

North Carolina last week released statewide dropout rates for last year. A report in chart form, including Charlotte-Mecklenburg results. Page 2.

The resolution

Assignment road map abandons struggle to desegregate schools

By **ARAMINTA S. JOHNSTON**

Under persistent pressure from the Chamber of Commerce, some elected officials, and affluent white parents to “do something” the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school board may be poised to officially abandon its historic commitment to being “the premier urban, integrated system in the nation” when it meets Tuesday night.

Meeting in special session at that time, the board will consider a resolution introduced last Tuesday by its newest member, Bob Simmons, that substitutes “choice” for the principle of diversity adopted by earlier citizen committees appointed to advise the board on school assignment.

In an interview Friday,

Simmons acknowledged that he fears the flight of primarily white affluent families from the public school system. “If we don’t adopt this approach now, then I think we’re going to end up in a worse place than we are now” he said.

He said he is concerned that if the board doesn’t accede to some parents’ demand for greater choice in their children’s school assignment, he thinks that the Charlotte-Mecklenburg system could end up like urban school systems in other parts of the nation: populated primarily by disadvantaged children and lacking a community commitment to support public education.

Simmons, appointed by the board to fill out the term of former District 1 representative Jim Puckett, acknowledged that if the board adopts a pupil assignment plan based on his resolution, the result is likely to be a school system characterized by increased socioeconomic and racial isolation, at least in some areas of the county.

Simmons said, however, that he believes the resolution as it now stands will commit the school system to working to ease such isolation “to the extent possible” through such means as the location of assignment zones, the location and structure of programs and the application of priorities that give greater choice to low-performing and poorer children in low-performing schools.

“Will we really try to create less

Text of the proposed resolution

Here is the text of proposed school board resolution on pupil assignment, as presented to school board March 27. Tabled at that meeting, the wording was undergoing revisions late last week. The board is scheduled to discuss it again Tuesday night.

Background

Equal opportunity for all children to receive an excellent education in every facility of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) is essential to the success of our citizens and our community. Stability of pupil assignment is essential to the student and faculty relationships that foster excellent education. Proximity of

assigned schools to the homes of the children learning in these schools facilitates the family participation that strengthens education. Balanced utilization of schools enhances both efficiency and effectiveness. Choice of school assignment within a plan providing equal access to excellent schools with the opportunity for real options for stability, proximity and diversity provides students, families, faculty and staff with the freedom to find satisfactory individual alternatives enhancing the effectiveness of the system.

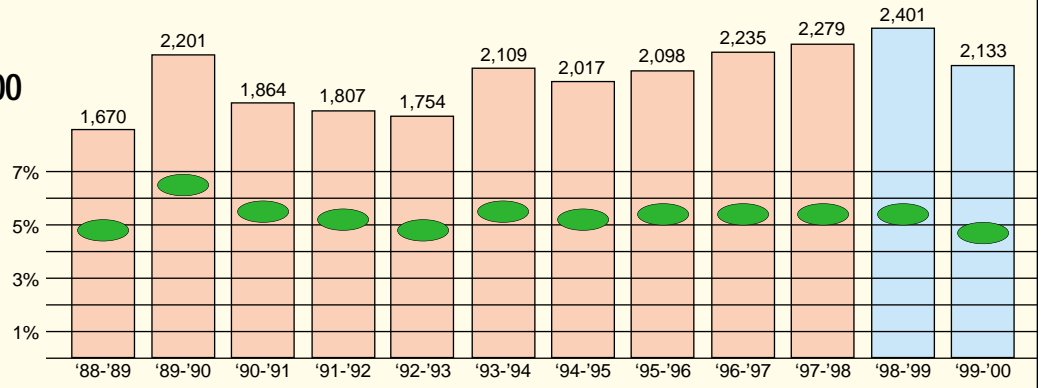
The Charlotte-Mecklenburg
Continued on Page 4

Continued on Page 3

CMS: Dropouts, 7-12, for years '88-'89 to '99-'00

Note: Last 2 years not directly comparable to earlier years because transfers to community colleges are included.

Total dropouts by year
 Pct. of enrolled students



Dropouts: A persistent sign of schools falling short

The state this past week released dropout statistics for last school year. Many were improved.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg shared that trend (top chart, far right). Statewide, grade 7-12 dropouts fell by 971, from 4.6% to 4.34%.

