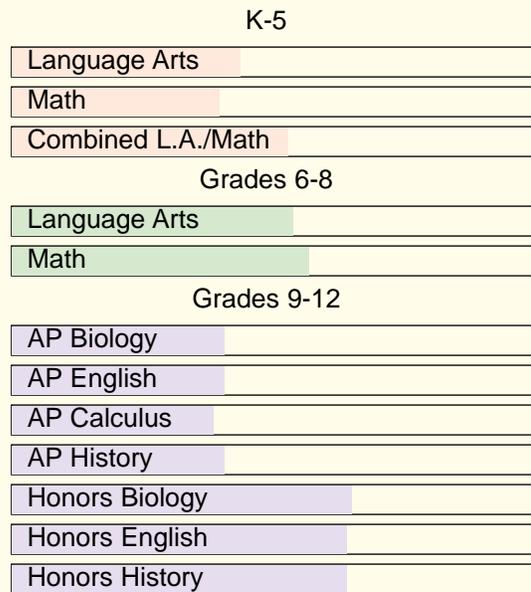


Minorities in advanced classes

If North Carolina's minority children were enrolled in advanced classes in proportion to their numbers in the school population, every bar at the right would be filled in.



Source: N.C. Department of Public Instruction

2 skeptics won over by reading program

Fort Worth classrooms show Open Court in use

The adoption of new reading textbooks is, says CMS schools official Frances Haithcock, "our most important leverage item in academics to ensure that we are going to bring this county up to a different level in achievement."

But the program has left lots of people with questions.

Even principals.

CMS sent two principals with lots of questions to Fort Worth, Tex., for four days to observe use of Open Court, the textbooks series adopted here for K-5 use.

Speaking to the school board last week, Idlewild Principal Sam Snipes listed her questions and answers.

- Does Open Court require that teachers abandon all other teaching aids? The answer, she said, is no.

"I saw so many of the things teachers have learned here in the last five years -- with word walls... center time every day, literature discussions... writers workshops." Research projects by children at all grade levels were also part of what they saw.

"They said that the only thing that we're going to have to learn new is that solid core block of time where we teach systematic

Study tackles how to boost minority enrollment in AG, AP, other advanced classes

See how many of these laments about the state's advanced classes ring true:

From a black girl: "A white girl said [to me, 'Alisha,] you're not black, you speak correct English, you take honors courses. You're not what I picture as black."

From a white girl: Friends "make fun of me a lot for my grade point average. They call me by the number instead of my name."

From a black girl: "I was called 'White girl,' 'Oreo.' That bothered me for a while but now I don't pay attention to it. This was sixth through ninth grade that I was going through this. I know they were saying that out of ignorance and now those same people are asking me for help. I hear it all the time, 'I wish I hadn't played around.'

A white sixth-grade boy said his friend "got mad at me and wouldn't be my friend for awhile and then ... told me he was sorry for, uhm, not liking me for that long 'cause I was in AG...."

From the mother of a black girl: "...Oftentimes they were the only ones, and with all of this emphasis on team effort ... they've felt left out and in some cases they said they felt that the teachers did not make a lot of effort to incorporate them in the class."

From a white girl: A white friend "really didn't want to be in the advanced class because she didn't want to be categorized as one of the snobs. Because a lot of people in advanced geometry, or the advanced classes are, this is kind of weird to put this, but they're kind of rich and they real-

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Fort Worth shows off its reading program

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phonics,” Sipes said.

– “Does Open Court work at schools like Idlewild, at schools like Thomasboro, as well as the magnet schools and the very, very affluent schools?”

“No one that we talked to and no observation that we did said it doesn’t work at both ends of the spectrum. Once you’ve gotten your core taught, then the rest of the time is spent working where you need to work with students who are up here... and down here and all those in between. No one felt that it did not reach every child at both ends of the spectrum.”

Joan Dunn, principal at Oakdale, said even seasoned teachers were pleased, “basically because it was structured and there was there everything that they needed so it cut down on the amount of time they needed to plan and pull materials together.

“It was especially helpful for new teachers who know very little about teaching reading and who’ve had very little instruction on teaching reading in their college experience.” [Note to college deans: Fix this!]

Dunn said her other question was how Open Court and its group activity would affect discipline. “Will our children sit still for this group instruction?” she said.

Dunn says Fort Worth referrals to the office are down and “all of the children are engaged because the teaching process is layered – they learn something and then they practice it the same day, so everybody has success.”

