

Long-range plan fails to address key issues

Space for smaller classes, dropouts, retentions not figured into report that may be OKd Tuesday

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system may be about to move forward on a long-range plan that makes no room for equity in three key areas.

When the CMS Board of Education meets Tuesday night at 6 p.m. it will be asked to approve a long-range master plan for facilities that makes no provision for equity requirements in reduced

class sizes for low performing schools or for the increased retention of fifth-graders who for the first time this year will be required to pass state-mandated end-of-grade tests in reading and math in order to be promoted to the sixth grade.

More than a fifth of this year's fifth-graders did not pass similar tests last year.

In addition, the plan assumes there will be no decrease in the current student drop-out rate, and thus that no additional high school classroom space will be required.

All three groups of students – those in low-performing schools, those who fail end-of-grade tests, and those at risk for dropping out of school – are prime targets for the so-called equity measures that school board members and the school system have promised the community.

When one member of the Long Range Facilities Master Plan committee was asked why the group's recommendations for new school facilities didn't take into account the impact of equity measures, he replied that the data provided the committee by the school system didn't include the information required to make that calculation.

Some school board members have pressed Supt. Eric Smith about why that information wasn't provided to the committee, especially the data required to plan for a 16 to 1 student-teacher

Schools tell of progress on equity; data shows there's lots left to do

By REBA WHALEY

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system marked Thursday night a fine start to the concerted effort to achieve and maintain equitable resources in all CMS schools.

School system representatives reported to the school board the results of a recent inventory of current resources measured against equity standards.

The survey covered facilities, supplies, computers, courses, exceptional children, textbooks and, to a lesser extent, discipline and human resources.

School board chair Arthur Griffin said the system not only has a long way to go in actually providing equity for all CMS children, but even in creating policies to ensure it.

Griffin called the report "a good start, but just a start."

Speaking of the bulk of the

information provided to the school board Thursday, Griffin said, "Those are things. They have nothing to do with human resources. This is just a first swipe at trying to get it right."

Both at Thursday's meeting and in a later interview, Griffin said he was concerned that the report didn't include policies on such matters as hiring or developing and retaining excellent principals; in-service training for teachers; or retaining experienced teachers as well as developing them.

As Griffin pointed out, even in the areas addressed in the report there were "huge gaps" in resources among different schools.

Yet to come is an estimate of what it will cost to meet the standards addressed in the report at all schools.

It's clear from last week's report that the task won't be cheap. It

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Milwaukee in financial bind; lessons for Charlotte?

The report's title said it all: "The Return to Separate and Unequal."

Written not about Charlotte-Mecklenburg but about Milwaukee, the report chastizes the Wisconsin legislature for school funding systems that leave per-pupil spending in Milwaukee 25% below nearby suburban districts.

The legislature has given its blessing to policies that facilitate the departure of white students from Milwaukee, and Milwaukee's reintroduction of geographic boundaries to create all-white schools within the majority-minority city.

The patterns of governance in Wisconsin are different from those in North Carolina. All Wisconsin school systems, rich and poor, are at the moment under mandatory spending caps. And overall spending policies have heightened the disparity among minority schools and others: An average 1,000-student Milwaukee school in 1980 had \$127,000 less to spend each year than its suburban counterparts. By 1998-99, the difference had mounted to \$1.25 million.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg's consolidation occurred in the late '50s because the tax base was in the city, and the county couldn't finance the replacement of its dilapidated schools. Educators also knew that desegregation was coming, and knew it wouldn't work if white parents could flee to the surrounding suburbs. By consolidating its city and county systems in 1960, Charlotte-Mecklenburg avoided some of the white flight that turned Milwaukee's 80% white district of the 1960s into today's 80% minority district.

Aside from the reminders of what NOT to do in educational policy, are there lessons for CMS in the Milwaukee report?

Milwaukee may test a new state



Milwaukee Public Schools

Students work in the lab at Riverside University High in Milwaukee. To fund schools at levels equivalent to budgets at nearby suburban schools, Milwaukee would have to increase its tax levy by 75% – "in essence substituting tax injustice for school funding injustice," according to a group's recent report.

court ruling calling for higher state funding for urban school districts. One day, there may be a North Carolina equivalent of this July 2000 ruling.