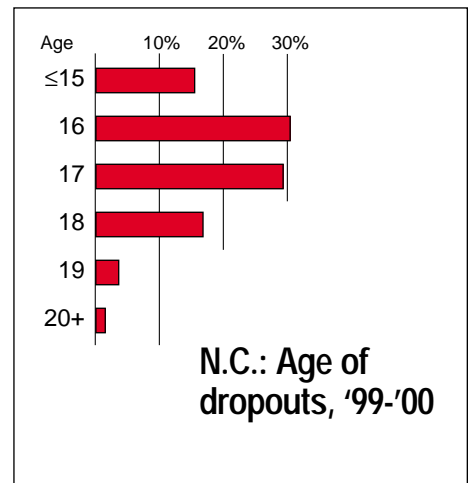
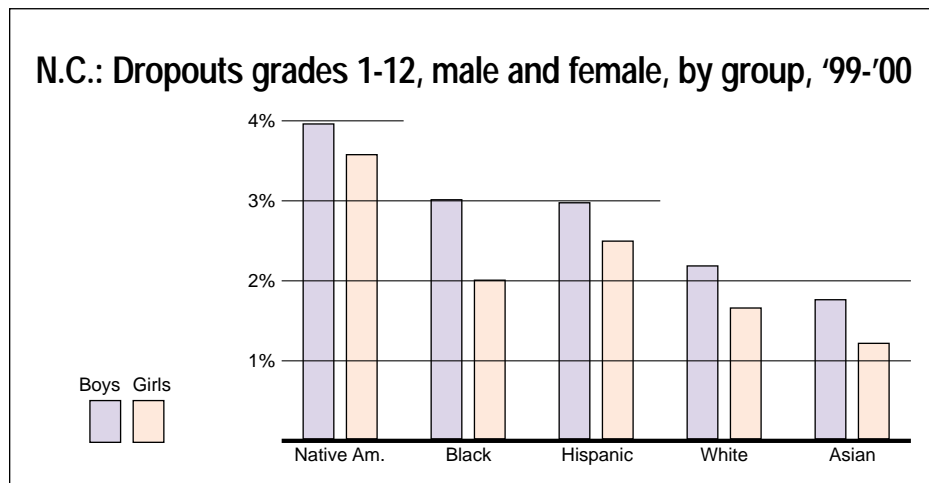
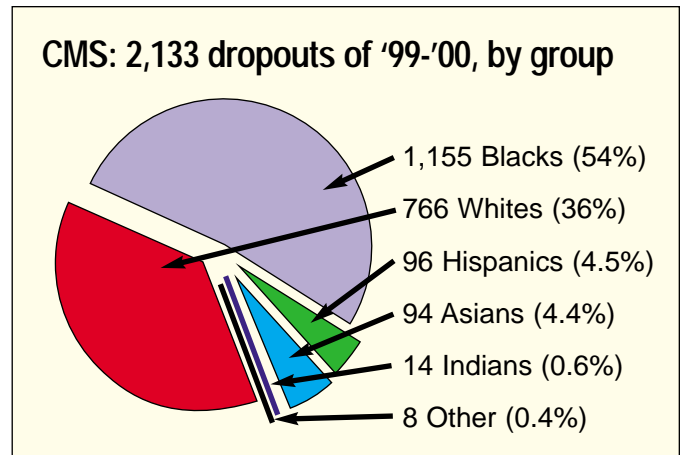
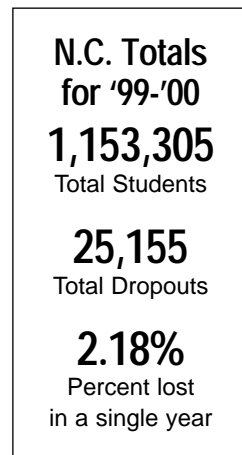
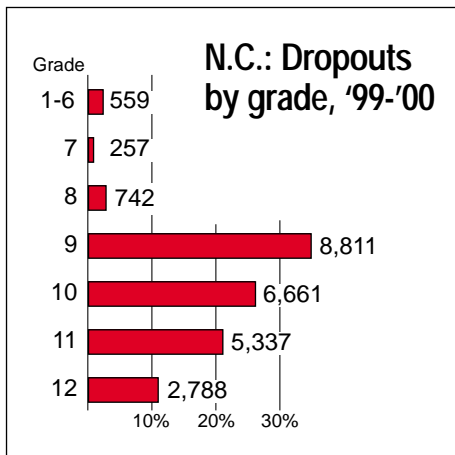
But state educators were not celebrating. "The numbers indicate we are continuing to lose too many students.... So long as we

believe this is their best preparation for becoming active citizens, we must not give up hope on any child or teen."

