 p.m. at Providence United Methodist. Sponsors include that church, Ash-Shalheed Islamic Center, St. Gabriel Catholic, Temple Beth El and Mecklenburg Ministries.

Teens Overworked: A study of teens working at jobs during high school concludes that the teens' grades begin to suffer when they work more than 20 hours per week. The National Research Council studied 16- and 17-year-olds. The New York Times said studies indicate that about a third

Continued on Page 4

Briefs

Continued from Page 3

of high school juniors work more than 20 hours a week. A union study showed the percentage of American teens 16-19 working in any given week, 53%, was far higher than in Germany (30.8%) and Japan (18%).

www.nytimes.com

Longer Middle School: Calif. Gov. Gray Davis has stirred up protest to a plan to add 30 days to the 180-day middle school year. Teachers want their summers to recuperate and study and work other jobs. Students want time away. But everyone is looking for some solution to languishing middle school test scores, the San Jose Mercury News reports. Those who would rather reduce class sizes have found little support in the governor's office. Earlier efforts to lower class size in primary grades have "greatly exacerbated California's school-facilities crisis and teacher shortage."

www.mercurycenter.com

Weapon "Paranoia"? Is a fingernail clipper a weapon? Is a tiny bracelet pendant in the shape of a gun enough to trigger school suspension? A Pontiac, Mich., child's finding the pendant in the snow on his way to school and then talking about it in school led to the latest questions about zero-tolerance policies, the Detroit Free Press reported.

Many take a "better safe than sorry" approach after the Columbine High School and simi-

Sound off! for quality education

Your words in support of a quality, equitable, integrated education can help make the case for community support of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. Pick up your pen! Or get your mouse in motion!

Here's information on how to submit your letters to area media.

The Charlotte Post: By e-mail: thepost@clt.mindspring.com; by fax: 704-342-2160; by mail: Editor, The Charlotte Post, 1531 Camden Road, Charlotte, NC 28203-4783.

The Charlotte Observer: By e-mail: opinion@charlotteobserver.com; by fax: 704-358-5022; by mail: The Observer Forum, The Charlotte Observer, P.O. Box 30308, Charlotte, NC 28230-0308.

The Charlotte World: By e-mail: warren.smith@thecharlotteworld.com; by fax: 704-503-6691; by mail: 8701 Mallard Creek Road, Charlotte, NC 28262-9705.

The Leader: By e-mail: editor@leadernews.com; by fax: 704-347-0358; by mail: 800 E. Trade St., Charlotte, NC 28202-3014

Creative Loafing: By e-mail: charlotte@creativeloafing.com; by fax: 704-522-8088; by mail: P.O. Box 241988 Charlotte, NC 28224-1988.

Educate!: By e-mail: SwannFello@aol.com; by fax: 704-342-4550; by mail: 1510 E. 7th St. Charlotte, NC 28204-2410.

lar shootings. Some lawyers believe the refusal to take intent into account in investigations of possession cases makes zero-tolerance policies constitutionally suspect.

www.freep.com

"Read, Read, Read": In a CMS interview for a schools publication, Jen Benkovitz, a fourth-grade teacher at Oaklawn Elementary was asked how parents could help their children improve their writing. Her reply: "Read, read, read. The basis for developing writing skills is building a love for reading. Parents should read to their children on a daily basis and have their chil-

dren read to them.

"Talk to your child about what you're reading. Encourage children to have questions in their minds before they begin to read.

"Before and after reading a story that your children have written, talk with them about the story. Ask them questions about their writing and have them explain or retell their ideas. Tell stories to your children.

"Let your children see you reading. Model reading and writing in your everyday life.

"Write to and with your child. Create a journal and write back and forth about your thoughts, ideas and opinions."

www.cms.k12.nc.us

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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, 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 56-2106776.

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Letters

Protect base of support

The writer has children at Rama Road Elementary.

Approximately 25% of Rama's children are bused from the Seigle Avenue area. When the choice plan came out, as a school and PTA we were very concerned about the welfare of our "satellite" children. We in fact did not want them to go anywhere else but Rama. At Rama, these children benefit from a strong PTA and a supportive community that they might not have at a poorer, more urban school. It is through our PTA programs that they are able to benefit from tutoring and a host of other programs that are beneficial to their mental and social development.

I strongly support the need for diversity in socioeconomics within a school. I also strongly desire, for my family, diversity in race. However, Rama Road Elementary must continue to attract children of middle and upper socioeconomics in order to provide for the needs of our poorer children.

When we are only interested in providing for the needs of those poorer children, we end up driving away part of the solution – in Rama's case, those families who have the time, and money, to help fund school programs.

At Rama, I feel like we really do try to educate every child, and we will continue to, regardless of school assignment. In order for us to do this successfully, we need a system that is attracting the solutions to some of our challenges. As a system, we cannot afford to drive away the families that have the privileges of money, time and voice. These are the people who have the ability, and will use it, to vote for school board members and school bonds. They are the people who have the ability to pro-

vide the resources to schools in order to have equity in the system.

It's my desire that in speaking for those who don't have a voice, that you at Swann Fellowship will not drive away or discount those who do.

Beth Whitehead

Is it necessary, to avoid driving away the privileged, that poor kids must bear the entire burden of busing? Is that fair? Or constitutional? The U.S. Supreme Court said no. Should we as a community say any less? Eds.

Impatient with Ranson

Ranson Middle is chronically underachieving, with half of its students not reading at grade level. I realize that Ranson serves a disproportionate number of children from disadvantaged homes. However, the Board of Education has chosen the status quo, rather than take action to improve the educational opportunities for Ranson students....

By the time this complex and controversial court case winds its way through the 4th Circuit and the U.S. Supreme Court, many underachieving Ranson students will be out of middle school and perhaps out of school altogether.... The current pupil assignment plan forces these students to continue attending a school that fails to give them the motivation and skills needed to perform at grade level. Yet last month, the Board of Education voted to continue with that assignment plan....

Nearly everyone in our diverse, middle-class neighborhood is refusing to send their children to Ranson – and that includes people of every race and ethnicity. We all are concerned that, in our children's most emotionally-fragile years, they have been assigned to a school that has, too often, failed to provide the academic and character-building opportunities necessary for success.... So far, no action has been taken by the

Educate! needs:

A Faxer-in-Chief

The Fellowship is looking for a volunteer who could fax each weekly edition of Educate! to some or all of the 90 people who have a fax but don't have e-mail. If you would be willing to take on some or all of the list, please message SwannFello@aol.com.

Computer guides

The Fellowship has heard from a number of folk who can't open Educate!'s PDF file. We'd send you a name, e-mail address and phone number and you'd talk them through the process of obtaining Acrobat Reader, or finding where to look in their computer for the Educate! attachment. If you could help with this work, message SwannFello@aol.com.

school district. We cannot be patient....

Sharon Schoffelman Foote

Be impatient for changes in staff, curriculum, equipment and leadership. But don't confuse those with pupil assignment. Pitch in to solve the problems with the staff, and Ranson will improve – for whatever children attend. Eds.

Why attack Smith?

I am stunned that the Swann Fellowship is attacking Dr. Smith. Not sure what our group is trying to achieve.

Michael F. Elliott

No attack. But it seems easy to forget that pupil assignment will be shaped by court deliberations that are not yet final. Eds.