The Wisconsin Supreme Court upheld existing state funding as meeting the constitutional requirement for public schools that are "nearly as uniform as practicable."

But a 4-3 majority on the court then created a new test for the adequacy of school funding. The Milwaukee report says:

"Poverty and other disadvantages were among the factors the state had to address, those justices said. 'An equal opportunity for a sound basic education ... takes into account districts with disproportionate numbers of disabled students, economically disadvantaged students, and students with limited English language skills.'"

Milwaukee leads its state in all three categories. CMS is second to Wake in total number of exceptional students. And the number of CMS students on free- or reduced-price lunch is higher

than the entire student census at systems in 97 N.C. counties.

These issues are being litigated in the Leandro lawsuit brought by five of the poorest N.C. counties, and joined by richer districts like CMS. It is a lawsuit that has already brought a court order mandating statewide pre-kindergarten programs for at-risk children. The case has the potential to redistribute money to districts like CMS that have the largest proportions of expensive-to-educate children. Mecklenburg's legislative delegation should be ready to join the school board and county commissioners in making the case for additional funding.

But little of any use, in Wisconsin or North Carolina, will be accomplished from redistribution if the total amount of money for education does not rise. Robbing Peter to pay Paul is not what's needed. Lifting all ships with a tide of new resources might be the better metaphor.

The report was published by Rethinking Schools, a Milwaukee-based school reform group.

www.rethinkingschools.org

Briefs

Trying the Arts: Asheville and Buncombe County schools next fall will be teaching the basics through arts. The schools are responding to a 1999 report that showed that “sustained involvement in particular art forms -- music and theater -- are highly correlated with success in mathematics and reading.” Teaching through the arts has the most success with students often labeled “at-risk.”

The Asheville Citizen-Times says the program will launch with a small amount of grant money and the help of 40 area artists. Two examples:

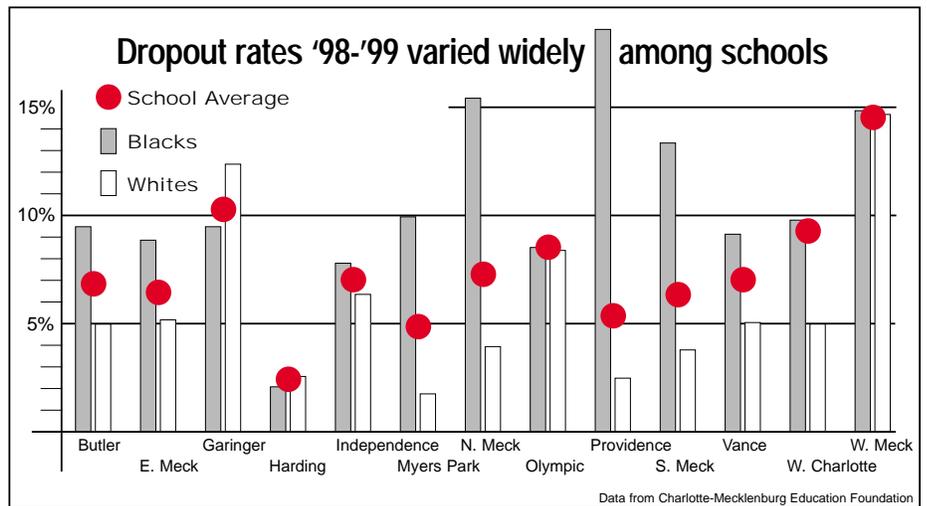
-- A dance instructor “teaches the elements of space, time and energy through dance, using the body to illustrate positive and negative forces moving through space, showing the commonality of ‘pathways’ in dance and in space.” Instructor Dana Davis told the paper: “The response is amazing, first of all because you’re engaging some students that don’t necessarily participate in class.”

