
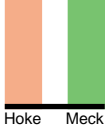
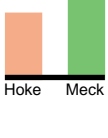



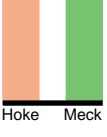
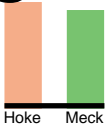
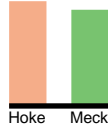


New Choice – New Inequities / page 7

Educate!

A newsletter on education in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, NC

April 8, 2001

Mecklenburg has resources Hoke may never enjoy. Relatively fewer poor children  more local resources for each child  local teacher pay  and dollars going into the classroom . Yet despite vast differences in spending, black kids are below grade level at similar rates in 3rd grade  4th grade  and 7th grade , in physical science  and algebra II .

A judge is now asking why.

They Call The Case

Leandro

It's a lawsuit against the state of North Carolina that is seven years old, and is nowhere near being settled.

It promises to reshape how North Carolina finances public school education – and perhaps even how North Carolinians think about public education.

It began when five poor counties sought state help because their tax bases would not support the quality education available in wealthier counties. It continued when six wealthy districts joined the suit, asking the state to bear some of their higher costs for educating the poor and those with special needs.

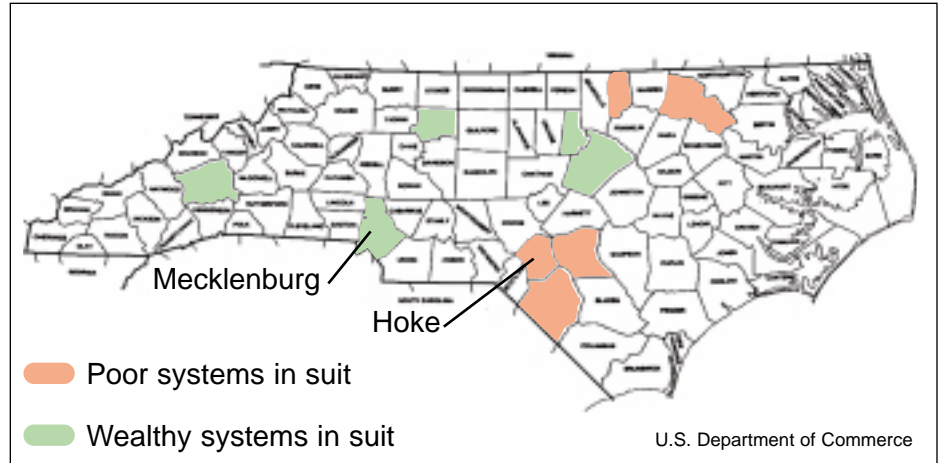
Last month's ruling, Judge Howard Manning admitted, "has 'gored' the sacred educational establishment ox."

Money, he ruled, would not alone solve the problem that North Carolina faces giving all children a basic education. At-risk children get no better an education in a wealthy county like Mecklenburg than they do in dirt-poor Hoke County near Fayetteville, he noted (see chart, page 4).

Indeed, the court found "the same pattern, more or less, in every county":

"North Carolina's public schools have two distinct student populations in every grade from start to finish – (1) those children at-risk of educational failure and (2) those not at-risk.... Educational achievement, or the lack thereof, is the dividing lines between the two groups...."

"The low-performing children ... are poor, and/or have parent(s)



with little education who are employed on the lower end of the economic scale, if they are employed at all.

"No matter how 'wealthy' the county ... is in terms of local funding support, the school systems' scores show that these two groups of children exist in each LEA [local education agency] and the disparities between their academic performance are just as stark in 'wealthy' systems such as Wake, CMS, Orange and Forsyth as in the school systems in the middle and at the low end of the local funding spectrum."

Who suffers

The losers, Manning wrote, are not just minorities, but all poor children.

"The number of white students failing to achieve at grade level and thus at-risk is sometimes greater and many times comparable to the number of black students failing to achieve at grade level.... North Carolina has an across the board problem with at-risk students of all races, not just a problem with minority students...."

"Again, it is not race which causes the child to be at-risk, but the poverty, low parental educa-

tion and job skills, if any, and the illegitimacy which results in there being no stable family environment for the children to grow up in."

