

Choice policies up for comment

All policies and regulations controlling the 2002 student assignment plan were before the school board Tuesday night and they are now online for public comment.

The board's policy committee will meet Tuesday at 1 p.m. at the Education Center to deal with board members' questions. The meeting is open to the public.

The board wants all policies in place before the choice plan's Dec. 1 Showcase of Schools, so the policies will be back before the board on Nov. 27 for probable final vote.

A story on some of the details is at right, but readers interested in particular aspects of the plan can review the documents directly online. A list of links to all documents is at: www.cms.k12.nc.us/inside/schboard/proposed.htm

Choice plan spawns review of all rules on assignment

The details of next fall's student assignment plan are being finalized. Many questions are being answered. Some new ground is being plowed.

At Tuesday's school board meeting, Supt. Eric Smith and his staff outlined details that range from how the lottery will work to how a home school zone for a new school will be created. Board members and the public meet again Tuesday for further review.

Staffer Sarah Crowder said many of the policies represent codification of how the system has long operated. She said, for example, that the board's policy manual has never spelled out what a magnet program is. Magnet schools by that name date to the early '90s, and by other names date to the mid-1970s.

Others policies and regulations are new. Example: A regulation now states that students enrolled in a magnet program must take an unspecified minimum number of courses within the magnet.

Among the notable policy issues reviewed last week – some new, some not:

– After the lottery in March, CMS staff will have 10 days to apply to have their own children reassigned to any nonmagnet school in the system. If the reassignment is outside of the staffer's choice zone, no transportation would be provided.

The only parents with similar right to request transfer after the lottery are those facing extreme

Amid preparations for choice, other expectations are rising, too

Expectations are rising for next fall's big student assignment changes. But other expectations are rising as well.

A discussion of graduation requirements last Tuesday night got school board members and staff to talking about how changes more than a year ago raised math requirements for current 10th graders.

Supt. Eric Smith argued that those changes were the right thing to do, and so was the decision to move some teens to higher-level math courses last fall.

"The youngsters whose schedules were adjusted earlier this school year," he said, "were comparable in performance to students that were already in those courses.... All we did was clean up the paperwork so they were where they should have been all along, which might make one

wonder about the expectations we've had....

"If you take our nation's performance on international measures, the fact of the matter is we simply haven't expected enough out of our high school students. They are capable of doing more work than we have historically asked of them.

"If as is many times the case, if we define the expectation at a higher level, they will in fact meet it and exceed it....

"This is going to be a challenge for staff development, professional development and a reorientation of our thinking to be successful."

Smith said he would report back to the board on pilot programs now under way in math and reading to help "students that have gone through a pipeline perhaps not as prepared as they should be and are now facing high school

Board Notes

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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: 2,499.

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.

Graduation: Will you be there?

CMS released dates and times for graduation of the Class of 2002. If tradition holds, about 5,000 students will receive diplomas.

Trouble is, about 8,200 students started down the road to graduation as ninth-graders in the fall of 1998. A few died, some moved away. But most of them dropped out.

Tuesday, June 4

Metro School at Metro School Multipurpose Room 7 p.m.

Wednesday, June 5

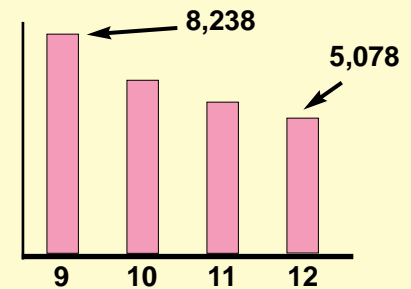
Midwood at Dana Auditorium, Queens College, 7 p.m.
Northwest School of the Arts at Ovens Auditorium, 7 p.m.

Thursday, June 6

West Meck at Coliseum, 8:30 a.m.
West Charlotte at Coliseum, 11:30 a.m.
South Meck at Coliseum, 2:30 p.m.
Olympic, at Coliseum, 5:30 p.m.
Harding at Coliseum, 8:30 p.m.
North Meck at Cricket Arena, 8:30 a.m.

The Class of 2002

Enrollment at 20th day for each grade



Source: CMS

Independence at Cricket Arena, noon.

Myers Park at Cricket Arena, 3:30 p.m.

East Meck at Cricket Arena 7:00 p.m.

Friday, June 7

Vance at Cricket Arena, 8:30 a.m.

Butler at Cricket Arena, noon.

Providence at Cricket Arena, 3:30 p.m.

