



New rises next to old

As crews expand Thomasboro Elementary, they are tying the new into the old, linking the new building to the school's history, and its community. At left is the old gym, built in 1948 to replace a gym that burned. With a school on the site since 1922, Thomasboro was a senior high from 1937 to 1951, when the county began the consolidations that created West, North, East and South Highs.

School budget bleaker as N.C. slices into funds county had anticipated

A Mecklenburg County official told the Education Budget Advisory Committee Wednesday morning that a projected \$18 million in additional money for next year's county budget had disappeared.

"Based on Governor (Mike) Easley's actions, I have reduced projected county revenues by \$27 million," budget official Deborah Bright said. The county's revenues might in fact be lower for next year than in the current year, because in addition to funding cuts from the state, sales tax revenues are off 8%, Bright said.

For weeks Supt. Eric Smith has been arguing that his budget should get a portion of the projected \$18 million. If none is available, the budget squeeze gets considerably tighter for the schools, which face a county request to cut 10% from this year's budget while also absorbing the costs associated with opening new schools and teaching thousands of new students.

While growth has normally been about 3,000 new students a year, Smith said the popularity of the family choice student assignment plan may exact another cost. "The choice plan has been successful," he said. "It appears as many as 2,000 students" will leave private, charter and home schools for CMS this fall. "That will radically adjust our calculations" in

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Rookie teachers make pitch for value of mentor program

Rick Reynolds teaches math at Ranson Middle, and he's a new recruit to the profession. His training to be a teacher is coming to him on the job through a mentor. Lessons include how to teach, how to keep a class running, how to deal with parents, how to deal with the emotions of being a new teacher. "My mentor has put out a few fires," Reynolds told the school board Tuesday night.

Vontrese Fedrick is a second-year math teacher at Waddell High. She had a part-time mentor last year, but got little support because the mentor had his own

classes to tend. This year, working with a full-time mentor, the relationship has bloomed, and helped her "reflect on what went well" in the classroom and how to improve. "Many days, some of us would have quit" without the support of an experienced mentor, she said.

Waddell Principal Jeff Knox remembered his own first year of teaching 37 years ago: arriving with a history degree and being assigned to teach two English classes. Not knowing what else to do, he taught the entire year via lecture, "and the students suf-

fered." He said he was pleased recently when a new teacher who wanted to come to see him asked to bring her mentor along.

Of 17 Waddell teachers served by the mentoring program, Knox said he's lost only one. Turnover rates at other Equity Plus II schools have been as high as 33%, and the systemwide average last year was 22%.

Mentors also keep teachers focused on the N.C. course of study, which stipulates what should be being taught in each course. Knox asserted that gradu-

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Educate!

a 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.

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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; Steve Johnston, executive director. Published since September 2000; 6-week average circulation through last issue: 2,235.

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.

Schools may have smaller pot of money

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the budget.

Smith said the schools staff had been busy for six months finding ways to lower costs without losing focus on raising student achievement, maintaining safety and keeping the momentum toward meeting equity goals by 2005. He said he had met with representatives of elementary school principals last week and would meet with high school principals Wednesday afternoon to focus all administrators' attention on how to cut costs. Draft numbers should go to the budget advisory committee in two weeks.

Key components of the \$27 million in new local dollars that Smith says the system needs are: \$4.8 million for staff salary increases; about \$11.5 million in teaching and supply costs to teach 3,000 new students; \$10.3 million to open new schools; \$250,000 in revenue lost to a charter school opening in Mint Hill; and a \$500,000 increase in property and general liability insurance costs – an outcome of Sept. 11.

A misunderstanding left over from last year's budget period was discussed extensively, and it deals with textbooks.

Committee member Becky Carney, who sits on the Board of County Commissioners, said the county thought that a \$7 million local contribution was to cover the costs of new reading textbooks. Even at the school board retreat Jan. 31, member John Lassiter mentioned the \$7 million as a nonrecurring cost that could help trim the budget painlessly.

It turns out that the \$7 million included money for routine replacement of lost or worn-out texts and so forth. This year's budget for texts will be only \$4.5 million smaller, not \$7 million, Smith told the group.

Budget advisory committee members are also interested in a

much larger challenge facing the system: The rising percentage of at-risk and non-English-speaking children means that annual costs per student, now around \$7,000, are headed toward \$10,000.

"You can't force a \$10,000 student through a \$7,000 system," said committee member Howard Haworth. Changes in the student population in the last five years, he said, are "startling."