For the key grades 9-12, statewide dropouts fell from 6.78% to 6.43%. Joining CMS with lower numbers were many big districts (Durham, Forsyth, Guilford, Orange, Chapel Hill-Carrboro and Wake), and many in the Charlotte

area (Anson, Cabarrus, Catawba, Gaston, Iredell, Union). Area districts with increases included Kannapolis City, Hickory City, Rowan and Lincoln.

Tracking dropouts by the year tends to understate the problem. In many cases, a quarter of kindergartners won't graduate. The graph at top illustrates the persistence of the problem.



Resolution may end desegregation effort

Continued from Page 1

socioeconomic and racial isolation? Yes. But if we're looking at contiguous (assignment) zones, we're probably going to end up with some school zones that have a higher concentration (of SES and racial isolation)...than we have today," Simmons said.

But he said he believes that a pupil assignment plan based on the resolution "gives us a better long-term chance to create equity than our current situation does."

Simmons has introduced his resolution at a point that CMS is still in limbo with the federal courts. In February all parties to the current lawsuit over pupil assignment, including the school system, argued their case before the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals.

The parties had argued the issues before a three-judge panel of the appeals court in June. Between then and the time that the panel issued its decision in early December 2000, Superintendent Eric Smith proceeded to construct a pupil assignment plan that the board was forced to abruptly withdraw when the panel handed down its decision.

Board members had instructed Smith to prepare two assignment plans: one based on choice and a second that would take race into account if, as was in fact the case,

the panel ruled that the school system was not unitary.

The single plan that Smith had presented to the board allowed only for assignments based on choice.

When the panel ruled that CMS is not yet a unitary system (has not eliminated all vestiges of its previously de jure segregated system), the school board and the school system were caught short two days before a "Showcase of Schools" event designed to allow parents to shop for choices for their children's school assignment.

The event had to be abruptly canceled, to the consternation of parents.

When Simmons was asked about whether his proposal posed similar risks as the school system waits for the appeals court to rule – which knowledgeable sources say is probably several months away – Simmons said that the resolution makes allowances for rulings that the court might issue.

Although he implied that his position on the issue does not enjoy complete endorsement among school board members and staff, he said that he believes that the differences between a plan in compliance with the proposed resolution and Smith's previous plan would make allowances for any ruling that the appeals court might issue.

He said that while the plan does not make diversity in schools one of its primary principles, he believes that it does guarantee equal education if not integration.

Inner change

Mecklenburg Ministries offers to facilitate sessions at churches or other community groups exploring "issues of race, power and prejudice." Weeknight programs run three hours once a week for four weeks. Weekend workshops begin Friday evening and continue Saturday. For more information, contact Shantel Ingram, program director, at 704-347-2404 or shantel.ingram@meckmin.org

He declared that the U.S. Supreme Court ruling issued in 1971 in *Swann vs. Mecklenburg* was not designed to produce integration as a goal in itself, but rather used race as a tool to promote equal educational opportunity.

Given this assumption, Simmons said that "if *Swann* doesn't apply when the courts get through" then his resolution would be in conformity with such a decision.

If the court declares that taking race into consideration "is either required or allowed" Simmons thinks that an assignment plan in conformity with his resolution – an "overlay" – could be easily accommodated.

He said he believes the school board would make use of such an overlay if the courts either require or permit it to do so.

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. Published since September 2000. 6-week avg. circ. through last issue: 2,264.

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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.

Text of proposed board resolution

Continued from Page 1

Board of Education (the Board) has pursued equal educational opportunity only since the early 1970's after the decision of the United States Supreme Court in *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* ordering the desegregation of separate and unequal schools in CMS. In March 1999, the Board adopted a document entitled "Achieving the CMS Vision: Equity and Student Success (the Equity Plan). As noted in the Equity Plan, it "started out as a means for the district to achieve unitary status; however, it became a comprehensive framework for student achievement." The Equity Plan outlines goals and strategies for achieving equity in several areas, including educational opportunities, family and community involvement, instructional materials and supplies, media centers, technology, faculty, instructional facilities, organizational capacity and accountability. On June 1, 2000, the Board adopted a resolution in which it recommitted itself to the components of equity outlined in the Equity Plan and to avoiding, to the extent possible, the resegregation and racial isolation of schools. On February 8, 2001, the Superintendent presented to the Board a status report on the work done to date to implement the Equity Plan to provide for all children enrolled in CMS an equal opportunity to receive an excellent education in every school.

