

Assignment 2002

School board comes together on plan; members explain 8-1 vote

Adoption of a 2002 student assignment plan on July 31 came quietly, with only a small crowd on hand.

The deep divisions in the community that school board members have long articulated are no doubt still present.

But there is a plan – if it holds up to judicial scrutiny.

Two board members led the journey from dissension to consensus: District 4 representative Louise Woods and at-large member Wilhelmenia Rembert.

Their comments, and those of Supt. Eric Smith and other board members who spoke July 31 follow. Excerpts from those comments, and particularly Woods', best sum up where the board is, and the challenges the board sees before it.

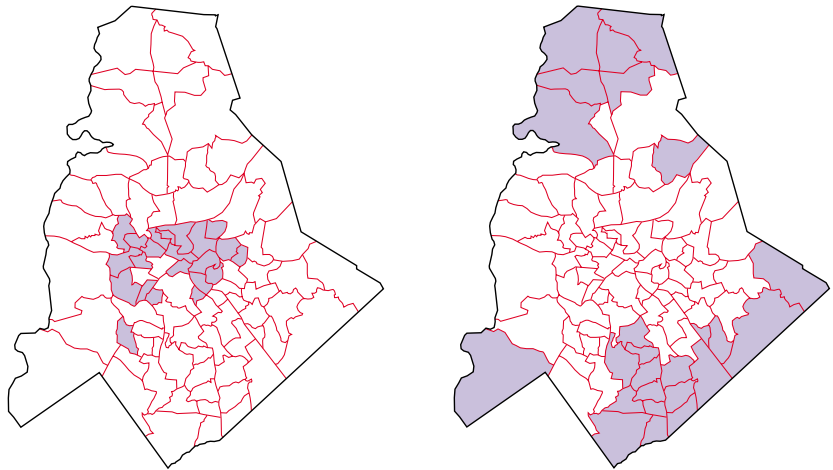
One of the keys to reaching consensus was agreement on a list of actions to ensure equity at all schools. These standards were added to Supt. Eric Smith's June 26 assignment proposal. They are discussed in an article on page 6.

Providing *Educate!* readers with full information about the proposed plan will take some weeks. Coverage begins with regular elementary schools, which are the backbone of the assignment plan. Future issues will cover middle schools, high schools, the magnet programs and other details.

On page 5 is a large map showing regular elementary school attendance areas. More detailed maps for each school are on the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools' Web site, www.cms.k12.nc.us.

The assignment plan was approved 8-1, with Chairman Arthur Griffin dissenting. Griffin, a board member since the '80s,

The economic divide



Data source: CMS

Elementary school attendance areas in the new assignment plan tend to put poor children with other poor children, wealthy children with wealthy children. Map at left shows elementary schools projected to have 80% or more of children on free- or reduced-price lunch, an indicator of low family income. Map at right shows schools projected to have 20% or less. Larger map of school boundaries is on page 5. Middle, high school maps will be published later.

said he was opposed to adopting an assignment plan before policies ensuring equity were in place. He said he had seen multiple instances when equity was promised in exchange for his vote, and then not delivered.

Louise Woods

"This is a pivotal time for us all. It is our job as a board to bring this community together to assure every child success.

"Our assignment struggles are not primarily where students are, but how we assure an environment that promotes success for all students. That is the reason that we are uneasy about having more schools of high poverty, schools that are overcrowded or potentially without significant parent

involvement, because research elsewhere and our own experience here shows that these conditions can negatively impact student learning.

"Where we have shown success in these settings, adequate resources, particularly effective teachers and principals, have been the key. That is why baseline standards, equity funding, a balanced scorecard, instructional template, a standing equity committee, and policies to cover these issues have been put in place by this board.

"Through these actions we are attempting to assure, in a potentially less diverse environment, what we know is necessary for true educational choice....

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To new readers of

Educate!

a free community journal on public education in Charlotte-Mecklenburg

Welcome to this week's edition. Our aim is to supply information useful to you in your role as student, parent or citizen interested in the welfare of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. To be removed from our mailing list, send a "Remove" message to SwannFello@aol.com

Educate! is published by The Swann Fellowship, 1510 E. 7th St., Charlotte, NC 28204. Voice: 704-342-4330 Fax: 704-342-4550. E-mail: SwannFello@aol.com Lucy Bush, president; B.B. DeLaine, vice president. Published since September 2000. Six-week average circulation through last issue: 2,208.

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.