"The demographic trends are very clear," Smith agreed, adding, "If we fail at our mission we will speed that process up."

He said he supported raising the legal age for dropping out to 18, but said "now they're staying and they can't read." A rising number of 14- and 15-year-olds are reading at the third grade level, he said.

He said next year's budget would signal a major push toward literacy for all children in middle schools and high schools. "We are going to win that battle," he said.

Sound off!

How to submit letters to media:

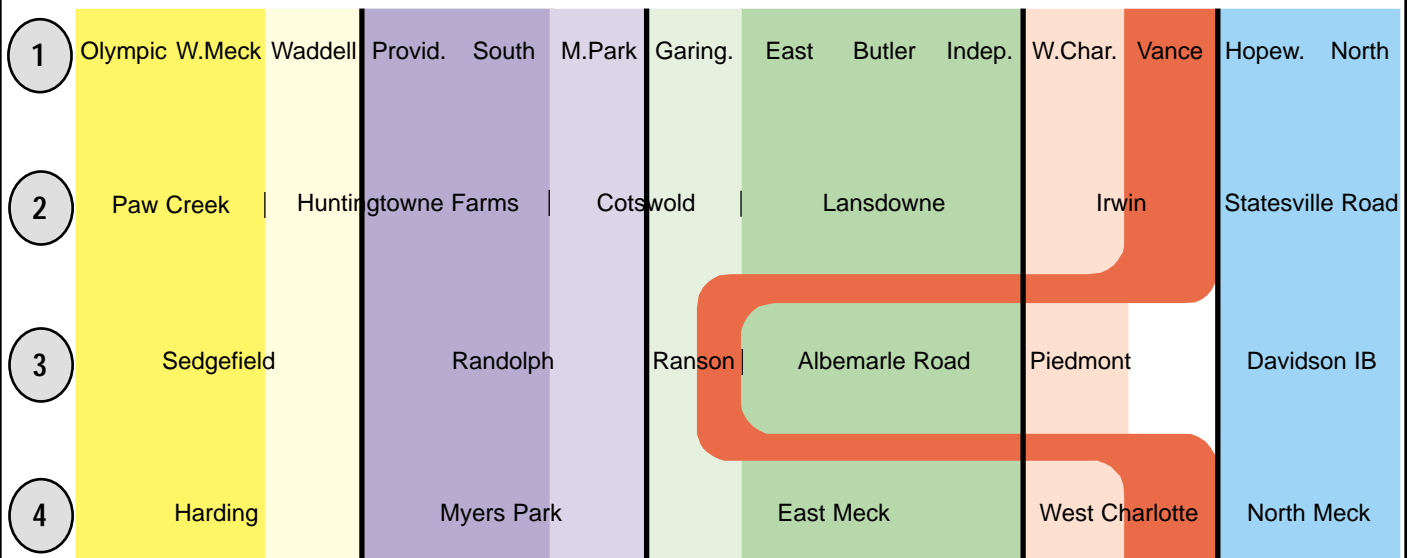
The Charlotte Post: By e-mail: thepost@clt.mindspring.com; by fax: 704-342-2160; by mail: Editor, The Charlotte Post, 1531 Camden Road, Charlotte, NC 28203-4783.

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 Leader: By e-mail: editor@leadernews.com; by fax: 704-347-0358; by mail: 800 E. Trade St., Charlotte, NC 28202-3014

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The (occasionally) winding road to International Baccalaureate



Source: CMS Choice Application Guide, 2001

Keeping kids together has educational and social benefits that get higher priority in some parts of town than others. The International Baccalaureate programs set to begin this fall only do a partial job of keeping children together.

To examine the chart above, begin at the far right. Parents in the elementary schools in the Hopewell and North Mecklenburg High attendance zones (line 1) who want their children in IB programs receive bus transportation if they enroll at the pre-IB program at Statesville Road Elementary (line 2). All those children move on to Davidson IB for middle school (line 3) and land up at North Mecklenburg High for the formal IB program (line 4). This is the cleanest path created by the choice assignment plan.

At the far left of the chart: Elementary parents in the Olympic and West Mecklenburg attendance areas receive transportation to Paw Creek, while elementary parents in the Waddell High attendance area start at Huntingtowne Farms. The Waddell children join the Olympic and West Meck children at Sedgefield Middle, then move together to Harding. Harding is a countywide IB site, but children moving up from Sedgefield are to get priority.

Elementary parents in the Providence and South Meck high school areas, who begin at Huntingtowne Farms, will see their children get together at Randolph with Myers Park area children and move together to Myers Park. East, Independence and Butler area children will stay together on their way to East Meck.