The Board has determined that the foundation of equal educational opportunity under the Equity Plan framework is sufficiently sound, if completely developed and adequately funded, to result in the resolution of remaining inequities over a reasonable time to institutionalize the goals of *Swann* and to justify the adoption of a plan of pupil assignment for

the 2002-2003 school year.

Resolutions

Based on the foregoing, and in recognition of its responsibility to guarantee for all students equal access to excellent educational opportunities, the Board takes all of the following actions:

1. The Board hereby reaffirms its commitment to the goals of educational excellence and equal education opportunity for all of the children of Mecklenburg County.
2. The Board commits to continue with strategic planning, operational implementation and community collaboration to achieve the goals of educational excellence and equal educational opportunity.
3. The Board supports the Superintendent's implementation of the Equity Plan framework to attain the goal of raising the academic achievement of all students to or above the appropriate grade level in all curricular areas, with a focus on the core academic subjects. The actions to attain this goal include maintaining universally high expectations and high standards for students, teachers and administrators, providing a rigorous and engaging curriculum and instruction, offering support for families, obtaining consistent parental and community involvement and delivering programmatic and fiscal accountability. The Board directs the Superintendent to develop an educational template to eliminate the inequities documented in the Equity Plan and to continue to develop and implement procedures to monitor the provisions of the Equity Plan to assure equity in personnel allocations, curriculum and program offerings, professional development, facilities and maintenance and fiscal support to guarantee that excellence and equity will be sustained over time.

4. The Board commits to seek

Calendar

- 2 Student assignment oversight committee, Board Room, 7:30 a.m.
 - 3 School board budget work session, Board Room, 6 p.m.
 - 10 School board meeting, Board Room, 6 p.m.
 - 12 Curriculum committee, Board Room, 6 p.m.
 - 17 Bond oversight committee, Building Services, 7:30 a.m.
Joint lunch with commissioners, City Council, Room 267 Government Center.
Personnel/Policy committee, Board conference room, 3 p.m.
- May**
- 8 School board meeting, Board Room, 6 p.m.
 - 15 School board meeting, Board Room, 6 p.m.

aggressively the funding necessary to guarantee equity in the allocation of resources to every school, including quality teachers, rigorous curricular offerings, appropriate educational materials and supplies, effective family support services and adequate physical facilities. The Board acknowledges that providing equal educational opportunities within all schools requires providing additional resources, such as differentiated staffing, smaller class size, more experienced and successful teachers, increased instructional supplies and materials, expanded and renovated facilities, new parental involvement initiatives, upgraded technology, full extracurricular and co-curricular activities, supplemental guidance and counseling and enhanced professional development to schools serving students with additional

Continued on Page 5

Text of proposed board resolution

Continued from Page 4

educational needs, and the Board commits to allocating and reallocating available funds within its budgets to maintain as the first priority the achievement of the goals of the Equity Plan framework.

5. The Board directs the Superintendent to develop a student assignment plan (the Plan) for 2002-2003 for adoption by the board by August 15, 2001 that will be in compliance with applicable law and that:

(a) maintains stability for students to the fullest extent feasible;

(b) guarantees availability of a "home" school assignment choice for every student in proximity to the student's home;

(c) guarantees options for low performing students assigned to home schools with high concentrations of low performing students and for students of low socioeconomic status who are assigned to home schools with high concentrations of low socioeconomic status students, to choose assignment to schools with high performance and low concentrations of low socioeconomic status;

(d) provides choice for all students;

(e) supports families' and students' interests in specialized programs in diverse environments; and

(f) maximizes utilization of all schools to encourage successful outcomes for all children.

The Plan shall be designed with due regard for the pending litigation to which the board is subject, maintaining the flexibility to be modified to accommodate possible

'I just want something I can understand'

Part of the problem with student assignment is its complexity. Another part is that it keeps changing. One reader writes:

Do right by all kids. Give parents so much choice they choke. And for God's sake, follow the court orders we're under. Does it need to be any more complex than this?

1. Fill every school by lottery. Parents choose their favorite 20 schools for their child's age. Let 'em apply for any school they please. With elementaries tied to middles and highs, we'll know where our kindergartners will graduate. Everybody rides a bus. Practically everybody does already. Walking to school is a Norman Rockwell image. Many of us don't look like Norman Rockwell.

2. If you refuse to choose, the lottery computer will select. Newcomers during the year go where there are seats. You can re-enter the lottery next year to move.