"Way too many of North Carolina's children are brought into this world and, through no fault of their own, plunged into 'home' environments void of intellectual stimulation, discipline, respect for others and from which they arrive at the schoolhouse destined for academic failure.

"This is not the fault of the public schools and yet, the public schools have no choice but to shoulder the burdens of these at-risk children and are expected to provide them with the equal opportunity to obtain a sound basic education.

"This is so because, in the eyes of the law, these at-risk children are citizens of North Carolina, and, as citizens, they have the same constitutional rights as those children whose parents are married, have decent educations, earn a decent living and provide their children with a learning-rich environment from the day they come home from the maternity ward."

Manning wrote that he is con-

Continued on Page 3

They call the case Leandro

Continued from Page 2

vinced that when money is focused on at-risk children, they not only learn, but rise to grade level. This is a key issue, for without it his controversial remedy would fall apart.

Look, Manning wrote, at Hoke County's West Hoke Middle, where with no additional spending principal Darlene Clark raised scores to "exemplary growth/gain" status on the '98 ABCs. Her strategies: She reworked the daily schedule to devote two more hours to reading and math; and she created teaching teams so each child would receive instruction from teachers who knew the child's needs well.

Look, Manning wrote, at Kingswood Elementary in Wake, where a largely poor student body is 95% on grade level. Principal Sue Sisson reassigned administrators to the classroom, cutting class size to 15 students. Other money was redirected to pay more teachers to tutor.

Look, Manning wrote, at Gaston Middle in Northampton County, where Principal Lucy Edwards has taken an 84% free- and reduced-lunch student body and has three-quarters learning above grade level thanks to a "relentless focus on achievement."

Look, Manning wrote, at Baskerfield Elementary in Nash, where a 92% free-lunch school has 81% of its students on grade level.

In each case, Manning says the good results could be laid to the work of a principal, classroom teachers and supportive parents.

"If these wonderful educators can achieve success with at-risk children on a shoe-string, there is no, absolutely no, excuse for other schools, especially wealthy schools, not to achieve at-risk student success with leadership and proper strategic allocation of resources."

The judge's assessment shares

A Tale Of Two N.C. Counties, Part 1

Judge Howard Manning's ruling makes extensive use of school achievement statistics from two counties: Hoke and Mecklenburg. One is poor, the other wealthy; both, the judge ruled, have failed to provide at-risk children with the basic education required by the N.C. Constitution.

The Counties

	Hoke	Mecklenburg
Area in square miles	382	549
Largest city	Raeford	Charlotte
Population Census 2000	33,646	695,454
Avg. weekly earnings Q1 2000	\$429	\$709
Per-capita income 1998	\$13,582	\$35,245
Median family income 2000	\$37,400	\$57,100
Retail sales 11-2000	\$7,168,042	\$1,435,167,710

The Schools

Enrollment '99-'00	6,132	99,403
Children on free- or reduced lunch	63.7%	36.4%
Local supplement per pupil	\$664	\$1,910
Local supplement rank in N.C.	#99	#5
Avg. teacher supplement '98-'99	\$293	\$3,951
Local funds per classroom	\$17,264	\$49,610

Sources: Wake County Superior Court Memorandum of Decision, March 2001; N.C. Dept. of Commerce; U.S. Census

much in common with conservatives who tend to raise up individual schools nationwide to bolster arguments favoring one or another national "answer" to education's challenges. Manning, for example, takes it as a given that the principal is "the person acknowledged by all to be critical to a school's success." While some principals are "stars," cooler heads often wonder whether there are enough to go around – if progress on achievement is so dependent on having a "star" principal, is there any hope that all children will receive the basic education the N.C. constitution requires?

But Manning may have anticipated that concern, too.

First in line

Why should failure rates be so similar regardless of the level of local spending? he asks. Having already ruled that all school districts are under a mandate to have all children on grade level, Manning concluded that the "only logical answer" is that neither the states' dollars nor local dollars are

being "strategically and logically directed and spent" on getting all children to grade level.