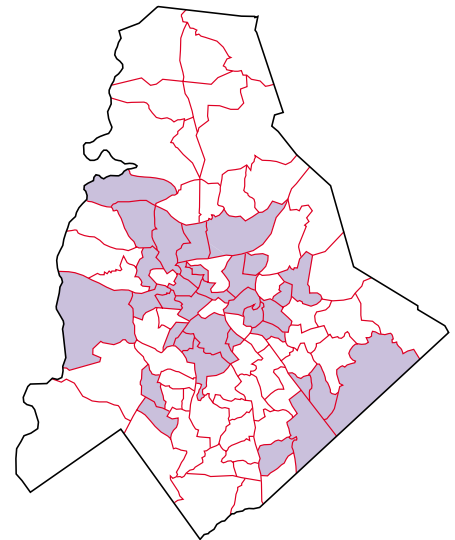
The vision: As people of faith, our vision is that all children in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system will have excellent educational opportunities which are both equitable and integrated.

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 nonprofit 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.

Underutilized

CMS projections through Aug. 14 list these schools as being at less than 85% of capacity in 2002-2003. Utilization may rise as capacities are refigured to provide smaller class sizes at high-poverty and low-achievement schools under the Equity Plus II program. Schools in that program this year are marked with an asterisk.

Westerly Hills*	44%
Oaklawn*	55%
New Grier Rd.	57%
Bruns Avenue	61%
Crown Point	61%
New Greenville	63%
New Plank Rd.	64%
Shamrock*	66%
Eastover	67%
Sedgefield*	67%
New Craighead	68%
Billingsville	71%
Merry Oaks*	71%
Allenbrook*	72%
Berryhill*	72%
Selwyn	72%
Sterling*	72%
Nations Ford*	73%
Oakdale*	73%



Ashley Park*	74%
Lincoln Heights	74%
Winterfield	75%
Nathaniel Alexander	78%
Devonshire*	79%
Statesville Road*	79%
Windsor Park*	79%
Hidden Valley*	81%
Irwin Avenue Open*	82%
Matthews	82%
Bain	83%
New Providence Rd.	84%

Source: CMS

Board adopts 2002 assignment plan

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"We are not tonight adopting a choice plan. Instead we are adopting a pupil assignment plan – if declared unitary, with opportunity for students to attend schools reasonably close to home, and potential options for attendance at other schools that might interest them; and if not declared unitary, diversity that is legally required.

"It is our job tonight to adopt a plan... that the community can count on. It is our job to begin tomorrow, as staff and community, to assure that this assignment plan becomes a plan of choice.

"We will know it's a choice plan when parents and students, regardless of where they live, see

their home school assignment as a solid academic choice.

"We will have a real choice plan when parents can be assured that at each school we have strong, effective leadership and a reasonable balance of new and experienced teachers who excite students about learning.

"We will have real choice when extracurricular activities and field trips other than the most basic ones aren't limited to the most affluent schools but are available everywhere.

"We will have real choice when resources are provided to assure that each school has an active PTA, school leadership team, sufficient numbers of volunteers and mentors, and parents involved with their children's learning.

"We will have real choice when we volunteer, when WE volunteer, and support schools nearby us that have special needs, and when

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Board adopts 2002 assignment plan

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we seek schools outside our comfort zone to help, if ours has sufficient help.

"We will have real choice when staff at schools with an abundance of experienced, successful teachers make choices to join their fellow educators in schools that are lacking, to create the same environment there.

"We will know it is choice when our culture changes, when we accept no less than conditions for success at each school every year and when come together to make it so.

"Thirty years ago we were taken to court because certain children were denied equal access to a quality education. If tonight a majority of us become comfortable with a plan that provides a good choice for our children but not for all children, and we continue business as usual, we will likely be taken again in court, or remain in court. We need to make a different choice.

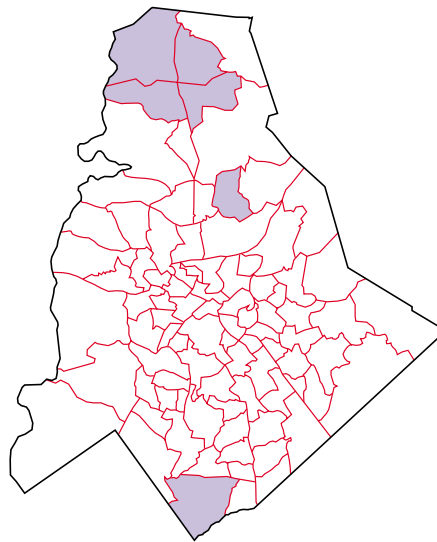
"Thirty years ago we came together – civic leaders, ministers, League of Women Voters, churches, synagogues and a committed, extraordinarily committed staff – to care for the children of every school, to bring peace to a divided community.

"We need this kind of extraordinary effort again.