Open Court has been in use at the traditional magnet programs at Druid Hills and Myers Park Traditional for some years. It is also used at several Charlotte area private schools. But it’s gotten its acid test this year at Thomasboro, a high-poverty, low-



SRA

performing westside school that continues to have a state assistance team helping out.

Mildred Wright, principal at Thomasboro, told the board she had fifth-graders this fall who could not read at all. They are now learning. When showing visitors through the school last week she said she found students answering questions in full sentences, not just with a word.

“My best day at Thomasboro was the day when I saw my fifth-grade children going to lunch with books in their hands to read at lunch.

“Our children read better, they write better, and they read more. They speak a lot better than they did before.”

Referrals to the office dropped for the month of March to 15, and have been as low as 2 or 3. “Our instruction is so focused at this point, that children are busy, very engaged in the work that they do and they don’t have time to come to the office.”

Wright says not to worry that other content areas will be abandoned to achieve reading results. Last month in one fourth-grade classroom, a history lesson on North Carolina’s Lost Colony involved literature from the Open Court text and history from the social studies text. Map skills were being incorporated.

“The hardest part of all this is convincing teachers it can be done,” Wright told the board.

Perhaps Thomasboro’s reading assessment numbers will help:

This school had 39% of children on grade level last spring. This year children have been tested quarterly. That 39% number has since risen to about 55% on the quarterly tests.

Will Thomasboro’s students be able to show that skill level on the key end-of-grade tests this week and next?

“I’m cautiously optimistic,” Wright told the board. “I know the children can read because I hear them and see them.”

When board member Louise Woods suggested that the system track disciplinary referrals next year as another way to “show some real success” with the reading program, she hit a brick wall. “The real measure we’re looking for is reading achievement,” said Supt. Smith.

The textbook adoption places Open Court materials in K-5, McDougal Littell materials in middle schools and Prentice Hall materials in 9-12. The materials include not just books, but videos, software and a variety of “consumables” that will not transfer to another child.

Board members were told that the consumables would move with a child transferring during the year to another school. They were also assured that the cost of replacement materials was becoming part of the operating budget.

Study looks at AG minority enrollment

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ly are snobs.”

The quotations are taken from a new State Department of Public Instruction research report.

The quotes sum up some of the key factors – racial stereotyping, peer pressure, envy, pressure to conform, fear of being ostracized – that educators believe are discouraging minority children from seeking out higher-level coursework.

Education research offers five explanations for low minority participation in advanced classes: minorities don't test well; they weren't taught; little was expected of them; most adults don't look for brilliance among the poor; and what is perhaps the most oft-discussed factor: “acting white.”

William Darity, lead researcher for the study and an economics professor at UNC-Chapel Hill, says flatly that the “acting white” explanation “is contextual, and it doesn't appear until high school.”



Darity

In predominantly black schools, students don't mention it, Darity says. And it's not a factor in some majority white schools.

“Parents and community groups should be pressuring the schools to be changing the environment,” he says.

The researchers offer many suggestions on how schools can overcome the barriers. They suggest in-service training to sensitize teachers to the many ways non-verbal (and therefore often untested) talent can manifest itself.

Taking pre-requisites

The report presses the case for raising the number of minority children in elementary programs. Changes must begin at lower

How students are placed in advanced coursework

What role should standardized tests play in identifying the children who will benefit from advanced classes? What's the right role for teachers? for parents?

and students? Should others play a role? The Darity report does not raise these issues, except to point out the numbers here: the percentage of the schools surveyed that reported using the tools listed.

Teacher recommendation	90%
End-of-grade test scores	90%
Grades	81%
Self-selection, parent request	66%
Student work portfolio	62%
Standardized achievement test	53%
Parent-requested outside review	45%
Other assessment procedure	36%
Aptitude tests	13%

Source: N.C. Department of Public Instruction

grades, for though some barriers have fallen, higher-level courses on the high school level still depend on having a sturdy academic background. As a school counselor explained to the researchers:

“...One problem I found here lately, among the black students, so often they take those lower-level math, in the middle school. And when they get to high school, they don't have a foundation. And you can look at their grades, K through four, and see that they were pretty good students. But a lot of them got labeled as discipline problems or just weren't tracked properly, so if your kid comes to me and they've got an A in pre-Algebra, I cannot put them in Algebra I, I have to put them in Algebra IA or 1B, based on our criteria.

“See, a lot of parents don't understand this. ‘My kid has an A,’ [they say]. Yes, he has an A, but he has an A in the lowest math, and this doesn't prepare them for the highest math...”