"Leandro requires that the constitutional right to the equal opportunity be met before any other dollars are spent on opportunities outside of the sound basic education."

The case before the court is one about a constitutional right to a basic education. It is not, Manning kept repeating in his opinion, a case about how to give all children the very best education possible.

He ruled that there was no proof that the state was not providing enough money to educate all children in the basics. And until the schools redeploy their money to get that job done, he said he would not address the need for more money from the state.

The judge's "frills and whistles" quote got a lot of press attention: "The right to the equal opportunity to a sound basic education," Manning wrote, "is only to the sound basic education, not the

Continued on Page 4

They call the case Leandro

Continued from Page 3

frills and whistles. The State Constitution does not require that children be provided a prep school education, nor that children be provided the courses and experiences to enable them to go to Yale or Harvard.

“While there is no restriction on high-level electives, modern dance, advanced computer courses and multiple foreign language courses being taught or paid for by tax dollars in the public schools, the constitutional guarantee of a sound basic education for each student must first be met.”

Manning had indeed “gored” the sacred educational establishment ox” and reaction was swift.

CMS Supt. Eric Smith and board chairman Arthur Griffin shared a byline in the Charlotte Observer last week, writing in part:

“Without access to academic rigor and high expectations for achievement, the ‘sound basic education’ proposed by Judge Manning would open doors that lead nowhere. If we truly want our students to be able to compete on an ‘equal footing’ in our ‘complex and rapidly changing society’ as the Constitution calls for, we need to raise our expectations and standards, not lower them. Raising those standards requires additional funding. Simply stated, if North Carolina expects to serve the needs of all children, more resources are necessary.”

At a CMS budget hearing March 27, Swann Fellowship President Lucy Bush told board members, “We can, if we choose, better serve the needs of both at-risk children and advantaged ones... 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

A Tale Of Two N.C. Counties, Part 2

Judge Howard Manning’s ruling makes extensive use of school achievement statistics from two counties: Hoke and Mecklenburg. One is poor, the other wealthy; both, the judge ruled, have failed to provide at-risk children with the basic education required by the N.C. Constitution.

Students BELOW grade level, ‘99-’00, in percent

	Hoke	Mecklenburg	N.C.
3rd grade math and reading			
Native American	60.8	48.7	47.6
Blacks	55.7	58.0	69.4
Whites	27.6	18.1	38.9
4th grade math and science			
Native American	42.3	41.7	42.4
Blacks	53.1	54.5	51.1
Whites	26.2	15.3	20.4
7th grade reading and math			
Native American	50.9	37.8	44.6
Blacks	49.3	48.9	49.5
Whites	26.6	12.2	19.0
Algebra I			
Native American	49.2	48.1	47.9
Blacks	51.5	70.2	52.0
Whites	41.9	29.4	33.8
Physical science high school end-of-course exam			
Blacks	80.6	75.0	67.0
Whites	35.7	28.7	30.5
Algebra II high school end-of-course exam			
Native American	57.1	NA	62.7
Blacks	67.2	61.9	60.4
Whites	41.3	29.8	30.0
Exit exam, reading (10th graders failing test pegged at 8th-grade level)			
Native American	63.2	64.7	57.8
Blacks	69.5	62.9	60.6
Whites	31.7	21.9	28.4
Exit exam, math (10th graders failing test pegged at 8th-grade level)			
Native American	57.9	64.8	55.0
Black	59.9	61.9	59.2
White	21.9	19.4	25.3

Sources: Wake County Superior Court Memorandum of Decision, March 2001

world they are called to lead.”

Smith and Griffin are certainly not wrong. But with strong voices arguing for the needs of advantaged students, it may be easy for the state to lose focus on the needs of at-risk children that Manning’s ruling says must be dealt with.

Is judge oversimplifying?

Judge Manning’s ruling seems to suggest that, if only schools would do a better job, then all children would at least be on grade level. But it may not be that easy. Three examples come to

mind.