Garinger at Cricket Arena, 7:00 p.m.

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.

NAACP pushes to close achievement gap

The national NAACP issued a call last week for educators at all levels to cut racial disparities in student achievement by 50% over the next five years.

Referring to the 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling from the U.S. Supreme Court that outlawed school segregation, the NAACP said, "The *Brown* decision embodied in our law the fundamental insight that separate is never equal.

"The fact that the educational achievement gap is growing in an age of pronounced school resegregation highlights the unfulfilled promise of *Brown*."

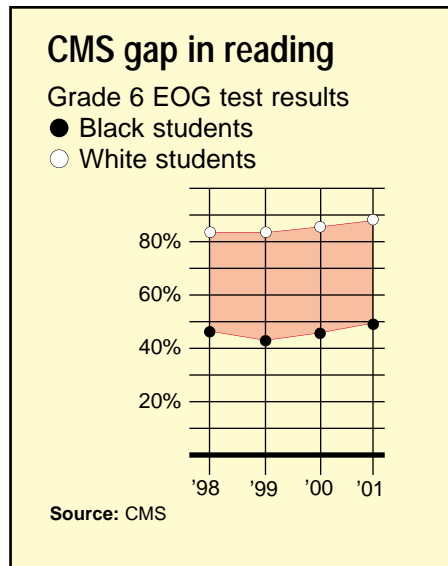
The group said it was focusing on "resource equity," though it claimed it "remains a dependable ally in the fight for diversity and the desegregation of our nation's schools."

The group demanded that all school districts, colleges and state regulators submit to the NAACP by May a detailed proposal on how the achievement gap would be narrowed. The language of the "call to action" suggested the potential for lawsuits if plans are not forthcoming.

Rather than depend on a single measure of the achievement gap, the NAACP suggested that school districts, for example, use a variety of measures, including not only test scores but graduation rates and retention rates.

The group focused attention on a variety of issues that it says contribute to the achievement gap: resources, textbooks and materials, early childhood programs, smaller classes sizes, disparities in computer facilities, testing program and high dropout rates.

Materials released by the group appeared to raise the possibility of litigation over statewide tests that are used to reward or punish schools if the material covered in



the test is not uniformly covered with all children, even those taught by staff members teaching out of their fields.

About dropout rates, the NAACP noted, "In numerous inner city schools with overwhelmingly minority student populations, less than 30% of ninth-graders graduate four years later."

"The future greatness of our multiracial democracy depends on our ability to understand one another, and to celebrate our differences," the group wrote in the Call to Action materials. "The extreme levels of racial isolation commonplace for many children is a clear danger we should not ignore, even as we focus on the immediate agenda of boosting achievement levels."

The chart at right on North Carolina test results shows the gap to be slow to change

over time.

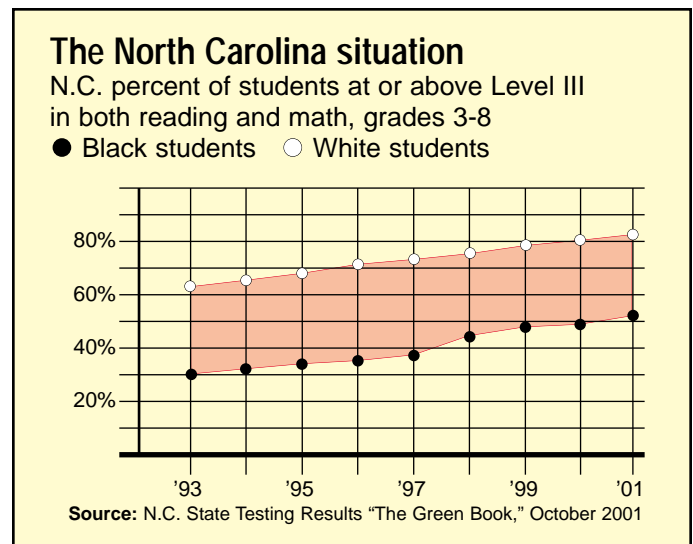
In the chart at left, sixth-grade reading scores are shown for CMS. Again, the gap is both large and tenacious. But the data suggest that what the NAACP proposes as a goal is possible:

If white reading score gains leveled off and black scores continued the improvements seen in 2000 and 2001, CMS students would indeed close half the gap in five more years.

The drop in black scores in 1999, however, is a reminder that progress is not always a straight-line phenomenon. Achieving a 50% reduction in the test-score gap would appear to be problematic.