Cautious counseling

Some students told the panel they felt they were steered away from taking tough courses. A white high school student put it to the researchers this way:

“When we were in middle school, we were told not to take

the Honors courses because they were too much work, and unless you had a hundred average not to do it. My eighth grade year, I had to beg to be put into the Honors courses and I had straight A's. I had a hundred and two final average in science. But they just didn't think that people would succeed, and I find that school counselors won't let my friends in Honors courses, and they're afraid that they won't succeed and that they'll be putting them in a class that's over their head.”

Solutions

The Darity study wants reforms to bring the school environment to the point that “giftedness is perceived as having multiple forms.” Today's gateways to advanced classes (see chart above) favor children whose giftedness includes word skills.

Change will take time, the researchers warn. “The state must maintain support for these efforts for a sufficient period of time in order to assess properly the results of these changes.”

One way to hasten the change is to bring recognition to school staff who go beyond the standard measures to identify gifted children. This is something that Charlotte-Mecklenburg parents can do without a smidgen of red

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Study looks at AG minority enrollment

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tape.

The researchers found teacher who goes beyond the standard measures. She said teachers who see children acting up sometimes “think that they’re a behavioral problem, they’re not smart, if they were smart, they wouldn’t be a behavioral problem.

“So what I usually look for is students that may be depressed, show signs of depression.... A lot of your worse behavior problems are really extremely gifted and I think that’s where we’re missing the whole boat on a lot of students being identified” for advanced classes.

Here, in capsule form, are the suggestions in the Darity report. Some can be used by parents as they work with principals on their own children’s programs. Other suggestions must be pursued at the system or state level.

Changing the basics

You’ve heard this one before, perhaps. As a first essential step to encouraging children’s high-level thinking skills – and paving the way to higher-level coursework later – every student must take Algebra 1 before ninth grade.

Indeed, the researchers’ broadest and most challenging recommendation is to raise expectations

across the board. “Broaden minority exposure to advanced curriculum at the elementary and middle school levels, regardless of AIG identification,” they write. “Schools should eliminate tracking and increase the rigor in all course offerings at the elementary and middle school levels.”

Honors classes should become nearly as rigorous as Advanced Placement courses, they contend.

High school advanced courses should have open enrollment – no mandatory pre-requisites that become an artificial barrier to entry. Some systems combine open enrollment with a written pledge in which the student declares a serious interest in the course.

In rural or other areas where it is difficult to staff advanced classes, use technology, whether interactive TV or online AP coursework.

All coursework should move toward a tiered model of services: “enrichment and/or differentiation in general education classes, separate services provided by AIG teachers, and grade level acceleration. Each tier should have specific identification criteria and service delivery characteristics, with the services provided for students at each tier clearly supported in each student’s Differentiated Education Plan (DEP).” We offer this translation: Every child should have access to a rich dose of curriculum that will prepare the way for an even richer dose in the future.

For students

Add nonverbal assessment tests to the traditional measures to identify kids whose talents don’t take verbal form.

At all schools, all children should be reviewed annually for transfer to advanced courses.

Recruit, recruit recruit. Charlotte-Mecklenburg was praised in this regard: Ninth and 10th-graders who don’t sign up for higher-level courses are contacted during the summer if their PSAT scores suggest they are ready.

Then support the students, particularly by “addressing the social/emotional needs of minority students as they move into more advanced courses.”

Add rewards, both for individuals and for teams working together, modeled on those used in university-based summer programs.

For teachers

Teachers are the key cog in identifying students with potential. School systems should be “training teachers to see talent in more varied ways.”

Intervention

Researchers suggest that principals be given power to intervene when minorities are severely underrepresented. One suggestion is to declare as eligible the top-ranked 15 percent of a school’s minority children.

Mechanics

The researchers had some ideas on alternative scheduling to eliminate a key student complaint that they are frozen out of some courses by schedule conflicts.

The report also recommends acting to prevent sports and other extracurriculars from discouraging students from taking tougher courses. The point is a sensitive one, as the researchers acknowledged: “Research... suggests that extracurricular activities often help keep low-achieving students in school.”

The researchers want more

CMS AP enrollments

African American

White

Using the same indexing method used in the state report, here’s a look at CMS data on students taking one or more Advanced Placement courses in high school. If blacks and whites were each enrolled in proportion to their share of the student population, both bars would be fully filled in. In this case, blacks are massively underrepresented; whites are overrepresented by nearly half.