-- Student body president Aaron LaFalce, a senior, recalls joining the school chorus as a ninth-grader: “I had no direction in my life, and a few times I even thought I couldn’t wait until I turned 16 so I could drop out of school and get on with my life.... It was an ensemble, and everybody was working together every day, and we were getting things done.... It was associated with school, and automatically I started connecting this fun thing with school, and everything changed. From my experience... classrooms are like a big church of knowledge that needs a revival. And I think that revival is going to be through the arts.”

www.citizen-times.com

Bumping Along: In a column for washingtonpost.com, Post staff writer Jay Matthews muses about

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Ed. Foundation has CMS's number, or two or four

You could call the State of Public Education Report the Tom Bradbury Rorschach test.

The Leader newspaper saw the report as “an awakening” to “unacceptable performance by anyone’s standards in schools where performance, in general, is thought to be acceptable, or even commendable.”

The Charlotte Post saw news of a “teacher retention crisis.”

The Charlotte Observer reported the recommendation that CMS and the state should report test results not by school-wide averages but by smaller subgroups so as not to mask the achievement challenges facing smaller groups of students.

Bradbury’s “tale of two systems, or three or four” contains all that, and much more. He’ll be speaking about the details at Tuesday night’s board meeting. We’ll share more of the report with readers the way Bradbury probably in part intended: in small doses. And of course we’ll use it as a reference book, for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Education Foundation has mined what data is available in thorough fashion. On student turnover (a likely proxy for disrupted learning), for

example, elementary-age kids come and go most at Westerly Hills, Merry Oaks, Albemarle Road and Statesville Road (all had 40% or more turnover in 1998-99). The turnover rate was under 5% at three magnets: Elizabeth Traditional, Villa Heights and Amay James Montessori.

Bradbury, a former Observer editorial writer and student of the schools, has long believed in numbers as one strong fulcrum on which a community can improve its institutions like schools.

He has long paid attention to statewide testing, and now is pressing to have the results presented to maximize their potential for provoking needed change. He writes:

“In truth, the superintendent and those working under him are acutely aware of the problems and shortcomings.

“But those educators live in a world that is schizophrenic. On the one hand, they must celebrate success if they are to attract students and teachers. On the other, they must be candid about problems if they are to identify them and solve them.”

www.cmef.org

On road to equity: Progress in schools

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also clearly won't be completed tomorrow, or next fall.

Supt. Eric Smith's report to the board covered 11 categories. Some real strides have been made: Readiness for exceptional children at Albemarle Road Elementary, for example, has been raised from 10% in 1995 to 91% today, Smith said. Garinger and West Charlotte have added two teachers each, and Olympic and West Meck are slated to receive 4 to 6.

But the challenges ahead are substantial. From Thursday's meeting, here are some details on the categories:

Facilities. By fall, 19 of 147 schoolhouses will meet physical standards. That's 13%. With bond-financed projects under way, that number will be rising. Setting the standards, and then getting annual updates, will reassure the community that deliberate if slow progress is being made on this key issue.

Supplies. The lists of materials for each classroom and grade level are in place. Not a single school is at 100% today, Smith said. The schools named Equity-Plus sites on account of large populations of low-income students were at an average of 41%. Other schools averaged 43%. Funding for supplies has been increased 30% at the Equity Plus schools.

Computers. The goal is a computer for every 5 students at all schools, a computer lab at every school, an automated library,

How to tell when night has ended

Louise Woods shared this recently with school board members:

An old rabbi once asked his pupils how they could tell when the night had ended and day had begun.

"Could it be," asked one student, "when you can see an animal in the distance and tell whether it is a sheep or a dog?" "No," answered the rabbi.

Another asked, "is it when you can look at a tree in the distance and tell whether it's a fig or a peach tree?" "No," answered the rabbi.

"Then when is it?" the pupils demanded.

"It is when you can look on the face of any woman or man and see your sister or brother. Because if you cannot see this, it is still night."

- Church World Service, www.churchworldservice.org

cabling and a closed-circuit TV system. Officials hope to reach the goal through three phases: first an 8-1 standard, then moving to 5-1, then instituting a program of replacing 20% of all installed computers each year. Smith said that, as of January, 19 schools met the 5-1 standard and 40 schools met the 8-1 standard. That leaves 88 schools further behind.

