

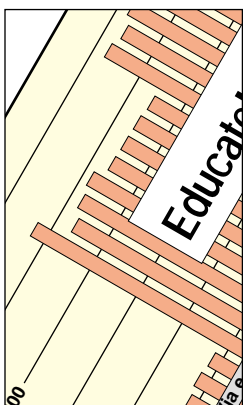
## Inside

Educate! will suspend publication for summer, with some planned exceptions. 6

A new effort to bring together folks on all sides of assignment debate starts on candid note. 2

Hearing draws comments on proposed policies to assure equity of access to school resources. 3

The CMS magnet program gets a \$2 million boost from Washington. States across the land deal with testing foul-ups; and North Carolina withdraws an appeal in the long-running case over how the state pays for educating its children. 6



# Assignment plan on the horizon

## Modified choice plan, due out next week, to face scrutiny by school board, public

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools is about to unveil another student assignment plan.

Originally promised for early June, the plan is expected for next week's school board meeting on June 26.

At the weekend, school officials were still crunching numbers. The location of some magnet programs was also reportedly in flux.

But the plan was ultimately expected to look much like the last one that was shelved last December.

When details of the new plan are released, most people will first look to see how the plan will

affect them. Where will my child go to school? How far away will the school be? What middle and high schools are involved? What kind of students will go to the school? What have this school's test scores looked like in the past?

Attention may then turn to broader questions. Here are some of them:

- Are rich parents' choices more attractive than poor ones?
- Does the plan depend on lines in the dirt that will have to be moved as the population shifts?
- Will the schools be operating racially or socioeconomically iden-

**Continued on Page 4**

# A school system budget to build on

## Schools don't have what they need; equity (and unitary status) still unmet goal

No one should be truly happy with this year's outcome of the annual Battle of the Budget.

Even with the result as good for the schools as it is likely to be by the end of this week.

But the agreement to add \$40 million to the CMS operating budget will move the schools forward. It will help a lot of children move toward success. And the events of the last week helped spotlight the good work of two proven leaders. First, the leaders:

In one way, Wilhelmenia Rembert and Becky Carney were meant for the job of finding a way around the budget impasse. Rembert had earlier been named



Rembert

the school board's person to stay in touch with the county board. Becky Carney had the same task for the county board.

When the school board sought \$64

million more from the county board than was in the current budget, and the county manager suggested \$14.5 million, Rembert and Carney began talking.

There is no great magic in the number they settled on. What is magic is the leadership skill to find a solution that all can live with. This is a great lesson to



Carney

have before us as we wait for a new student assignment plan, one that may present many in our community with choices they cannot live with (story above).

As outlined by Supt. Eric Smith Tuesday, the \$40 million will finance schools for a growing population, maintain the new space, pay for rising health, insurance, retirement, ESL, and utility expenses, and match for locally paid staff the raise planned by the state. The \$40 million will

**Continued on Page 4**

# Forum launched – with candor

## CRC makes a new stab at building consensus on equity, student assignment

By **ARAMINTA S. JOHNSTON**

In the face of skepticism from some participants, representatives of the Charlotte Community Relations Committee forged ahead Friday with plans to conduct a series of facilitated community forums focused on public education in Charlotte-Mecklenburg.

About 50 people attended the CRC's "partner planning luncheon" at Covenant Presbyterian Church to hear presentations about the dialogues from CRC board members and staff.

The group was a diverse one and included representatives from COMPASS, a citizen group that has campaigned for "neighborhood schools," and from the Swann Fellowship, which has spoken out in support of "excellent, equitable, integrated" education for all children.

Also among those present were District Four school board member Louise Woods and Charlotte-Mecklenburg Education Foundation president Tom Bradbury, as well as representatives of the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce, the Charlotte Police Department, H.E.L.P., Fighting Back, North Carolina Conference for Community and Justice, and the CMS PTA Council.

Woods was among the participants to press CRC presenters to specify how the proposed dialogues would be different from earlier community forums on education conducted by the Community Building Task Force and the Education Foundation.

Assuming that the dialogues proceed, Woods also asked, "When the community says this is what we want, how do we reach the goals we have in common?"

Other participants also raised questions about whether the dialogues could produce concrete

results that would move the community and the school system forward on such thorny issues as equity and pupil assignment.

In response, CRC Executive Director Willie Ratchford and CRC Education Committee chair Leonard "Deacon" Jones both emphasized that the CRC had talked with all nine school board members, either in person or by phone, and believed that they had a commitment from them to move in the direction that the Mecklenburg community might outline.