Source: CMS, N.C. Department of Public Instruction

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Study looks at AG minority enrollment

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monitoring, and more data collection, to help policymakers.

Grants could finance wider use of technology.

The DPI report is based on state testing data for 1999-2000; a mailed survey of schools; and interviews at 3 elementaries, 2 middle schools and 11 high schools across the state.

Can schools do it all?

Can school staff eliminate the barriers to greater minority involvement working alone? Or do nonschool organizations have a role to play?

One black Charlotte-schooled parent who refers to her time in school as “purgatory” says, “If you want black parents involved and encouraging their black children, then a mentor program might work. Have black parents of children who are not living up to expectation pair up with another black parent who believes in pushing their child, so they can learn from one another.

“For example, if a parent is identified who does not participate in PTA or come to teacher conferences, pair that parent with a parent who does participate in PTA and comes to teacher conferences. Let them develop, hopefully, a friendship where they can exchange ideas and encourage each other.

“I would suggest the same approach to the problems children face among their peers. From one who was in the “advanced” classes, I understand what these kids are talking about (and some things really don’t change). But I learned, and so will they, to ignore the remarks and push towards the mark.

“But having a friendly and empathetic shoulder to lean on would help keep them focused and with high self-esteem! There is nothing worse than having your

peers judge you on what I call the black-o’-meter and being told that you fall short because of the classes you take or the grammar you use.”

Should high schools be providing classes to teach students about racism? The goal would be to raise students’ consciousness about the insidious nature of personal racism and the class nature of institutional racism.

Should money be spent on marketing, with lots of community support, to make studying “cool”? Such a program would not only involve kids, but community groups and high-profile operations

like the Hornets, Panthers, etc.

Should social workers be more of a presence in the schools? What if social workers were assigned to students in the early grades to follow them throughout their school career. These workers would make home visits to involve parents, track students’ progress, encourage their achievement and advocate for them within the school system.

And can the community better support Upward Bound and other groups that take high school students on college trips, make homework clinics happen, and support counseling in the community?

Overcoming the 9% rule: What IS ‘education’?

You may remember the headlines: American schoolchildren spend only 9% of their lives in school. Lauren Sosniak, a teacher education prof at San Jose State University, notes that school as a place where children spend time ranks second only to the place where kids are simply asleep: the bedroom. In an article in *Teachers Record*, Sosniak doubts that raising school time from 9% to any higher percentage will be effective.

“We need to be asking how each of the various communities of practice within our society might be held accountable for both the intentional and unintentional education they are offering. Might banking and financial institutions hold some responsibility and accountability for the economic education of our children and youth, and food industries hold some responsibility for health and science education? Might the housing industry hold some responsibility for educating children and youth about safety and craftsmanship in housing construction....

“In other words, we need to find ways to move our educational expectations well beyond expectations for schools. I am not calling for increased funding or in-kind materials or services for our schools from the other elements of our society. This merely makes schools more responsible, albeit with conditions attached to what they should do and how they should do it....Neither am I calling for more volunteerism; that too misses the point.

“The education of our children and youth should not rely on the good will of good people but, rather, should be a matter of societal expectation and obligation. We need to find ways to ask what our communities, corporations, media, and all of our organizations and institutions are doing to promote the development of readers, writers, historians, scientists, artists, musicians, designers and craftspersons.

“Schools cannot do this work alone, in the 9% of the time allotted to them. If this is only ‘school work,’ it is hard to imagine that our students will see it as a meaningful part of their lives and their futures.”

www.trecord.org/Content.asp?ContentID=10756

CMS choice plan gets an understated budget

If it weren't for protocol, the school board should just have picked up the phone and said, "Appeals Court, send us word NOW. We're about to spend a bunch of money and don't want it to go to waste."

Tuesday, board members again were dealing with how much a new student assignment would cost. Approval of a budget was not unanimous because of concern that a decision not yet received from the Richmond court in the reopened Swann desegregation lawsuit could alter, delay or block the choice plan for student assignment that the board majority wants to proceed with.

Yet a budget was on the table Tuesday night for \$3.4 million to implement a new choice plan. Supt. Eric Smith said he would have his revised choice plan ready for the board by the first week of June. Implementation is expected not this fall but fall 2002.

The budget passed, but not before it was clear that the board wants the Richmond court, which heard arguments in the case in February, to issue its ruling, or at least give the board a hint of the decision. Board chair Arthur Griffin said school attorneys would make inquiries, but that

any advice would be heard in closed session and not shared with parents and the public.