But consider Garinger area parents who want the full course of pre-IB and IB environments. Their kids will go to elementary school with children from the Myers Park area at Cotswold, be in middle school with children from the Vance area when they go to Ranson Middle, then be folded into East Meck with children who have been together since kindergarten.

Vance area children will begin with West Charlotte area children at Irwin Avenue, go to middle school with Garinger area children while at Ranson, then rejoin their elementary school friends at West Charlotte.

New friends are great, but the foregoing understates the number of new faces these pre-IB and IB students will face. For each program is a partial magnet, meaning that each school will have lots of other children enrolled.

For parents and policymakers trying to assure healthy, stable schools, the feeder pattern into West Charlotte may be the most problematic. The Independence program moves to East Meck, so West Charlotte's will be the fledgling IB program. The split of Irwin students could damage Piedmont's ability to feed West Charlotte. The feeder also breaks the link between West Charlotte and areas like Dilworth, Myers Park and Eastover, whose parents helped make West Charlotte strong in the '70s and '80s.

Some parents seeking the West Charlotte IB have chosen West Charlotte's open program, expecting to enroll their children in IB once they are inside the school. It will be interesting to see if that strategy works, and where else it is tried.

Fewer serious infractions

Charlotte-Mecklenburg has seen some decrease in the conduct code violations that lead to students being removed from their regular school to management school, the Learning Academy or the

Right Choices program. The numbers at right do not include incidents handled through lesser penalties – short suspensions, or in-school programs. Safe schools coordinator Bev Mauldin recalls that when the late Supt. Jay Robinson set up the discipline program in 1980, there were eight rules and he said, “Now Bev, if you will run this for me for a year, I think we’ll have a handle on it.” There are now 31 such rules, Mauldin said.

Category	'97-'98	'98-'99	'99-'00	'00-'01
Assault & battery	238	311	314	327
No-hitting zone*		229	169	138
Weapons	166	215	187	133
Sexual offense	30	29	61	66
Alcohol/other drugs	89	68	54	56
Fighting (multiple incidents)	66	23	33	32
Threats	54	43	28	15
False alarm	9	6	6	14
Bomb threat				14
Firearms	34	34	12	11
Theft	31	34	16	7
Arson	15	15	15	7
Burglary	4	3	1	6
Pornography	0	2	3	6
Vandalism	15	7	9	5
Robbery	6	9	2	5
Gang activity	3	1	5	5
Disruptive behavior	162	80	60	3
Extortion	7	0	2	2
Refusal to allow search	0	7	0	2
Profanity/obscenity	1	0	0	1
Disruption	0	3	0	1
Trespassing	0	1	0	1
Counterfeit currency	0	0	0	1
Insubordination	4	0	0	0
Inappropriate Internet use	1	0	1	0
Tobacco	0	0	0	0
Reckless vehicle use	0	0	0	0
Gambling	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	966	1,120	978	857

*Fights in congested areas (hallways, etc.)

Source: CMS

Keep closing the achievement gap, speaker urges

Kati Haycock of the Education Trust challenged 600 Charlotteans Wednesday to keep closing the student achievement gap, the CMEF Advocate reported.

“To continue to close the gap, Haycock said the nation, states, districts and individual schools must set clear goals, be honest about information gleaned from assessments (even if the news is bad), provide a challenging curriculum aligned with standards, offer every child a quality teacher, provide extra time and instruction for those who need it, and demand nothing less than the best.

“If we do not, Haycock insisted, we are sending them a very false message about what they can do and about what they can expect in the real world,” the Advocate reported.

Haycock was speaker for Thursday’s annual meeting of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Education Foundation. Managing Director Margaret Carnes said the foundation would focus this year on its communications, lobbying and understanding teacher retention.

New teachers say mentors invaluable

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ates of some of the state’s education schools “are not aware there is a state testing program,” much less a course of study.

Supt. Eric Smith said that by the end of this school year he should have hard data “to demonstrate the success” of the mentoring effort, which has focused on 132 teachers at Equity Plus II schools. About 28% of the teachers at those schools are on initial certification; about 72% are teaching on emergency certificates or

are in lateral entry programs.

This report to the board comes as staff prepares a new budget. And it was clearly an effort to make a case for continuing or expanding a small program whose funding was cobbled together from a number of departments.

Without board action, money for some or all the mentoring positions will end in June.

The school board also heard Tuesday night a pitch for a November referendum to keep construction work progressing.