But goals have value as reminders of where people want to head. And the NAACP call to action certainly could serve that purpose:

"The legacy of *Brown* is, in part, the guarantee of equal educational opportunity. It is also in part a crucial reminder that 'separate' can never be truly 'equal,' because segregation and racial caste go hand in hand. And the legacy is in part a reminder that America's greatness will be diminished so long as color divides us."



Expectations of all kinds are rising

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graduation requirements that we do expect them to meet.”

A model teacher

Harriet Weinstock was honored for winning a 2001 N.C. Council of Teachers of Mathematics award. Her principal at Lansdowne, Meg Thompson, says “I have never ever seen her give up on a child... She challenges each and every one of them.”

Weinstock’s situation may not be unusual, but for readers it may be instructive: Challenging “each and every one” is not simple: Thompson said the children in Weinstock’s fifth-grade class span four grade levels in math.

Serving high-achievers

Norm Gundel, president of Mecklenburg chapter of Parents for the Advancement of Gifted Education, asked the board to revisit requirements for a second year of PE and a requirement for a communications course to learn the skills often pursued in conjunction with projects for other courses. For students with many interests, along with those on IB or AP tracks, the requirements block other more useful courses that could serve the same purpose, he said.

Allow kids to replace that “second year of physical education with a second year of physics,” he asked.

Supt. Smith promised a report.

Auditor’s advice

The schools got a clean bill of health from their auditors last week. All money is accounted for.

Among the intriguing suggestions from the auditors, however, is that the board raise its threshold for a “fixed asset,” which is an item purchased for the long-term such as equipment, real estate or furniture.

CMS now sets the minimum

value of a fixed asset at \$200, but the more normal standard for a school system is in the \$2,000 to \$5,000 range.

Upcoming accounting procedures will make the tracking of fixed assets even more complicated – and expensive – so the advice was to reduce the number of fixed assets requiring tracking so that auditing procedures could be streamlined and less costly.

The schools’ audit will be placed in public libraries, and may be posted on the CMS website.

Metro School to stay

The board had before it last week a \$1.29 million contract to design the refurbishing of Metro School on 2nd Street.

“If anyone is looking for certainty as to what the fate of Metro is and the location, they will receive it with the vote of the board tonight,” Smith said.

The vote was unanimous.

Library equity

The board unanimously approved a policy that covers two issues: maintaining equitable resources across all media centers, and establishing rules for those who would “challenge the selection or use of certain materials.”

The policy calls for an annual inventory of the materials. It was the release of such a list last February that highlighted some of the inequities (Educate!, March 11).

Exceptional children

Among the changes in a policy saying the board would comply with federal and state laws on education of children with special needs was a commitment to give the public access to the compliance documents not just at the downtown central office but at all school sites.

Magnets’ future

The discussion of how teachers affected by the relocation of magnets made it clear that the magnets themselves are clearly at the

mercy of student choice.

Some magnets are moving for the fall. Not all teaching positions may move, assistant superintendent Barbara Jenkins told the board. All teachers would be allowed to move “if student choice supports the allotment,” she said.

Not only that, but magnets face being busted up internally, as only teachers “critical” to the magnet’s mission may be allowed to move with the magnet.

Jenkins gave as an example the language magnet that moves in the fall from Bruns Avenue near J.C. Smith University to the current Smith Middle on Tyvola Road. Only the language teachers at Bruns will be considered critical.

“We will have to have some convincing on whether or not some other peripheral staff members are really critical to the magnet.” That job will fall to principals.

The apparent reason for this decision is to minimize the involuntary displacement of teachers at schools where magnets are moving. And the superintendent gave an indication of why that issue is being managed so carefully.

Some teachers’ “association with a magnet is as much the location of the magnet right now as it is the magnet,” Smith told the board. “I’ve heard from teachers where they plan on staying at the school, not necessarily going with the magnet. We’re going to see a spread of what teachers’ preference is, partly based on why they originally signed up to be at the school in the first place.”

Displaced teachers

With magnets on the move, some teachers at the receiving sites face displacement. Middle school traditional magnets, for example, are moving from Hawthorne to Sedgefield and from J.T. Williams to Wilson.

Teachers may stay at the school if their job is not affected by the magnet’s arrival; those displaced may interview for unfilled magnet

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Expectations of all kinds are rising

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positions, and they may apply for transfer to another school. If those options don't create a new assignment, teachers will be involuntarily reassigned by central staff.