"Let us – board, superintendent, staff and community – commit tonight to act to make this pupil assignment plan a real choice plan for all of our children and to act in the future to sustain it."

Wilhelmenia Rembert

"I'm not saying that I am at a place where I am just overwhelming comfortable, but I don't know that any of us are. But what I am feeling much more strongly is the capacity of this board to tackle



Overcrowded

CMS projections through Aug. 14 list these schools as being at more than 115% of capacity in 2002-2003.

Hawk Ridge	150%
Cornelius	124%
Huntersville	121%
David Cox Road	119%

Source: CMS

the most difficult issue we have ever had to deal with in this community. And I am much more convinced today than I have ever been, that 'If not us, then who?'

"I talked with Ms. Woods this week more than I ever have, and it nearly killed me! (Laughter from other board members). I say that to say that I am convinced that there is probably no other member of this board any more committed to these values than Ms. Woods. She struggled so, and she forced me to struggle long hours. But in retrospect I thank her for that because she really stretched me.... Now that we have the funding to do right by children, and now that we have facilities well under way to do right by all children, I hope that we all keep the faith and make sure that we do right by all children."

George Dunlap

"I too have been on the phone quite a bit. Lord help me. Louise will wear you out. I don't know of

a more dedicated person on this board....

"This plan that we are about to adopt is in fact a plan that incorporates choice for the parents who want that opportunity.

"It incorporates diversity for those who feel that diversity is an asset.

"It incorporates utilization, to ensure that we are making wise use of our tax dollars.

"It incorporates proximity for those who want to attend school close to home.

"And it incorporates stability for those who want to stay where they.

"This in my opinion is the best plan we could have possibly come up with....

"I look forward to the day when student achievement is the order of the day, and not pupil assignment. By the passage of this resolution we will be in fact moving ahead.

"For those people who live in my community, who for years have been bused to schools in different communities, they will in fact not only have an opportunity to attend school in their communities if they choose, but for the first time many of them will be going to a brand new school, something that we haven't seen much of in my community.

"This I think speaks volumes of what this community can do when we all pull together and work for one common goal."

Vilma Leake

"We have been misunderstood. We have been labeled as not knowing what we were doing, didn't know how to do it. But that's not true.

"The truth of the matter is that there were those of us who come from the '60s and probably from the '50s we bring some baggage with us that led us to believe that we would get the same thing that we had before if we do not take a stand as we sit here as board members for every child in this community that cannot speak for

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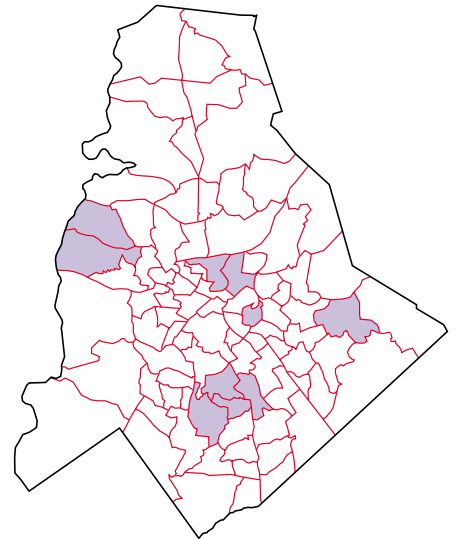
Some changes since June proposal

Changes between initial release June 26 and July 31 adoption affected projected utilization numbers for 2002 or the percentage of students on free- or reduced-price lunch at some schools. Key examples:

School	June Proposal		July Adoption	
	Utilization	FRL	Utilization	FRL
Beverly Woods	48%	5%	99%	2%
Druid Hills	55%	95%	78%	91%
J.H. Gunn	101%	43%	97%	43%
Lansdowne	62%	18%	101%	33%
Merry Oaks	73%	73%	71%	73%
New Craighead	67%	89%	68%	89%
Paw Creek	61%	25%	100%	36%
Pawtuckett*	84%	55%	96%	55%
Sharon	96%	17%	100%	17%

* Capacity number reduced.

Source: CMS



Board adopts 2002 assignment plan

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him or herself. It's our responsibility that the superintendent will provide that quality education....

"Dr. Smith, I commend you for helping us with this resolution and making sure that we include 'equitable educational opportunities for every child.' Because if you don't do it I'm going to be at your door knocking every day (Smith: 'Good') all day long for those who need that kind of education....

"So I say to us that we must do the right thing, and make sure we are fair, that we are legal, and that we are consistent in what we do for all children across this district."

Arthur Griffin

"After some struggles in 1978, in 1981, in 1983, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education passed some resolutions about its commitment to kids that it has not served effectively....