Both also affirmed their confidence in facilitated dialogues as a way to reach a collaborative solution to differences, an approach to conflict that Ratchford described as "win-win for everybody."

CRC board president Don Steger, formerly an assistant Charlotte city manager, told Woods, "We may still have different perspectives when it comes out of the pipeline," but he added that he thought the process would make progress possible if participants were willing to really listen

to each others' perspectives and remember that "it's about all the children."

One Swann representative commented that the CRC's proposed forums might have more chance of resulting in action for two reasons: the diversity of participants and the fact that many participants, as well as other citizens, are tired of ongoing conflict and stalemate surrounding the schools.

The CRC plan is first to conduct a facilitated forum with Friday's participants and then a series of four community forums throughout the county. Jones said that at the community forums "we need to hear from everybody – parents, non-parents, taxpayers, and children."

Steger said the timeline was "as long as it takes," but that the CRC "would like to project a November-December" conclusion.

In addition to the CRC, other partners in the process are the Community Building Task Force and the Interfaith Advisory Committee.

## Calendar

### June

- 18** Student Assignment Oversight Committee, Room 408, Education Center, 7:30 a.m.
- 19** Bond Oversight Committee, Building Services, 7:30 a.m.  
 Joint lunch with commissioners and city council, noon, Government Center Room 267.  
 Personnel/Policy Committee, Board conference room, 3 p.m.  
 Joint redistricting hearing with commissioners, Government Center meeting chamber, 6 p.m.
- 26** School board meeting, Board Room, Education Center, 6 p.m.

# Hearing draws comments on equity policies

On Tuesday, the school board held its public hearing on three new board policies dealing with equity (Educate!, May 20).

One policy sets up a system of annual reviews of key equity issues so the public will know what progress is being made.

Another, on instructional staff, puts the superintendent on notice to juggle assignments so that every school has a "reasonable balance" of new and experienced teachers.

A third, on instructional materials, codifies the board's efforts to give all teachers what they need to teach.

The board will vote on the policies later. Following are excerpts from Tuesday's comments.

*Madine Fails is president of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Urban League and a member of the Student Assignment Oversight Committee.*

Having read the policies as a whole I would certainly urge their adoption. But I hope that we would go a step further, and not just adopt this policy, as has the board done with so many policies that sat on the shelf. This policy, all three of them, are critically important if we are committed to what Dr. Smith said about creating a new environment for doing business in closing the achievement gap....

I would ask that the policy read "the board and superintendent SHALL" – not "may" – appoint a committee to help to facilitate the

annual analysis of the provision of equal access to excellent education."

This will ensure an ongoing monitoring function of the policy and will also serve to send a positive signal to many in the community who still have serious doubts about the school district's commitment that the policy will be implemented...

I would hope that equity funding will be part of the 2001 budget and not an initiative that will be funded only if funds are available. I hope you will make it part of the budget – and not apart.

*Araminta Johnston is a co-founder of The Swann Fellowship.*

...In general, we support these policies. Our concerns about them are two, however:

First, we are sorry to see... that the "Instructional Staff Assignments and Transfers" policy only directs the superintendent "to develop and implement regulations and strategies DESIGNED to" ensure equity. While this superintendent will undoubtedly do everything in his power to bring such equity about, this community and all its children might well be better served in the long term if the verb in question were "ensure" rather than "designed to." This community and this school system need such equity to be ensured, guaranteed, and it should be an expectation of a superintendent – any superintendent – to ensure that equity is, in fact, the case.

Second, the devil is both in the details and in their implementation. We have long maintained, based on over a century of historical evidence – not to mention the facts of human nature – that, in the words of the U.S. Supreme Court in *Brown vs. Board of Education*, "Separate will never be equal."

We continue to have very strong concerns about the degree of separateness that will exist in this school system in coming years as a result of decisions made by this board. While these policies represent a significant effort to create equity, this board and this superintendent, as well as school boards and superintendents in the future – in addition to county commissioners – must be prepared to make a superhuman effort to ensure that the equity promised by these policies will indeed be implemented.

*Annelle Houk is a longtime education advocate.*

It's true, we don't always trust you. We wished we always [could] trust you, but on equity you have not always delivered. And I'm not talking just about the bunch of you who are here right now. I'm talking about THE school board, THE county commission....

Remember, you're after excellent educational opportunities. "Equal access to excellent educational opportunities."

If you really mean that one sentence, you hardly need the rest of the policies.

## **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: 2,224.

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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.

## Another assignment plan is about ready

Continued from Page 1

tifiable facilities, the likes of which were ruled unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1954?

– Does the plan acknowledge, or ignore, the high court's ruling that "separate will never be equal"?