– Drug use can radically alter schools’ ability to reach children. Presence of drugs in a community also radically increases the difficulty of finding educators willing to serve in affected schools. The constitution’s provisions do not literally predate the use of drugs. But it would be folly to leave educators the whole task of shouldering all the problems connected with drug use, its marketing, and the fallout of those activities on children.

– Lack of confidence -- students

Continued on Page 5

They call the case Leandro

Continued from Page 4

in teachers, teachers in students, students in themselves, teachers in the school system, parents in the system and in their own children, the community's confidence in the schools -- layers upon layers of disrespect have piled up over time. Educators can work to remove some of the layers, but many are out of their control. And each layer is a barrier to student achievement.

– All the strings Raleigh places on money going to school systems can become a barrier to flexible, effective use of resources. Each string of course was put there after a financial scandal or an abuse of power or a spending abuse. But the cumulative impact of categorical funding to the school systems is to make it nearly impossible for them to promptly meet their children's needs.

Where to from here?

Since it was filed in May 1994, the Leandro case has covered a lot of ground.

The first plaintiffs were children and parents in Cumberland, Halifax, Hoke, Robeson and Vance counties, five of the poorest N.C. counties. Five months later, they were joined by six wealthier districts: Asheville City, Buncombe, CMS, Durham City, Wake and Winston-Salem/Forsyth.

In 1996, a panel of the N.C. Appeals Court ruled that the constitution's guarantee to education covered only access to whatever schools the state is operating at any given time.

In 1997, the N.C. Supreme disagreed, saying all children had a right to "a sound basic education," defined as "preparing students to participate and compete in the society in which they live and work" and as further detailed in the box on this page.

In October of last year, Manning reviewed the nuts and bolts of

Supreme Court defined 'sound basic education'

From the text of the N.C. Supreme Court's 1997 Leandro ruling:
 "...We conclude that Article I, Section 16 and Article IX, Section 2 of the North Carolina Constitution combine to guarantee every child of this state an opportunity to receive a sound basic education in our public schools. For purposes of our Constitution, a 'sound basic education' is one that will provide the student with at least: (1) sufficient ability to read, write and speak the English language and a sufficient knowledge of fundamental mathematics and physical science to enable the student to function in a complex and rapidly changing society; (2) sufficient fundamental knowledge of geography, history and basic economic and political systems to enable the student to make informed choices with regard to issues that affect the student personally or affect the student's community, state and nation; (3) sufficient academic and vocational skills to enable the student to successfully engage in post-secondary education and training; and (4) sufficient academic and vocational skills to enable the student to compete on an equal basis with others in formal education or gainful employment in contemporary society...."

North Carolina's education system and found it sound, including its system of dividing available resources among the state's school districts.

Later that month he issued a ruling that concluded that to fulfill the Leandro mandate, all school systems must provide at-risk children an education program to prepare them for kindergarten. The model studied in that ruling was CMS's Bright Beginnings program. A \$6.3 million proposal to increase Bright Beginnings' reach from 50% to 75% of CMS's at-risk kids for next year is in the superintendent's proposed budget now before the school board.

Deadline in a year

Manning has given the state and its school districts 12 months to come up with a plan to reallocate available resources to get all children to grade level.

The judge did not tell the state how it should reallocate resources. That's because the 1997 Supreme Court ruling warned that the courts should decide what the constitution requires, but defer to the governor and legislature on the details of implementing the law.

Manning said he would leave the governor and legislators, "ini-

tially at least, to use their informed judgment as to how... to remove the barriers to an equal education."

But he ordered quarterly reports to the court – to keep the state focused on resolving the case.

For North Carolinians and their elected leaders, Manning's challenge need not mean stripping the "frills and whistles" from the curriculum. Identifying the resources needed to bring all students up to grade level, and then providing those resources in all N.C. schoolhouses, would be a smarter approach.

Most of the identification work may already be done. Educators really do know what works with kids.

Small classes.

Persistent, creative, dedicated teachers.

Strong communication with supportive parents.

And the tools of the trade: Roofs that don't leak, books, computers, supplies and all the rest.

Why is that so hard?

Is there the public will?