Staffing E+II sites

The board was told the staff continues to hope that carrots, not sticks, will fill positions at high-poverty schools that will be designated Equity Plus II sites. The financial enticements are on the books, and marketing has been prepared so recruiters can make a pitch to teachers at meetings during teacher work days.

Another enticement: The rule that now forces teachers to stay at one school for two years will be waived. That should increase the pool of teachers who can entertain transfers to E+II sites, but it was not disclosed by how much.

Jenkins said that next fall's list of high-poverty schools should be final about three weeks after the choice applications are due Jan. 18.

Timeline for teachers

By Feb. 22, according to Jenkins' presentation to the board, principals will know how many teachers they will have, "based on family selections...."

Teacher transfers will occur in two phases. Equity Plus II and new schools get first dibs, from March 5 to March 15. Positions open at all schools will be posted from about March 25 to April 12. Notification to teachers who will be involuntarily reassigned should be issued by April 26, with new assignments coming by June 7. All teachers should know their fall assignment before school ends in June.

"We believe there is a home for everyone, and we are committed to a smooth transition," Jenkins said.

Enrollment projections

Smith sought to clarify staff's "total utilization" numbers that were developed for each home-school site. Educate! has used the numbers frequently since August to indicate where schools might be over or under capacity.

"Numbers that have frequently been distributed throughout the discussion of the choice plan and are out in the schools now," Smith said, "are not to be confused with projections or anything to do with future school population.

"Those simply represent the number of students that are found with a home school boundary."

If, as an earlier survey indicated, 90% of parents choose to keep their children at their existing schools, "you can take in most cases a school and look at its current enrollment and assume it's going to be probably close to what it is today or 90% of what it is today in many cases.

"We won't have a good number until late February."

The staff's Oct. 29 projections of student populations in the home school areas showed that if all parents in the Hawk Ridge Elementary exercised their home school choice, the school would be at 175% of capacity. Were the same to happen at Oaklawn or Westerly Hills, the schools would be about half empty.

The projections would likely be most accurate in home-school areas where few children today enroll in magnet schools.

Whither bonuses?

Board member Louise Woods asked if teachers now being paid bonuses at Equity Plus II schools would lose the bonuses if February's list of E+II schools for the fall did not include their school. Smith replied that "my expectation is that that's an issue we don't have to address" because there will likely be more such schools next fall, not fewer. But he also said bonuses might be extended for up to three years in individual circumstances.

Returning to CMS

Catherine Munn, regional assistant superintendent, reported that the choice plan's information hotline had 700 calls in its first three days. Staff is ready for the movement of supplies and materials "so that the right things stay and go so that all our schools are equitable."

And of the 2,600 or so forms received from parents expecting to have children in the system for the first time next fall, about a quarter are not from parents of kindergartners, "which means we are getting kids from somewhere else."

Prefer Fax?

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All assignment policies are reviewed

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hardship or a medical necessity of the child.

– All students opting to stay put next fall at the school they are now attending, and who are assigned there because space is available, will be granted transportation, even if it is outside their choice zone. This provision means the mostly black children in “satellites” now bused to suburban schools could exercise the choice to stay put. (Their other primary option, a nearby “home school,” may prove in most cases to be a higher-poverty and often lower-achieving school.)

– The potential for transfers appears to have been tightened. (Depending on one’s point of view, transfers have either been a relief valve for parents dissatisfied with a school assignment – or a source of abuse by parents fleeing an assignment they disliked.)

Transfers to magnets are ruled out entirely. Transfer requests to nonmagnets must include a reason, though the regulations do not state what reasons are acceptable. And appeals have been tightened: Appeals of the staff decision on a transfer request must claim a violation of state or federal law or of school board policy. And since the acceptable reasons are listed neither in board policy nor regulations....

– A policy describing how the superintendent will create home school areas for newly built schools is, Smith says, “a significant change.” Smith said the goal is to begin by consulting parents in the area, create new attendance lines, then come to the board, “front-loaded with information, rather than back-loaded with information from parents” – meaning reassignment hearings might be less turbulent than in the past.

– Revision of a 1965 policy amended in 1984 allows the

superintendent to set an “estimated capacity” of a school. “All reasonable assignment alternatives will be considered and may be utilized before the assignment of students causes the school to be over its estimated capacity.” The policy appears to allow more trailers to be hauled in at schools overrun with students to avoid reassigning children away from their home school.

Smith said a number of issues, including the amount of available land that could be used for mobile classrooms, would be considered in setting estimated capacities.