– If there are inconveniences created by the plan, are they shared equally by all sides of town?

Despite scores of committees and years of work, this community has not warmed to any solution that is likely to avoid all these problems. And it is perhaps easy to forget that on its road to desegregation, the community was never forced to make such hard choices. The courts imposed solutions, and rulings transformed the discussion from what was best for children and the community to obeying the law of the land.

The courts have changed since the '60s. They are less likely to impose a solution. Yet Charlotte-Mecklenburg still needs an assignment plan that (1) is just, and (2) does not resegregate.

One of the keys to the school board's review of the new plan will be assess how well it accomplishes those two goals.

The last plan, hastily shelved last December, adopted parent choice as No. 1 value controlling assignment. All parents were guaranteed an assignment close to home – not necessarily the closest school, but one nearby.

School officials envisioned that the plan would move about a third of the system's students, and that popular schools would see choice requests skyrocket. They planned to meet the demand by artificially boosting a popular school's capacity with mobile classrooms, at a cost of millions of dollars.

The plan to be unveiled next week would likely be effective not this fall but in fall 2002.

## How to contact county commissioners

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## A budget schools can build on

Continued from Page 1

also pay for reading textbooks, incentives for teachers at low-poverty schools, business computers, a pay boost for noncertified staff, to grow Bright Beginnings to reach another quarter of the eligible children, and boost the A+ Program that's reducing the minority achievement gap.

The compromise budget leaves more than \$20 million unfunded. Officials failed to provide a full accounting in time for publication, but Smith said Tuesday that some of the problems from the shortfall would be "serious." Most of the

items address equity issues:

- \$2.765 million for the phased-in preventive maintenance program for older buildings.
- \$984,000 for a mentoring program to retain first-year teachers.
- \$6.2 million to put all at-risk children into Bright Beginnings preschool classrooms.
- \$300,000 to put copy and fax machines on a scheduled replacement program to cut maintenance costs and down time.

Smith said the \$4.4 million set aside in the \$40 million for retirement programs may not be needed. If it is not, he said he would use it for pay raises and portions of three more equity investments: technology at the schools, materials, supplies and co-curricular programs, and media supplies and equipment.

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## Briefs

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**Mainstreaming:** The state of Connecticut last week settled a 10-year-old lawsuit with an agreement that will mainstream more children with mental retardation into regular classes. Observers believe the settlement could become a national model.

"General education teachers think they can't teach these kids. They are wrong," consultant Eileen Luddy told the Hartford Courant. "The attitude is the biggest barrier."

www.ctnow.com

**Magnet money:** CMS received \$2 million in federal grant money to bolster several of its magnet programs next year. The money will go to the Center for Leadership and Global Economics programs at Eastway, Kennedy, Garinger and Olympic; the language immersion programs at Bruns Avenue, Collinswood, Smith and West Meck, and the environmental studies programs at Spaugh and Harding.

**Goldilocks:** The California Board of Education doesn't want too many of its current 9th-graders to pass, or too many to fail, but to have its high school graduation exam come out just right. Oddly, the test has already been given, and only now will the board set the passing grade. The Mercury News called this not an exercise in assuring that high school grads know what they need to know, but "a determination of how much student failure the California public will tolerate."

www0.mercury.center.com

**Nonpromotions:** Baltimore summer school will be crowded this year with children who failed to meet new promotion standards. The details: Half the 8th-graders; 40% of 6th- and 7th-graders, and 33% of children in grades 1-5. The program's budget is \$12.8 million

and involves 2,100 teachers for a five-week session involving classes of between 12 and 20 students.

www.sunspot.net

**What's passing:** In Texas two years ago, students had to pass 70% of the questions to pass the math portion of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills. This year, the passing percentage was dropped to 50%. Officials said the test had become harder to reflect new curriculum introduced in 1998. To make the scores comparable, the passing percentage was dropped. In effect, even though the curriculum was made more rigorous, the passing standard was not. Another revision of the test begins in 2003, and at that point it will be used to control 3rd-grade promotion.

www.dallasnews.com

**Reviewing:** New York City's board of education is embroiled in a debate with its testing company over whether last year's 6th-grade

reading scores were inflated either because some questions were rated more difficult than they actually were, which would raise students' scores, or because 12 of the 50 questions had been on the previous year's 6th-grade test and students might have seen them or used them as practice questions. The New York Times mentioned one sure sign that there was a problem: This year, those children's scores in 7th grade showed no gain for a year's worth of schooling.

www.nytimes.com

**Leandro:** The state dropped its appeal in the long-running suit over school finance, saying the judge had left nothing to argue about – at least for the time being. Judge Howard Manning ruled earlier that he would personally review what the state needs to do to meet the N.C. Constitution's mandate that every child be given a "sound basic education."