"In 1992 this room was packed... as we talked about moving from one pupil assignment plan to another assignment.... That was passed and a lot of promises were made.

"For me, the trial in 1999 was

very emotional for me in terms of some of the questions I had to answer on the stand with respect to our continuing commitment to a number of youngsters.... The resolution before us tonight [still] talks about fixing it.... It concerns me a great deal that we still have in this thing a resolution to fix it.

"I still have concerns, but I have hope, faith, trust that the nine of us, regardless of the vote this evening, will focus on that resolution that talks about 2001 and the instructional template, because all of our youngsters have got to have the justice and the mercy, and it can't just be rhetoric, but it has to occur, and it has to occur now."

John Lassiter

"I think Dr. Leake was very much on point to thank Mr. (Bob) Simmons for his efforts to draw us to consensus.... Dr. Rembert, I think your leadership in the last couple of weeks deserves special thanks because a lot of us would not have made the effort to try to reach consensus had you not reached out and tried to get people to be open and discuss the things that are important to us, and see how we could incorporate that, knowing that each of us have competing interests and competing philosophies....

"I want to thank Dr. Smith and his staff, but particularly you, Eric, for sticking with us. A lot of

superintendents would have packed their bags and gone to find a lot less chaotic environment in which to ply their trade. You have stayed with us despite our difficulties.... We are blessed to have you here....

"You've helped us – and it is clear from what is in this resolution – to remain child-centered. Too often we can get preoccupied with numbers and lines and philosophies. So much of the conversation in the last couple of months has focused on children and what we need to be doing as a board to guarantee for individual children. That to me is very very important. That's why I serve on the board, and I think that's why all of us serve on the board – having the chance to do what now I think is right, and what really no community has been able to pull off effectively....

"I think it is important for us in the coming days and weeks and months to maintain this sense of consensus and willingness to work and listen to each other. There will be events and personalities that will attempt to tear us apart. It will be easy to drift...."

Eric Smith

"I sincerely appreciate the hard work the board members made in making a great effort to come together to bring this to resolution."