For most of its history, North Carolina has been a desperately poor state. Every facet of its public life, from roads to legislative

Continued on Page 6

They call the case Leandro

Continued from Page 5

halls to teacher pay to transit, reflects a constant juggling of insufficient resources to meet the most crying need. The wealth visible in Mecklenburg today is a very new phenomenon. The city-county school merger of 1960 that created CMS, for example, was in large part inspired by the county's inability to finance the rebuilding of its dilapidated schools.

And outside of Mecklenburg and a few other urban counties, North Carolina remains a poor state.

Despite that history, all North Carolinians aspire to raise their children well, and give them a good education.

And of course many of North Carolina's new residents have little understanding of the state's history. And living in the state's wealthiest counties, they may have little awareness of the state's history of poverty.

To nurture all residents' aspirations, and to implement the constitutional mandate Judge Manning has brought into full view, will take money. And the money must come from residents of wealthy urban counties like Mecklenburg. Is the public resolve strong enough to mandate that change?

Legislators can make the case for new spending, if only by appealing to voters' self-interest. More than three-quarters of N.C. inmates are dropouts. To reduce crime, schools must keep more of these young people learning to

make their own way. But if kids don't drop out, education costs will rise.

To fill the jobs on which we all depend in this economy, students must have higher-level skills. Teaching these skills is not cheap.

And besides: The best way to get the courts and concerned citizens to just shut up about the needs of at-risk kids is to meet those needs. Send a check: That fits nicely with the modern era's don't-bother-me ethos.

Manning's ruling stipulates that at-risk children cost more to educate, and that the schools will not violate the constitution by spending more on them than on children not at risk.

Studies suggest that children not at risk learn just as well in large classes as in small ones. There's even some indication that it is first-graders, not second- or third-graders, who benefit most from small classes.

Now, efforts to help at-risk children may strike some taxpayers as discrimination against children not at risk – children who work hard and do well and have every "right" to as many resources as the next student.

Not so, Judge Manning might reply. In North Carolina, the only constitutional mandate is to have every student achieving on grade level. "No more, no less."

'What can I do?'

Judge Manning's order to reallocate existing resources in order to bring at-risk children to grade level may well be appealed or delayed. It's abundantly clear that his ruling will not be popular among educators. But they and

school board leaders and legislators will no doubt study the ruling and try to discern what it might mean for their operations.

For citizens concerned about education for all children, there is work to be done:

✓ Embrace the ethical soundness of Judge Manning's ruling. Talk to your friends. The ethical relevance of the ruling suggests that citizens and local governments could pursue its goals even if the order forcing compliance gets mired in legal conflict.

✓ Ponder how YOU would shake things up to assure that every child was achieving on grade level. Your review may well wander outside the schoolhouse, and rightly so: Most of the causes for underachievement are in our community's homes. Your review may suggest how you, and groups you can influence such as religious congregations and civic groups, could help educators with this undertaking. The review might inspire you to be in support of an individual family's needs. For how to do that, contact United Family Services Community Education at 704-333-3721.

✓ Pray for and be ready to support elected officials who you believe will lead North Carolina and its school systems toward serving the needs of all children.

No Easter Issue: Barring unforeseen developments, Educate! will not publish next week on Easter, April 15.

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: 2,208.

To unsubscribe, send us a "Remove" message. If you'd like to see it regularly, message us with "Subscribe."

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.

New Choice – New Inequities

School board resolution calls for choice plan; plan would violate court orders, Swann lawyers tell board; an injunction to halt plan could come just as schools are trying to open this fall

By **ARAMINTA S. JOHNSTON**

Lawyers for the Swann plaintiffs in the ongoing lawsuit over pupil assignment in Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools put the school board on notice last week that the board's Tuesday night vote to make parental choice primary in student assignment decisions violates existing court orders.

Bowing to pressure from the Charlotte business community and neighborhood schoolers, six members of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school board voted Tuesday night to instruct Supt. Eric Smith to move forward with a so-called choice plan.

Exactly how much real choice will be available to poor and minority children is not clear.