### *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.

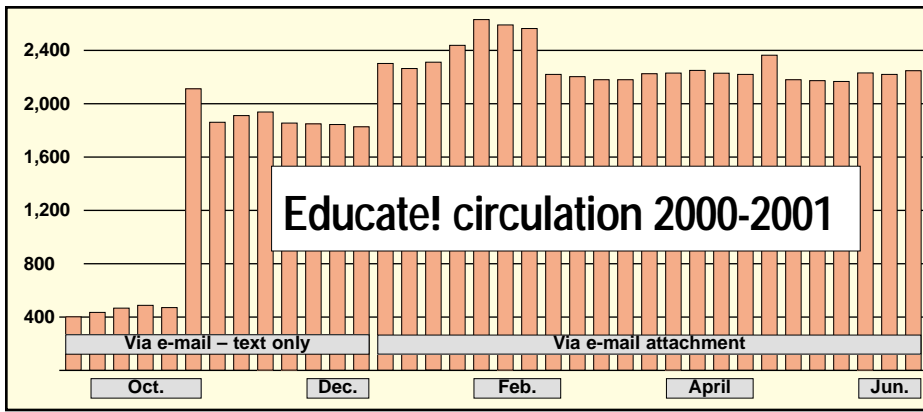
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**Creative Loafing:** By e-mail: charlotte@creativeloafing.com; by fax: 704-522-8088; by mail: P.O. Box 241988 Charlotte, NC 28224-1988.

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## Calendar '01-'02



## Educate! to stop publishing for summer, except for...

By LUCY BUSH

Thank you, dear reader, for giving us a bit of your time each week these last many months.

The Fellowship's volunteers will now take a bit of a break for the summer.

Except, of course, we know we will be sending you news a few times during the break.

We will publish immediately after the U.S. Court of Appeals issues a ruling in the school desegregation case. We'll first give you all or a major chunk of the text of the ruling so you can read it for yourself. Then, depending on events, we will return with analysis of the ruling and any reader comment we receive.

We want to give all of you access to the court's ruling to make it more likely that the ruling is followed. Back in 1979, a District Court ruling got very little notice and was subsequently ignored. The issues then before the court – mostly about equity – are still before the courts today. We as a community must break this cycle.

And then there is the looming student assignment plan. We know you will learn most of the details of Supt. Smith's next proposed choice plan from other outlets or from whatever the school system posts on its Web site. If, however, we receive questions

from you about the new plan, or if events suggest the need, we will again interrupt the summer break to deliver that information to you.

During the summer, we hope to put time into seeking funding to broaden the distribution of the newsletter. We'll also be collecting names of people who might be interested in reading Educate! when it returns in mid-to late-August. If you have suggestions, please message us at [SwannFello@aol.com](mailto:SwannFello@aol.com).

And we'll look at how to make improvements in the newsletter. In connection with that, around the middle of this week we will send all of you a short survey. Please read it and take a moment to respond. We want your help identifying the information that is most useful to you.

The Swann Fellowship is proud to provide you with this newsletter at no cost. It is a vehicle for one of the Fellowship's key missions – educating the public on issues touching on quality, equitable, integrated education for all of God's children in this place.

We welcome your advice. Message us, or leave word at 704-342-4330 anytime.

Thank you, have a great summer, we will be in touch off and on in the next little while, and we will return to regular publication in mid- to late August.

<b>AUGUST</b>	15	First day of school
<b>SEPTEMBER</b>	3	Labor Day holiday
	17	Progress reports
	20-21	Teacher workdays
<b>OCTOBER</b>	22-23	Teacher workdays; parent conferences
	31	Report cards
<b>NOVEMBER</b>	6	Teacher workday
	21-23	Thanksgiving holidays
<b>DECEMBER</b>	3	Progress reports
	20-01	Winter break
<b>JANUARY</b>	18	Teacher workday (make-up if needed)
	21	M.L. King holiday
	30	Report cards
<b>FEBRUARY</b>	18-19	Presidents Day, teacher workday (make-up)
	25	Progress reports
<b>MARCH</b>	28	Teacher work day
	28-29	Make-up days if needed
	29-31	Spring break
<b>APRIL</b>	1-5	Spring break
	15	Report cards
<b>MAY</b>	6	Progress reports
	27	Memorial Day; teacher workday (make-up)
<b>JUNE</b>	4	Last day of school; elementary report cards
	5-7	Graduation
	11	Secondary report cards in mail