Libraries. The standard is one book per 10 students. All schools meet the quantitative standard. But there's a qualitative standard: How current are the books, as in were the science books written before or after the space shuttle first flew? On the qualitative standard, Smith said 5% of the schools are top-rated on a three-point scale. On library personnel, 91% meet the standard.

Courses. These standards are tied to the N.C. Standard Course of Study. The schools fell short of curricular offerings in 1996 when Smith arrived. The record today is

close to 100%, he said. The standards deal, for example, with the curriculum available in high schools, and an elementary day that includes 2 hours of literacy, an hour of math and 90 minutes of science.

Exceptional children. Smith says 80% to 90% of schools meet the standards.

Textbooks. Smith said all students at all schools have access to textbooks. He said CMS is now ordering directly from vendors to decrease shipping time.

Faculty. Smith said the goals are in place. Meeting them will take more time. He's focused on assuring high-quality staff at Equity Plus schools by 2002.

Discipline. Standards are in place and each school has a "safe school" plan and audits. Due process procedures are in place, and the number of hearing officers is up to 6 so students can receive timely hearings. Spanish has been added to handbooks.

Educate! a newsletter of The Swann Fellowship

1510 E. 7th St. Charlotte NC 28204
704-342-4330 SwannFello@aol.com Locally produced content © The Swann Fellowship. Lucy Bush, president; B.B. DeLaine, vice president. Six-week running average circulation through last issue: 2,297

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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 non-profit organization exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code 56-2106776. Financial information about this organization and a copy of its license are available from the State Solicitation Licensing Branch at 1-888-830-4989. The license is not an endorsement by the state.

Long-range plans ignore big issues

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ratio at low-performing schools, a key part of promises of equity.

Smith reportedly has replied that he doesn't know yet where such additional classroom space will be needed and can't make that determination until the courts finally decide the outcome of the Cappachione-Swann suit against the school system.

Once the courts speak finally in the suit – which may be several years away – then the school system will be able to put a more permanent student assignment plan in place and the determination of low-performing schools will be easier to come by.

In the meantime, Smith says, smaller class size can be provided where needed with mobile classroom units.

Some school board members have argued, however, that even short of a final court ruling, there are a number of schools in the system that will clearly need smaller classes if the promises of equity are to be made good on and that the facilities plan should include a commitment now for permanent space at those schools.

The board's meeting on Tuesday night will include a public comment session around 8 p.m., but the board's vote on the long-range plan will almost certainly have been taken by that point in the evening.

Concerns about the long-range facilities plan's failure to provide for equity in key areas can be addressed by telephone or e-mail to school members.

Remember, the vote will take place Tuesday night.

CMS says written comments on policy decisions may be submitted in writing via e-mail at:

cmspolicy@cms.k12.nc.us

Faxes go to 704-343-5739.

School board members and their e-mail addresses are:

District 1, Robert Simmons: simbob@rbh.com; 704-377-8353

District 2, Vilma Leake: v.leake@cms.k12.nc.us; 704-846-2508; fax 704-343-5684

District 3 George Dunlap: gdunlap@bellsouth.net; 704-597-5980; fax 704-343-5075

District 4, Louise Woods: lwoods@bellsouth.net; 704-536-0335; fax 704-343-5076

District 5, Molly Griffin: MABGriffin@aol.com; 704-376-5524; fax 704-343-5683

District 6: Lindalyn Kakadelis: kakadeli@bellsouth.net; 704-543-6313; fax 704-343-5077

At large, Arthur Griffin: agriffin@bellsouth.net; 704-542-0764; fax 704-343-3761

At large, John Lassiter: lassiter@bellsouth.net; 704-343-4822;



Sloane Whaley/Myers Park Traditional

fax 704-343-3760

At-large, Wilhelmenia Rembert, at-large: rembertw@winthrop.edu; 704-543-5454; fax 704-343-5160

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.