3. Give every school some rich kids and some poor ones. Over time, that's the only way to get a handle on this equity stuff.

4. Move teachers to give every school some experienced ones. Equalize the buildings, the materials and all that.

5. And stop being so scared to send us the bill. We taxpayers know what's important. It's our kids. Keep it simple. I just want something I can understand.

court actions on both unitary status and the use of race as a factor in student assignment.

6. The Plan shall be based on the "Family Choice Plan" adopted by the Board on June 1, 2000 and suspended by the Board on December 1, 2000. The Plan shall retain many features of the Family Choice Plan to enhance stability, such as the priority for highly mobile students in the magnet lottery and the priority for students to remain in current assignments. The choices of students within the Plan shall also be based on the choices available under the Family Choice Plan, but shall be restructured as follows:

(a) to guarantee the right to choose (with transportation provided within the same choice zone and without transportation provided outside the same choice zone) another school (i) for students who qualify for free or reduced price lunch and who are assigned to a home school where

60% or more of the students qualify for free or reduced price lunch, where the chosen school is below 40% free or reduced price lunch, and (ii) for students performing below grade level in reading and assigned to a home school where fewer than 60% of students are performing at or above grade level in reading, where the chosen school's performance in reading is 5% or more above the system average;

(b) to provide for other students assigned to a home school where 60% or more of the students qualify for free or reduced price lunch priority to choose (with transportation provided within the same choice zone and without transportation provided outside the same choice zone) another school;

(c) to guarantee for all students assigned to a home school with fewer than 60% of students performing on grade level in reading for two consecutive years the right

Continued on Page 6

Text of proposed board resolution

Continued from Page 5

to choose (with transportation provided within the same choice zone and without transportation provided outside the same choice zone) another school where the chosen school's performance in reading is 5% or more above the system average; and

(d) to provide to all students priority to choose (with transportation provided outside the same choice zone and without transportation provided outside the same choice zone) another school where their choice would enhance economic diversity but not create a concentration of low socioeconomic status above 50% free or reduced price lunch.

The Superintendent shall also design the Plan to avoid the involuntary movement of students reassigned in the 2001-2002 school plan, to seek continuity with the 2001-2002 school plan, to anticipate the addition of the new schools in 2002-2003, to reduce high concentrations of low socioeconomic status students in home school zones, to avoid the relocation and dislocation of existing programs, and to provide additional staff and programmatic support needed both to meet expectations of excellence in schools demonstrating poor or declining student achievement and to attract a variety of students, including higher achieving students, to these schools. Finally, the plan shall provide for voluntary transfers of students (without transportation) in the Fall of 2001 through a lottery into their "home" schools under the Plan, to the extent capacity is available in those schools in 2001-2002.

7. Because some greater concen-

A Fellowship comment on the budget

Fellowship president Lucy Bush addressed Tuesday's school board budget hearing. Her message:

"There is broad agreement that the schools' need for additional resources is real. The courts have made it clear that the schools are under an obligation to more effectively educate at-risk children. It is also crystal clear that our wealthiest parents will not countenance budgeting that reduces their children's access to upper-level courses.

"It is time to test our proud talk that we are willing to work together and to commit our worldly goods toward building a better community. We are blessed with resources that many poor North Carolina counties can only dream of. We can, if we choose, better serve the needs of both at-risk children and advantaged ones. I speak for thousands of people in Charlotte-Mecklenburg in asking you to press the case with county commissioners, to choose to spend what it will take to give all students, not only the basic education that the constitution demands, but the quality, equitable, integrated education that will prepare them for the world they are called to lead."

trations of low socioeconomic status (as measured by students eligible for free or reduced price lunch) may not be reasonably avoidable under the Plan, schools with higher concentrations of low socioeconomic status and schools which qualify as Equity Plus II schools under the applicable criteria of the Board shall receive additional resources under the Equity Plan, including, but not limited to, family support services, teacher and administrator incentives to create and maintain stable balances of experience and qualification, reduced class sizes and curriculum enhancement to elevate and meet expectations of excellence. The Board shall work cooperatively with parents, other interested citizens, community leaders and elected officials to ensure the sustained availability and equitable distribution of high quality educational resources needed to provide for all students an equal opportunity for an excellent education. The Board shall seek the cooperation and support of both the Board of County Commissioners and the Charlotte

City Council in funding the achievement and perpetuation of the Equity Plan.