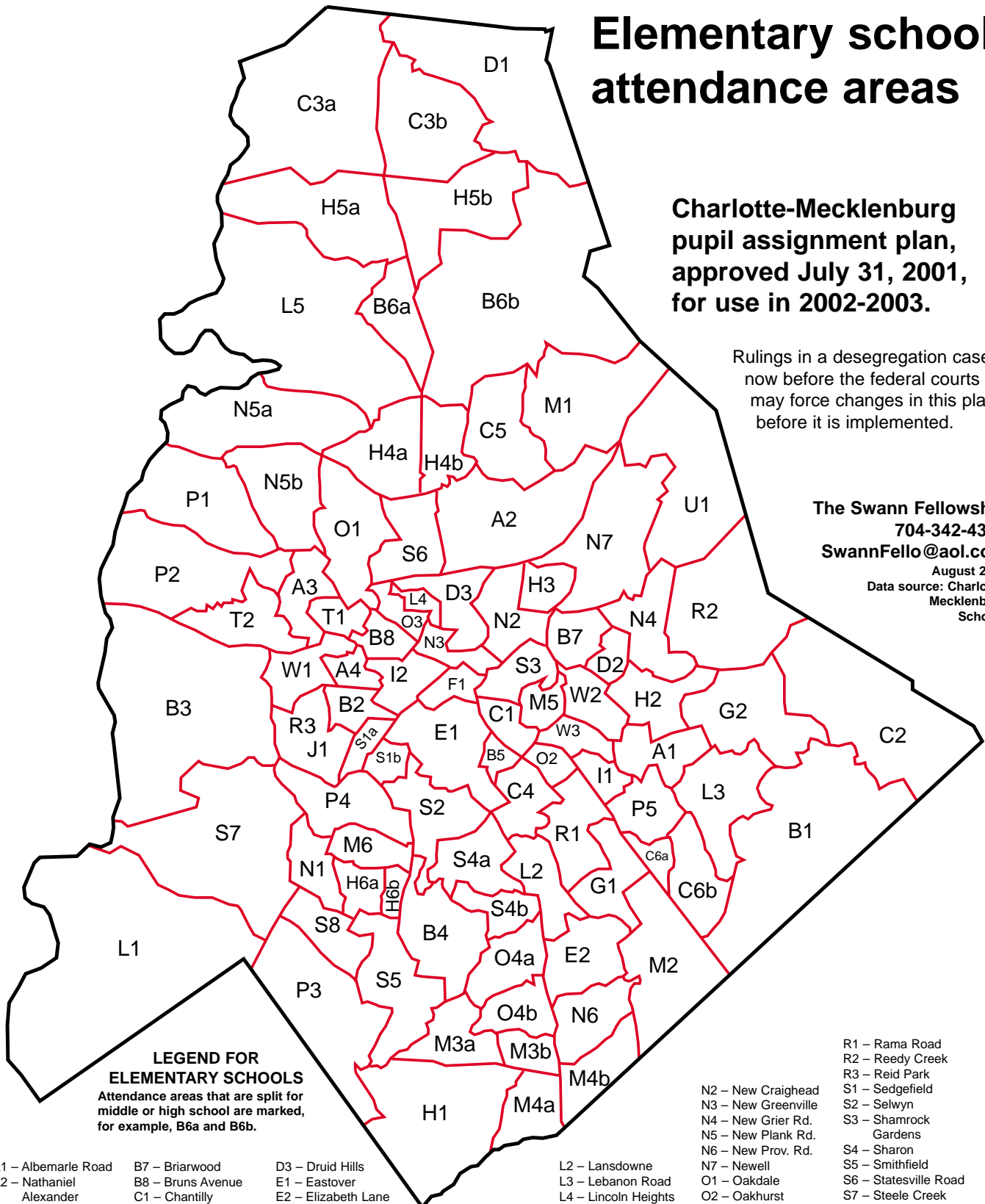
Elementary school attendance areas

Charlotte-Mecklenburg pupil assignment plan, approved July 31, 2001, for use in 2002-2003.

Rulings in a desegregation case now before the federal courts may force changes in this plan before it is implemented.

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August 2001
Data source: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools



LEGEND FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS
Attendance areas that are split for middle or high school are marked, for example, B6a and B6b.

A1 – Albemarle Road
A2 – Nathaniel Alexander
A3 – Allenbrook
A4 – Ashley Park
B1 – Bain
B2 – Barringer
B3 – Berryhill
B4 – Beverly Woods
B5 – Billingsville
B6 – Blythe

B7 – Briarwood
B8 – Bruns Avenue
C1 – Chantilly
C2 – Clear Creek
C3 – Cornelius
C4 – Cotswold
C5 – David Cox Road
C6 – Crown Point
D1 – Davidson
D2 – Devonshire

D3 – Druid Hills
E1 – Eastover
E2 – Elizabeth Lane
F1 – First Ward
G1 – Greenway Park
H1 – Hawk Ridge
H2 – Hickory Grove
H3 – Hidden Valley
H4 – Hornets Nest
H5 – Huntersville

H6 – Huntingtowne Farms
I1 – Idlewild
I2 – Irwin Avenue Open
J1 – Armay James
L1 – Lake Wylie

L2 – Lansdowne
L3 – Lebanon Road
L4 – Lincoln Heights
L5 – Long Creek
M1 – Mallard Creek
M2 – Matthews
M3 – McAlpine
M4 – McKee Road
M5 – Merry Oaks
M6 – Montclair
N1 – Nations Ford

N2 – New Craighead
N3 – New Greenville
N4 – New Grier Rd.
N5 – New Plank Rd.
N6 – New Prov. Rd.
N7 – Newell
O1 – Oakdale
O2 – Oakhurst
O3 – Oaklawn
O4 – Olde Providence
P1 – Paw Creek
P2 – Pawtucket
P3 – Pineville
P4 – Pinewood
P5 – Piney Grove

R1 – Rama Road
R2 – Reedy Creek
R3 – Reid Park
S1 – Sedgefield
S2 – Selwyn
S3 – Shamrock Gardens
S4 – Sharon
S5 – Smithfield
S6 – Statesville Road
S7 – Steele Creek
S8 – Sterling
T1 – Thomasboro
T2 – Tuckaseegee
U1 – University Meadows
W1 – Westerly Hills
W2 – Windsor Park
W3 – Winterfield

Resolution addresses key equity issues

It was as clear a quid pro quo as you can get in public policy:

School board members said, in effect, We'll adopt this pupil assignment plan if action is really taken on providing equity.

As Chairman Arthur Griffin made clear in his lone dissent July 31, similar promises have been made before. Will these promises be kept?

If they are kept, the tool listed in point 1 at right will probably be the reason.

The school "template" discussed there is designed to force the school system to make available to the public key information about each school site. Months of work by the board and the Student Assignment Oversight Committee has gone into creating a format for the data so that parents – and school board members – can compare one school against another.

The goal is clear enough: The data should indicate, for example, if one high school has chemistry lab equipment but another does not. Or if one elementary in the suburbs has far more experienced teachers than another in the inner city.

Publishing the data alone, of course, is not enough. The public, and its representatives on the board, must remain determined to provide services and resources equitably across the system.