Despite efforts by board member George Dunlap to delete one sentence that would allow parents, if they can provide private transportation for their children, to request that those children be placed in their "home school" this fall, five members of the board refused to delete the sentence.

Thus, families with the time and resources to provide private transportation to and from school can begin choosing schools close to their homes this fall. Families without such resources will have to wait until the following school year at the earliest.

Tuesday's vote reversed the board's earlier position that assignment should be placed on hold until the board has a better idea of how the lawsuit will be resolved in federal courts.

A December 2000 ruling in the

suit by a panel of the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals declared that CMS, by not providing equitable educational opportunities, has failed to remove all vestiges of its previously segregated system.

That ruling forced the board to cancel a planned community-wide choice extravaganza less than two days before the event was to occur, resulting in widespread community dissatisfaction with the board.

White suburban plaintiffs in the suit appealed the panel's ruling to the full court, which heard arguments in the case in February of this year.

The plaintiffs and some members of the school board, most clearly John Lassiter, have high expectations that the full court will reverse the panel's ruling.

Those expectations, along with pressure from the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce and threats by affluent, primarily white parents to take their children out of the public school system, apparently resulted in Tuesday's vote.

If, however, Lassiter and others should be wrong in their predictions about the court's ruling, the school board could easily find itself back in the same situation they were in December.

Attorneys Luke Largess and James Ferguson II indicated that while they have warned the board about their action, they are unable to proceed in court until the board formally adopts an assignment plan.

The appeals court is not expected to rule until summer at the

earliest; thus, the school system could be in the midst of implementing an assignment plan for fall and discover that their plans are not permitted by the court.

On Saturday, Dunlap said he had three reasons for proposing the amendment that would have delayed the implementation of changes in student assignment until fall of 2002.

At Tuesday night's meeting he spoke primarily to the inequities caused by allowing students with private transportation to begin applying for transfers to their home school next fall.

He also spoke to the danger of placing the school system in conflict with existing court orders.

"If we [approve Simmons' resolution without amendment], that puts us in direct conflict with what we have argued in court."

But, like other board members who spoke Tuesday and who still voted in favor of an unamended resolution, Dunlap says he is deeply concerned about the consequences for staff in both the CMS central offices and in the schools themselves.

Central office staff people will be the ones to implement the lottery that will allow some children with transportation to attend their home school this fall. That staff will also be the ones to pursue the logistics of assigning mobile classrooms. Both tasks are complicated and now must be completed under enormous time pressure.

In addition, teachers and other school staff could find themselves suddenly moved to another school late in the summer depending on changes in student population at various schools that may result from implementing the resolution.

When board members expressed these and other concerns to Smith Tuesday night, his responses were

Continued on Page 8

Resolution creates new inequities

Continued from Page 7

in marked contrast to his earlier unrelenting pressure on board members to approve a student assignment policy that guaranteed choice as soon as possible.

Tuesday night, Smith repeatedly told board members who asked him about scheduling the various elements of pupil assignment implied by Simmons' resolution, "It's a tight schedule, but we can make it work."

As for the budgetary impact of Simmons' resolution, Smith said, "We're still in the process of determining that." He specified, however, that the money to implement a plan based on the resolution is not included in the budget the school system will soon submit to county commissioners.

What remains to be seen is how much real choice a plan based on Simmons' resolution will offer low-achieving children and children in low-achieving schools.

Board members who voted against the unamended resolution are not optimistic, and, interestingly enough, County Commissioner Bill James, an advocate of "neighborhood schools," agrees with them.

In one of his frequent e-mails, James wrote, "In a strange twist, CMS' school board modified...its tortured 'Choice Plan,' claiming to make it better than the 'old' choice plan rejected by CMS' liberals months back. You will recall that the previous Choice Plan was rejected because it caused a

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.

'resegregation' of the school system. Now the 'old' plan is back packaged as a 'new' choice plan with essentially no effective change in the impact on 'resegregation'.

"So there appears to be little substantive difference and the school board's reversal seems more to do with politics than policy. The end result is that the plan WILL cause resegregation because neighborhood schools will be guaranteed."