Board member George Dunlap held out for a full accounting of the money spent last time. A choice plan was shelved at the last minute last December after another court ruling.

"I was left with pie on my face," he said, when the public was led to believe that the money spent was wasted.

Some of the money went to equipment or buses that are in use and won't have to be purchased again. But some of the money will be spent again – for leased equipment, Merchandise Mart rental, etc.

Smith promised a full report.

The \$3.4 million choice plan budget, down from Smith's earlier \$17 million-plus estimate, is not the last word on the costs of choice. It may turn out to be just what's needed this fiscal year,

with the big expenses falling after July 1 next year.

Shorn from the budget were computer costs that could be deferred a year, along with the big unknowables – how many buses, how many mobile classrooms, both of which will depend very much on the details of choice.

"If we are moving toward a choice plan in any kind of iteration," said board member Wilhelmenia Rembert, "and these are realistic costs associated with such a plan, then I think those costs should be part of our budget request to the county commissioners."

There has never been an accounting of how the system covered the costs of the canceled Showcase of Schools and other activities for the choice plan. Sources suggest numerous budgets were tapped, including instructional materials, meaning that the children paid.

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

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

More time with kids: Was it a Mother's Day story, or what? Research at the University of Michigan said moms – and dads too – were spending more time with their children in 1997 than in 1981. Just the tonic for guilt-ridden career parents. Alas, for single moms the time numbers had not changed. The Washington Post reported that the increases, 24% for moms overall and 21% for dads, are nothing to sneeze at. They even had family theory author Joan Williams cautioning that there comes a point at which too much time with parents is “not good for children.”

www.washingtonpost.com

Voucherizing: New York Times columnist Richard Rothstein says Seattle's effort to attach spending to each child, with hard-to-educate children receiving more, is an interesting effort to give schools an incentive to recruit low-income children. But it will fail, he says, because the \$259 increment now in place won't cover the higher costs. And Seattle's superintendent says “just enough” probably won't do either: Middle-class schools will want to make a profit for their trouble, turning that profit to the benefit of middle-class kids. And that, he concludes, is unfair.

www.nytimes.com

Quickie teachers: Denver Public Schools got 1,350 applications to its Denver Teacher

Project that aims to have 100 candidates help in summer school, go to a short “boot camp,” and then be thrust this fall into the classroom. But officials are being careful. Of first 433 candidates interviewed, only 48 were recommended for hire, the Denver Post reported. The paper reported that some of the most successful career-change hires have had some teaching experience, either as substitutes or as full-time hires working on emergency certificates. Most of the quickie teachers end up at the schools with the neediest students, the Post said.

www.denverpost.com

Connection? At Baltimore's Mount Washington Elementary, 60% of fifth-graders passed the Maryland reading test and 14% of the teachers are uncertified. At William Paca Elementary, 6% of the fifth-graders passed the reading test and 52% of the teachers are not certified. The Baltimore Sun says the school system is under pressure to more equitably distribute teacher talent. CMS Supt. Eric Smith earlier had made such a commitment by agreeing to limit teacher transfers out of low-performing schools, but backtracked this spring.

www.sunspot.net/news

On task: Chinese teachers are renowned for their tough language to keep classes of 50 students attentive. But The Christian Science Monitor says a Beijing district has now outlawed 40 phrases as it tries to reform education and increase student self-esteem and involvement in their own learning. Among the

banned phrases: “Whoever teaches you has the worst luck.” “You are a wood post with two ears.” “If I were you, I would not continue to live. You are hopeless.”

www.csmonitor.com

Tax upheld: In a controversial and split ruling, the New Hampshire Supreme Court has upheld a state property tax that funds education. The ruling allows legislative debate to continue on how to equalize assessments statewide.

www.theunionleader.com

Slow on uptake: Finally, from over the sea in Britain, the Daily Telegraph reports that with computer spending at an annual 1 billion pounds (Test-takers: At an exchange rate of 1.4 dollars to the pound, does that mean more or less than 1 billion dollars was spent?) training hasn't kept up, and teachers are not using the computers to full advantage. It also said there was little sign that instruction in other subjects had improved.

www.telegraph.co.uk

Calendar

- 15** Bond Oversight Committee, 7:30 a.m., Building Services
 - 15** Personnel/Policy Committee, 3 p.m., Board conference room.
 - 15** School board meeting, Board Room, 6 p.m.
- June**
- 12** School board meeting, Board Room, 6 p.m.
 - 26** School board meeting, Board Room, 6 p.m.

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: 2,255.

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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.