On other matters, Point 2 would allow, for example, low-income parents whose children are enrolled this year at high-performing schools to ask to stay at their school, rather than return to a home school that's expected to struggle with a large number of low-performing children. This option is available only in cases where space is available. With many of the high-performing

The Oct. 1 Deadline

By obvious pre-arrangement, the following text was added July 31 to a resolution approving the student assignment plan.

In order for this student assignment proposal to further the board's commitment to ensuring that all children are provided with equal access to excellent educational opportunities as set forth in the (1999) equity plan, the April 3, 2001 resolution and the Policy ADA, the board has determined that the proposal must be supplemented and amended in certain critical ways.

Based on the foregoing and in consideration of the board adopting the superintendent's June 2001 student assignment proposal as it may be amended, the board directs the superintendent to do the following by Oct. 1, 2001.

1. As required in Policy ADA, develop the "template" for the provision of equitable resources in all schools, but particularly schools that have been designated Equity Plus II schools. Among other items, this template should specify what teacher qualifications, differentiated staffing, curriculum and instruction, support staff including parent-family advocates, social workers, psychologists, nurses, speech psychologists, mentor teachers, materials and supplies will be assigned and/or available to those schools.

2. Increase stability by allowing students who attended schools in 2001-2 to remain in their respective schools regardless of grade if the parents so request and capacity permits.

3. Create themes and/or strengthen magnets with populations of 50% or greater of students who qualify for free- and reduced-price lunch.

4. Demonstrate how the Exceptional Children's or EC population will be assigned so as not to overconcentrate students in the most challenging schools yet maximize opportunities for EC students' success.

5. Provide choice to EC students to enroll in high-performing, low-poverty schools.

6. Create Professional Development schools in the most challenging feeders in addition to strong academic themed programs. These schools should be created in the context of the Business Educational Consortium structure under development, with area colleges and universities that have strong colleges or schools of education, and the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce.

7. Create before- and after-school care in all elementary and middle schools that are identified as Equity Plus II schools and others to the fullest extent feasible.

8. Consider adding foreign language instruction to schools that have 30 or more students who are enrolled in English as a Second Language programs.

schools projected to be at capacity, this may be a hollow promise.

Point 3 could bolster quality at the high-poverty schools created by the plan. Time will judge the merits of such efforts.

Point 6 was an idea designed both to entice experienced teachers, and high-performing children,

to struggling campuses.

But the approved resolution does not require that the programs be instituted at struggling campuses, so time will tell whether this will be a program to boost equity – or just be another way to boost the quality of already privileged schools.

Back-To-School: Some context

Total students

108,000

Schools

144

New campuses

E.E. Waddell High
Hopewell High
New Grier Road Elementary
Greenville Park Elementary
Craighead Elementary

Rebuilt schools

Druid Hills Elementary

Relocations

During construction, the following schools are meeting at new sites for one year:

Oakhurst Elementary will occupy New Grier Road campus.

Lincoln Heights Elementary will be at new Greenville elementary.

Highland Elementary is meeting at the Craighead site.

Bright Beginnings

The program for 4-year-olds expands this year by 1,000 students, and is being housed at 14 additional sites.

New sites	Continuing
Ashley Park	Albemarle Rd.
Beverly Woods	Derita
Idlewild	Double Oaks
Lansdowne	First Ward
Matthews	Long Creek
Merry Oaks	Plaza Road
Morehead	Piney Grove
Nations Ford	Sedgefield
Oakhurst	Starmount
Paw Creek	Tryon Hills
Rama Road	
Reid Park	
Sharon	
Winding Springs	

Lunch prices

When you go to school to be a

lunch buddy or visit your own child, take some extra cash.

While pre-kindergarten students pay \$1 for breakfast and \$1.75 for lunch, and all other students pay \$1.25 and \$2.00, prices for adults are a la carte.

Magnets

The Center for Leadership and Global Economics has opened at Kennedy Middle, Eastway Middle and Garinger High. Programs focus on the military, finance and banking, and the legal system.

Calendar

A	15	First day of school
S	3	Labor Day holiday
	17	Progress reports
	20-21	Teacher workdays
O	22-23	Teacher workdays; parent conferences
	31	Report cards
N	6	Teacher workday
	21-23	Thanksgiving holidays
D	3	Progress reports
	6	Teacher workday
	20-01	Winter break
J	18	Teacher workday (make-up if needed)
	21	M.L. King holiday
	30	Report cards
F	18-19	Presidents Day, teacher workday (make-up)
	25	Progress reports
M	28-29	Make-up days if needed
	29-31	Spring break
A	1-5	Spring break
	15	Report cards
M	6	Progress reports
	27	Memorial Day; teacher workday (make-up)
J	4	Last day of school; elementary report cards
	5-7	Graduation
	11	Secondary report cards in mail

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Please forward this issue of *Educate!* to people you think would find the information useful.