Chip Boorman, representing the board’s Bond Oversight Committee, said the school reconstruction effort had drawn to Charlotte a number of quality

contractors who would leave if they saw that the money was about to dry up.

“If a referendum is not put on the ballot and approved, the program will slow dramatically,” Boorman said.

At this point 47 schools are in the redesign or construction stages. Ten sites were turned over last year, and 14 sites totaling 1.4 million square feet should be ready this summer.

The system is spending \$15 million a month.

“We’re going flat out. It’s about as much as we can expect,” he said.

But only about two years’ worth of bond money remains.

Volunteers revitalize 2 schools' training efforts

There are many ways in which schools are unlike businesses. But not all of those ways are necessarily beneficial to education.

Consider what Chamber of Commerce Partners for School Reform volunteers found last fall at Paw Creek Elementary.

All members of the school's office staff were new to the job. Nearly a third of the teachers were brand new. Everyone seemed to be trying to learn a new job. There were anxieties about compensation, teacher licensing, working conditions.

The business executives chose to work at two westside schools: Paw Creek and Pawtuckett. Dee Merrill, a Wachovia executive who leads the Partners' teachers committee, reported Wednesday morning to the Education Budget Advisory Committee on the group's effort, which the volunteers hope can become a model for systemwide school reform.

Merrill said the group separated issues into three piles: state decisions, CMS administrative issues, and matters that could be controlled at the school site. They began with training and other issues that could be controlled at each school, taking away "that victims' stance" that can sour reform efforts. In short order the office staff was better trained. "The teachers would say they are getting more support, getting the supplies they need."

Merrill's committee brokered with Supt. Eric Smith a waiver of the rigid formulas for use of personnel so the committee and the principals could reassess how to spend existing dollars to improve instruction and teacher retention. Merrill called the idea being pursued in some districts of replacing an assistant principal with a business manager to run school operations as a "radical" idea, but it gives a general sense of the kinds of initiatives the business executives are looking at. The key,

Merrill said, is to create "all kinds of empowerment for the two principals." Recommendations for restaffing will be made in time for fall.

The business group is moving in other areas. One tangible effort to round up incentives for new teachers, to cover utility deposits, pay for meals and lodging when applying for jobs.

An early test of the group's efforts to improve the environment at the two schools will come this month as teachers begin to make choices for their fall assignments. One test will be whether teachers at the two schools apply to leave. Another is whether teachers who have heard about reform efforts at the schools apply to transfer in.

For the Education Budget Advisory Committee, which heard the group's report Wednesday morning, the key question is how to turn a pilot into systemwide practice.

"I have very little doubt that these two schools will have a catharsis of considerable magni-

tude," said member Howard Haworth. "Can we guarantee we can bring this to scale?" – that is, apply the lessons to all schools. "We have got to have resources to finish the trip."

Member Debbie Ware wanted to know why new resources would be needed. Merrill responded that the pro bono work by business executives could not be expected to cover the needs of a much larger project. The committee seemed to agree that if teacher turnover could be cut, savings in recruiting costs would cover any costs associated with the training effort.

Supt. Eric Smith told the committee that "the cost of recruitment, hiring and training is astronomical," but an even higher cost is paid by students. Teacher turnover in the 22% range annually "forces the system to change what it is teaching and how it is teaching it. Everything becomes more structured, more textbook-oriented.... We can't do higher-order things because you don't have time to get to the higher order."

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N.C. schools case returns to court Friday

Oral arguments are scheduled Friday afternoon in N.C. Superior Court Judge Howard Manning's Raleigh courtroom in a case that could reshape state spending on public education.

The so-called Leandro case, which originally involved five low-wealth N.C. counties, could help the N.C. General Assembly define what if any changes are needed to assure that all children receive what the N.C. Constitution guarantees: the opportunity to receive a sound, basic education.

Earlier rulings have made it clear that the constitution does not guarantee that all children must obtain such a basic education – only that they should have access to it. Yet even that standard could rewrite the way N.C. school systems do business.

In an earlier ruling, Manning suggested that money spent on advanced curriculum might need to be rerouted into remedial education if school systems continued to fail to offer such programs to all children who need them.

Sheria Reid, director of the education and law project of the N.C. Justice and Community Development Center in Raleigh,

School funding gap continues to grow, group says

What counties can afford for schools depends largely on their tax base. Wealthy counties with a low tax base can raise much more for schools than low-wealth counties even with a much higher tax rate. The North Carolina Forum has been tracking this issue since 1987, and their latest report says the disparities are getting worse, not better.