8. The Board shall also seek the cooperation of the Board of County Commissioners and the Charlotte City Council in promoting the growth and dispersion of affordable housing throughout Mecklenburg County and in expanding public transit serving houses, apartments and schools. In choosing sites for future construction of schools, the Board shall consider, in addition to other criteria in no prescribed order of priority, the socioeconomic diversity of nearby housing and the availability of public transit lines to serve the schools. In particular, to enhance the likelihood of reducing socioeconomic segregation and racial isolation in schools, the Board shall work with the Commissioners and Council Members to encourage the implementation of a scattered-site housing initiative in conjunction with the ten-year Capital Improvement Plan.

Briefs

Human scale: Even in a town as big as Baltimore, a few lucky children needing extra help have fallen into a small place that can help. Orioles Academy, operated by Communities in Schools with support of the baseball team and other sponsors, runs classes of 12, teaches character education, and tackles all the family and other problems that lead to behavior problems. The Baltimore Sun spotlighted one child, constantly suspended because he couldn't get to school on time, who now attends school every day because, on a handshake, a teacher had the authority to agree he could arrive up to 20 minutes late.

www.sunspot.com

Just 20 points: A study of the effects of test-prep courses for the SAT suggests that most students get no more than 20 points out of the coursework, the New York Times reported. The study, by Derek Briggs at Berkeley, examined Department of Education survey data from 14,000 students followed for five or more years. Test preparation companies say the study did not separate out one-day crash programs from expensive programs that may last months. The Times noted that just retaking the SAT has been shown to raise scores.

www.nytimes.com

Asthma-like symptoms: A UNCC School of Public Health survey last year at 499 or 88 percent of the state's public middle schools found that 27 percent of the state's seventh and eighth graders indicate having asthma-like symptoms. The N.C. Department of Public Instruction said Health and Human Services Secretary Carmen Hooker Buell called for "expansion of the state's cadre of certified school nurses and asthma educators, flexible school medication policies that

allow children who are capable of using their inhalers appropriately to do so, and increased school sanitation inspections to ensure environments free of irritants that can trigger asthma episodes."

www.ncschools.org

Out of the loop: A national survey by Public Agenda found that many teachers feel excluded from decision-making on school policy. Many have not taken ownership of the move to raise student achievement because they think achievement "depends on factors beyond their control," the Christian Science Monitor reported. Most board members and superintendents want more public involvement and depend on school board meetings to provide it. But about two-thirds of educators surveyed say their meetings are dominated by special interest groups.

www.csmonitor.com

Top toy: Was Playstation 2 the top-seller last holiday season? No, reports the Los Angeles Times: It was LeapPad, a cartridge-driven electronic book aimed at preschoolers that delivers a dose of word and phonics lessons in a captivating way. "This has moving parts for kids who learn by doing things, auditory elements for kids who learn by hearing and visual challenges for those who learn by seeing," a Los Angeles principal said.

www.latimes.com

Study together: The Washington Post profiled a number of teachers who encourage students to work together on homework because they find students can

Young Artists:

Share with all of us what you see! Send your words, digital photos and digital artwork to SwannFello@aol.com. Mail goes to The Swann Fellowship, 1510 E. 7th St., Charlotte, NC 28204-2410.

more easily grasp a difficult subject after discussing it among friends. Many of the teachers said they were inspired by University of Texas math educator Uri Treisman, "who showed that African American students did better in college when they adopted the study-group strategies of their Asian American classmates." Montgomery County, Md., social studies teacher Leon Busche told the Post that the groups must be voluntary, for it "is against social norms for students to meet together to discuss academics."

At the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, deputy director Mikki Terry said, "Today's students will be entering a workforce that puts increasing emphasis on teamwork.... What better place to begin learning...?"

www.washingtonpost.com

Census facts: The schoolage population has been 'achanging. The Los Angeles Times collected these gems from the Census: The schoolage population has returned to levels set in 1979. Non-Latino whites account for 63%, down from a Baby Boom high of 79%. African Americans represent 16%, Latinos 15% and Asians 5%. One in every 5 students has a foreign-born parent. One in every 20 students WAS foreign-born.

www.sfgate.com

You are what you watch: Susan Villani, a Johns Hopkins psychiatrist who reviewed a decade's worth of studies on the media's impact on children, says what kids watch can directly influence their behavior. "Children are being exposed to more graphic content at younger and younger ages," Villani told the Boston Globe. She praised efforts to discuss with children the "messages" they see on TV and in movies and music videos. Clarifying for children that such messages are not commands can lead to a level of "media literacy" that can decrease violent behavior, she said.

www.boston.com