James noted that in a Friday evening interview on WTVI, Smith "confirmed that the 'old' Choice Plan will essentially be the new choice plan with some slight modifications for new schools. In

the interview, he asks parents to pull out their previous choice books or news inserts in selecting a school."

— —

Voting in favor of Dunlap's amendment to Simmons' resolution were Dunlap, Arthur Griffin, Vilma Leake and Wilhelmenia Rembert. Opposed were Molly Griffin, Lindalyn Kakadelis, John Lassiter, Bob Simmons, and Louise Woods.

Voting for the unamended resolution were Molly Griffin, Kakadelis, Lassiter, Leake, Simmons, and Woods. Opposed were Dunlap, Arthur Griffin, and Rembert.

Briefs

Starting algebra: A 3rd-grade teacher in a New York City suburb begins marking the March calendar with each day's date. Wednesday is the 7th. He asks students for the next Wednesday's date and they offer the 14th. But he writes down $x+7=y$. Education Week reported that such early exercises in elementary school can prepare students to handle algebra, and particularly the notion that the equals sign doesn't always signal the answer, but can also announce a relationship.

www.edweek.com

How much homework?:

American School Board Journal reviews local efforts to put a lid on total homework assignments. It mentions the National PTA's rule: Ten minutes per grade per night (i.e., eight-graders should get no more than 80 minutes of work daily). It mentions that many children who are confused by the work do not complete the homework because "it's better to look lazy than stupid." The Journal cites a Michigan study that found homework had increased 50% since the 1980s, during which time test scores had declined.

www.asbj.com

Scaling back tests: The Ohio legislature may be pulling back from a test that retains fourth-

graders behind on their reading. Under a Senate bill, teachers and principals would be granted two other options: promotion in spite of low test results, and promotion with intensive reading help.

www.cleveland.com

Support for standards: The fourth annual poll by Public Agenda showed that the nation's parents think educational standards and public and private schools are now about the same. The Los Angeles Times reported that, in the first survey, 42% said private schools had higher standards, while 22% said public schools did. Public Agenda said the numbers had evened up because of testing programs.

www.latimes.com

Internet testing: Tests now required by the South Dakota legislature may be administered over the Internet, EdWeek reported. All public school classrooms are wired – something that can't be said in North Carolina. But unlike standard tests in which all children receive the same booklet of questions, the computer-generated tests South Dakota has been experimenting with for a year scores the answers as it goes along and asks new questions based on an individual student's answers. Educators say the tests give far more feedback on a student's strengths and weaknesses.

www.edweek.com

Restraining students: The Massachusetts Board of Education

has approved a policy that allows school districts to allow staff to physically restrain students who pose "serious threats to the safety of themselves or others," the Boston Herald reported.

Advocates of severely disabled students object to the lack of uniform standards statewide, and that 16 hours of training before staff engage in such restraints is voluntary, not mandatory. An example of restraint, the Herald said, is "holding students face down on the floor to calm them."

www.bostonherald.com

No panacea: Scottsdale, Ariz., school officials are junking Abacus software worth \$500,000, and may junk another \$1.4 million worth. "Five years after purchasing this product, we still can't make it work," Scottsdale's technology director told the Arizona Republic.

www.arizonarepublic.com

Calendar

- 9 School board, Student Assignment Oversight Committee meet, noon, Board Room.
 - 9 Information session on N.C. testing program sponsored by N.C. Justice and Community Development Center and Parents United for Fair Testing, 6 p.m. 3rd floor legislative auditorium, 16 W. Jones St., Raleigh. 919-856-2567.
 - 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.
- City-county-schools lunch, Room 267, Government Center.

No more confusion about intent

The Charlotte Chamber's committee on housing offered this "progress" report at www.charlottechamber.org:

"The name has been changed from 'Affordable Housing' to 'Housing Our Workforce' to better communicate the goals of this initiative. The term 'affordable housing' is often defined as requiring no more than 30% of a household's monthly earnings for housing expense. This definition, however, limits the perception of what affordable is, and usually translates into low income housing, thus the name change to avoid confusion."