Briefs

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what will happen when state graduation requirements kick in and parents realize that a quarter of their children are at risk of not getting a diploma. A few states, he suggests, are leading the way:

“Indiana is letting students who fail its tests graduate if they have a minimum grade point average in core academic subjects.

Delaware will give different types of diplomas, based on a student’s score. Students who fail New Jersey’s test may save the day by completing a series of classroom tasks.”

Not to worry about such abandonment of the strict new standards, Matthews writes: “All educational advances bump along like this.... My 16-year-old’s homework assignments are far beyond what I was asked to do at that age. I suspect most parents who take the time to read their children’s essays and tests would say the same.”

www.washingtonpost.com

Fixing, Not Fleeing: As debate begins on the Bush administration’s education policies, N.C. Superintendent Mike Ward has a very different agenda for the N.C. legislature. Instead of vouchers, he wants a narrowly targeted program to improve underperforming schools rather than siphoning off their best students.

The plan starts with the existing program under which state school assistance teams arrive at low-performing schools to improve curriculum, procedures, discipline, etc. Under Ward’s plan, if the school did not improve and is rated low-performing a second year, the state would pay to cut K-3 class sizes to 17, put all teachers on 11-month contracts to pay for training and more instructional days, and create teacher signing bonuses of \$5,000 and annual bonuses of up to \$10,000 for teachers meeting their goals.

www.newsobserver.com



First-Year Guides: In Dallas, new teachers are getting some help through their first year via Coaches for Success, a program that pairs retired administrators with first-year teachers. The Dallas Morning News, in a story about one such teacher in Glenn Heights, noted that a nationwide study by the nonprofit group Recruiting New Teachers Inc. found that school districts with such teacher-induction programs retained 90% to 100% of first-year teachers.

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Education Foundation’s State of Public Education report gives no dropout rate for first-year CMS teachers. But overall the rate is 19.4%; the N.C. rate is 13.6%.

www.dallasnews.com



Digital Divide: A David and Lucille Packard Foundation study suggests that, while the digital divide is closing, it hasn’t disappeared.

Just over half of all homes nationwide have Internet access. For families with incomes higher than \$75,000, it’s 91%. For families with incomes of less than \$20,000, it’s 22%.

The New York Times noted that computers have been found to be useful learning tools for children with disabilities. But little is known about the effects of home computer use on most children’s development.

Computers at home, however, are certainly reshaping the experience of childhood. A 1999 survey, according to the Times, found that where computers were present, children were in front of screens an additional hour daily. That’s an hour ADDED to the 3 hours and 40 minutes that children average in front of the television screen.

www.nytimes.com



Is it the money? Studies released last month on welfare-to-work programs implemented since 1993 showed two things:

When welfare recipients left the rolls for jobs that paid no more than welfare, the change had no effect on children’s education. When recipients left for jobs that boosted their family income, children’s test scores improved. Did scores rise because of the additional disposable income, or the added self-esteem, or the heightened regularity of daily life, or even the moves to better schools afforded by the higher family income? The stories we’ve seen didn’t say.

www.nytimes.com

www.cleveland.com

Calendar

- 12** Special meeting of county commissioners with N.C. legislative delegation, Ed. Center board room, 9 a.m.
- 12** Orientation for facilitators of Feb. 24 “Conversation Among Equals.” Urban League, 704 W. 5th St., 5:30 p.m. Call Beverly Cureton to volunteer, 704-373-3356 Ext. 204
- 13** School board meeting, Board Room, 6 p.m.
- 16** Student Assignment Oversight Committee, Board Room, 7:30 a.m.
- 19** Teacher work day.
- 20** Building Oversight Committee, Building Services, 7:30 a.m.
- 20** School Board-Commissioners-City Council lunch, Government Center Room 267, noon.
- 24** “Conversation Among Equals,” Spirit Square, 9:45 a.m.-4 p.m.
- 26** Student Assignment Oversight Committee, Board Room, 7:30 a.m.
- 27** School board meeting, Board Room, 6 p.m.

March

- 13** School board meeting, Board Room, 6 p.m.