And please let us know if there are people in your address book you think we should be sending each issue to.

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Send those names to:

SwannFello@aol.com

Summary results of Phi Delta Kappa poll

Phi Delta Kappa International, the association of professional educators, has sponsored a national poll on education issues for three decades. This year's poll, released last week, was conducted by

Gallup from May 23 to June 6, and has a margin of error of 4 percentage points. Below are key findings; details are posted at Web site of the Phi Delta Kappan, www.pdkintl.org/kappan/k0109gal.htm

Overall approval

- 51% of all respondents give public schools A's or B's, the highest rating and first majority in the poll's 33-year history
- 62% of public school parents give schools A's or B's

The achievement gap

- 88% believe closing the gap is important
- 73% believe the gap relates to factors other than schooling
- 55% say it's schools' responsibility to close gap

School finance

- 59% say quality varies by district
- 57% say funding levels vary also
- 68% say amount of money spent has great deal of impact on quality of education

Student achievement

- 81% think most students don't develop their full academic potential
- 52% believe all students can learn at high levels

Contradictory views on testing

- 65% believe achievement should be measured by classroom work and homework
- 53% say a single test should be used in promotion

Vouchers

- 34% think parents should have access to public funding for private school education, a drop from 1997-98 high of 44%

Charter schools

- 55% have heard of them, up from 49% last year
- 42% favor them
- 73% say they should remain accountable

Home schooling

- 54% say trend is bad, down from 73% in 1985
- 50% doubt home schools raise the nation's academic standards
- 52% of public school parents think home schooling does not promote good citizenship

Online education

- 67% disapprove of earning high school credits without attending regular classes
- 49% oppose having their child go through high school taking most courses online

The schools' biggest problems

- 15% Lack of financial support
- 15% Lack of discipline/more control
- 10% Fighting/violence/gangs
- 10% Overcrowding
- 9% Use of drugs
- 6% Difficulty getting quality teachers

Grading politicians on reform efforts

- 46% gave governor an A or B
- 40% gave President Clinton an A or B
- 39% gave state legislature an A or B
- 30% gave Congress an A or B
- 49% said Bush would do better than Clinton

Support for Bush education programs

- 81% want schools held accountable for how much students learn
- 71% support giving states greater authority over how federal education funds are spent
- 55% favor increased used of standardized testing

Return to basics, reassessed

- 44% favor focusing on basic courses in high schools, down from 49% in 1979
- 54% favor variety of courses, up from 44% in 1979

Responding to failing schools

- 65% favor awarding more state or federal funds
- 54% favor not renewing principal's contract
- 51% favor vouchers for parents to use at public, private or church-related school of their choice
- 49% favor not renewing teachers' contracts
- 32% favor withdrawing state or federal funds

Public support for contracted services

- 75% favor using local businesses to provide school bus or other transportation services
- 75% favor school bus maintenance contracts
- 75% favor food service contracts
- 26% favor contracts to run entire schools

Comments on firearms safety courses

- 50% say they would not save lives
- 55% say high schools should offer them
- 73% say security employees should not carry guns

Briefs

Charter model: Richmond Times-Dispatch columnist Matthew Ladner says New Zealand is a good model for school reform via charter schools. New Zealand is the size of Kentucky with many minority populations but a per-capita income that would rank it below all U.S. states. Its '80s reforms effectively turned all schools into parent-led charter schools. Funding that actually reaches the classroom has risen from 30% to 67% (U.S. figure: 50%). And seniors scored 22 points above the international average on the Third International Math and Science exams (American seniors: 39 points below average).
www.richmond.com

Tutoring success: The work of nonprofit Jobs for Youth in sharpening math and reading skills of Boston area youth seems to come down to this: Summer tutoring sessions work in small groups; and much of the instruction is via computer programs that move on as fast as each student learns. The Boston Globe reported that the summer programs ran two hours a day for six weeks.
www.boston.com

Greensboro protest: Black and Latino parents dissatisfied with angry talk at Guilford school board meetings decided to protest plans for their neighborhood schools by simply walking into school and being a presence, the Christian Science Monitor reported. Leaders want minority schools with minority teachers. They demanded that an historic black school be remodeled, not torn down. They've halted plans for an International Baccalaureate program in a middle school, fearing yet another test their children will fail. And Judith Brown of the NAACP's Advanced Project

explained parents' interest in minority teachers: "Where a white teacher may see a thug, a black teacher will see a kid."
www.csmonitor.com