“My hunch is that if it changed, it probably would change upwards.... We seem to find a way to expand capacity rather than reduce capacity,” he said.

Board member Louise Woods asked a question suggesting she’s worried that trailers for reducing class size at low-performing schools will be swiped in order to accommodate students elsewhere.

– On athletic policy, the rules delete requirements that tuition-paying students sit out for 365 days; allow students to play at whatever school they land in this fall; prohibit playing one sport at two schools during the same year (i.e., by transferring in mid-season); maintain the ban on coaches recruiting individual students; and continue to allow 15-year-olds to play on middle school teams.

CMS Director of Athletics Vicki Hamilton said the rules would limit board appeals of waiver requests.

Possibly looking to Tuesday’s meeting when board members will raise more questions and possibly seek new exemptions in the plan, Smith issued a warning:

“There is on my part,” he said, “a concern that we go into the choice process in a way that keeps an adequate level of control of the system as we unravel this thing and see how it plays out.

“If we in our effort to provide all things for all people, we might find that we end up absolutely bringing the whole system to a dead stop this summer.”



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Just send us their names and e-mail addresses and we’ll add them to our regular distribution list.

Send those names to:

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Briefs

More time: Four small elementaries in the St. Louis area have raised test scores by adding 25 days to the school year, the Post-Dispatch reported. But rather than institute separate summer sessions, which have had mixed results nationally in terms of raising achievement, the Ferguson-Florissant district kept children with their regular teacher. The results: Achievement in some subjects rivals wealthier schools, as does attendance. Even while more than 80% of children at the schools are on subsidized lunch.

www.post-dispatch.com

Opting out: Students at 191 Texas schools will have the option to transfer out this fall, the Dallas Morning News reported. About 125,000 students are covered by the 1995 law that allows transfers if a school is low-performing in one or more of the last three years and had 50% or more of its students failing the state's achievement tests in two of the previous three years. The CMS choice plan offers students at low-income schools a transfer option in 2003, and students at low-performing schools a similar option beginning in 2004.

www.dallasnews.com

Gathering storm: Wake County Schools' proposed student reassignment of 5,800 includes about 800 students from middle- and upper-income areas who would be moved to schools in low-income areas to meet diversity goals, the News & Observer reported. And opposition is already building. Virtually all students reassigned in earlier years for the purpose of diversifying schools were from low-income neighborhoods.

www.newsobserver.com

Cut first: With California facing a \$2.2 billion shortfall, Gov.

Gray Davis, known as the state's education governor, has targeted programs for low-performing and high-poverty schools, the San Jose Mercury News reported. Among the targets: money to equalize spending, rewards for schools making academic gains, and a one-year delay of funds for parenting classes, literacy classes and renovations.

www.sjmercury.com

Leadership: Addressing a frequent suggestion for improving the nation's schools, a survey for Public Agenda and financed by the Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds asked the nation's superintendents whether "recruiting many more administrators from non-education sectors, such as business or the military" would be a good thing. In the sample of 853 superintendents, 78% said such recruiting would be not too effective or not effective at all; 17% said it would be somewhat or very effective; 5% said they weren't sure.

www.publicagenda.org

Oversight: A San Francisco Chronicle has outlined how as

Listen Up

"Research shows that children from professional families hear an average 4 million words in a year, while children from families that qualify for welfare are more likely to hear an average of 250,000.

"If we can get children in poverty earlier, that would make a tremendous difference, so when they enter school they have the same language base as children from more affluent families," (Holman Elementary Principal Judith) Bick said."

— St. Louis Post-Dispatch

much as \$100 million in bond and tax money was used by the city's schools for projects not authorized by the voters. One key finding is that board members did not read or did not follow up on audit reports raising questions about how money was being spent. Another is that, while board members and citizens on advisory bodies asked the right questions, they failed to press administrators for answers.

www.sfgate.com

Calendar

- 19** District 3 meeting, St. Paul Baptist Church, 1401 N. Allen St., 7:30 p.m.
- 20** Board policy committee, Education Center, Room 408, 1 p.m.
Bond Oversight Committee, Building Services, 7:30 a.m.
- 27** School board meeting, Education Center, 6 p.m.
Information session on Berry Academy of Technology, 6:30-8:30 p.m. Waddell High.
- 28** Finance, Capital & Facilities Committee, Education Center, Room 408, 4 p.m.

December

- 4** Marian Wright Edelman to receive 2001 Citizen of the Carolinas award at Charlotte Chamber annual meeting, 7 p.m., Convention Center.