Special ed fight: Los Angeles is roiled in a fight over whether a court order detailing management of special education services should be altered, the Los Angeles Times reported. Parents oppose the move; new Supt. Roy Romer wants more decision-making freedom and elimination of "irrelevant and inconsistent" rules. Among them: elimination the court-imposed committee procedure for parent participation in decision-making about their children.
www.latimes.com

Uneven progress: Writing in the New York Times, professors Thomas Kane and Douglas Staiger say the problem with President Bush's education bill now in Congress is its reliance on year-to-year comparisons to judge whether schools are succeeding or failing. Comparing the sampling called for in the bill to the sampling for U.S. labor market statistics, they say the school sampling will be a thousandth of the size, making errors inevitable. They studied North Carolina and Texas, two states that developed a reputation for educational strides during the '90s. More than three-quarters of the schools in both states between 1994 and 1999 would have been labeled failures under the proposed legislation, they found.
www.nytimes.com

What works: The University of Texas is about to spend \$450,000 a year to open a National Center for Accountability to focus on what makes high-performing schools succeed, and how state policies contribute to or are barriers to success, the Dallas Morning News reported. The project is based on the six-year-old Just for the Kids, an Austin nonprofit that

uses statistics to identify similar campuses and then compare their results.
www.dallasnews.com

Moving around: CMS's foray into a single reading program for all schools is, in part, a way to address the problems children face when, during the school year, they move from one school to another. Research indicates these moves can put a child up to a year behind peers by sixth grade, may take a child 18 months to overcome, spawn behavior that leads to discipline problems and creates the huge anxiety issue: "What will I do during lunch?" Education Week reported that schools have a number of ways to relieve the problems. Just telling parents of what a move will cost their kids can cut such transfers, and some real estate companies have taken that project on. Programs such as Mecklenburg's Crisis Assistance Ministry, by assisting with utility or rent bills, can keep working families in their homes. In Chicago, kids create a "My Best Yet" folder of their best work that can go with them to show new teachers. Sometimes "exit interviews" with parents can delay a move until school year's end. Some schools give a new student a "buddy" for a few days to show the new student around. The system works best if the mentor was once a new student.
www.edweek.org

Dyslexia intervention: University of Washington researchers are looking for a blood test that could lead to early identification of dyslexia, the learning disability that interferes with reading and sometimes writing. The aims are to provide early intervention in phonics, and education and understanding of the disability so it doesn't assault a child's self-confidence. The problem affects 5% of the population.
www.seattletimes.nwsources.com

A letter to *Educate!* readers

We need your help covering our community investment in education

Dear friends,

The return of *Educate!* after a summer hiatus is a good time to discuss with you our plans, our hopes, and our need for your assistance in covering education issues in your community.

Educate! is an entirely volunteer effort at this juncture. We depend on people like you to write for us, proofread, give us tips, and cajole us into doing better. A variety of people work on *Educate!* Some get bylines; others prefer to work behind the scenes. Whatever your situation, please join us in this community project.

We're interested in providing readers with information we all need to be good citizens in support of a vital community service – public education. I look forward to hearing from you about how you can help us. Let me know by e-mail about specific matters you would like to write about so we can schedule those. But for all of us, here are some suggestions of how you can help make *Educate!* more useful.

Profiles in excellence: Write a short piece – it need be no more than 6 sentences – about someone making a difference in your children's education.

Things that work: As you see or hear of teaching methods, programs or classroom activities that have an impact on kids, let us know. Even if you don't know enough about it to write a story, let us know.

Overcrowding: As you hear or have first-hand experience with crowded conditions this fall, please message us.

Children in action: Encourage children to write for us. And we'd love to have short notes on school plays, concerts and other activities where the kids are the stars.

Equity issues: The school board is clearly committed to providing equitable facilities, including materials. Where the system has succeeded in making those improvements, let us know. And help us point out where more progress needs to be made.

Policy issues: We have had a few stalwarts covering school board and other meetings. They need some help. Let us know how you can help us cover these meetings, and the issues that are discussed at them.

Curriculum matters: Whether it's about the new reading programs at all levels, or science or art or geometry, tell us what all parents and citizens should know.

Upcoming events: Please pass this kind of information along whenever you see it.

School profiles: This is – perhaps – the year parents will make school choices under the July 31 assignment plan. To make choices, parents will need much information. They will get lots of data about travel times, test scores and curriculum. But as you know, that data doesn't really tell you much about how a school operates, how it feels, what its aspirations are, who makes it tick. With your help, we would like to be publishing that kind of information this year to help parents make good choices.

If you have any questions, please message me here at SwannFello@aol.com.

And whenever you can write something, pick up your mouse and do so!

Cordially,

Lucy Bush

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