"Since the Supreme Court ruled that disparities are constitutional, the gap between top and bottom

N.C. gives itself a school report card

Gov. Mike Easley and his education officials Friday released a progress report on the state's goal to be "First in America" in public education by 2010. "We are making consistent and important progress," Easley said in a statement from the N.C. Department of Education. He vowed not to let the current-year \$900 million budget shortfall "stand in the way of our commitment to education."

Goal	2000	2001
High student performance	C	C+
Every child ready to learn	C+	C+
Safe, orderly and caring schools	C+	B-
Quality teachers and administrators	B-	B-
Strong family, business and community support	B-	B

Source: N.C. Department of Public Instruction

said Manning had already determined that being below grade level on the state ABCs tests could be used as a way to judge whether systems were performing their constitutional duty.

"He's very much aware of the separation of powers issues," Reid said of Manning. Rulings might order that specific programs be implemented statewide. But an order that parties to the case develop a plan for court approval is more likely, she said.

Reid, whose organization will appear in a friend-of-the-court role Friday, said Manning has already said that throwing money at the problem of low-performing children is not the solution. For Reid, who taught English for 10 years, the solutions probably can't be found through litigation, or

imposed by a judge. She pointed to reforms in teacher training, in the structure of schooling, and in the climate within schools.

"Schools are ugly places and nobody seems to think that is important. The only other buildings in the state that are so squat are prisons.... People behave better in nicer places."

The Leandro case was filed in May 1994 by parents in five poor N.C. counties – Cumberland, Halifax, Hoke, Robeson and Vance. They asked for state resources to offset their inability to raise school funds from the property tax. Legislators responded with some additional resources in 1991.

Five months after the case opened, six wealthier counties, including Mecklenburg, joined the case, saying that their large populations of at-risk students meant they should have more state funding too. Along the way, a ruling that defined the constitutional provision as merely requiring that all children have equal access to whatever the state could muster by way of education was struck down. Clearly, Manning is under orders to hold N.C. school systems to a higher standard.

Reid said the judge was under no timetable to release a ruling after Friday's oral arguments. Earlier rulings have taken several months.

spending counties has increased 52.9%," the group writes. "The top spending counties spent an average of \$3,177 per student compared to \$692 spent by the ten lowest spending counties. This \$2,485 disparity per student translated into the top spending counties having \$64,610 more per classroom (based upon a 26 student class) and \$1,508,395 for the average 607 student school."

More about the report is at www.ncforum.org

Briefs

Closing race gap: The State Board of Education gave staff 30 days to implement 11 recommendations to close the racial achievement gap, the News and Observer reported. Not a word about this is on the state board's Web site, but the N&O says it followed a discussion of a commission's recommendations in which the need for better ties to families figured prominently.

www.newsobserver.com

Training online: The Los Angeles school district plans within two years to put 60% of its teacher development training online, saving millions spent in workshops and seminars, the L.A. Times reports, creating interactive exercises that teachers do not now have. Example: A video streamed to teachers' computers shows a student facing a learning problem. Teachers then create a solution, share it online with others, and then the solutions are discussed.

www.latimes.com

More applicants: Recruiters in a number of large school systems say they're seeing more applicants for teaching positions, the New York Times reported. Some say the events of Sept. 11 affected their decisions. But other factors are at work: Districts have intensified recruiting. Laid-off workers are applying. And, the Times said, some former teachers are going back to work because spouses were laid off.

www.nytimes.com

Voucher week: The U.S. Supreme Court this week takes up a controversial school voucher case, the Cleveland Plain Dealer reported. Aside from the church-state issues, the Ohio vouchers are held mostly by parents whose children were attending parochial schools before the vouchers were

Quotable

"If all the rich and all of the church people should send their children to the public schools, they would feel bound to concentrate their money on improving these schools until they met the highest ideals."

– *Social reformer and suffragist Susan B. Anthony, quoted by Public Education Network.*

available – thus raising the question of whether the state vouchers are merely subsidizing private educational choices that the parents could already afford.

www.cleveland.com

Gender-separate: Three public schools are among the 30 new all-girls schools founded nationwide in the last three years, the Seattle Times reported. Seattle also has a public elementary where classes are separated by gender. While research is split over the academic benefits, the Times found the girls unanimous in favoring the additional academic opportunities without the social distractions of being with boys. An educator told the Times that middle school is a time when, academically, "you lose girls and boys by the bucketful."

www.seattletimes.nwsourc.com

Grading schools: Michigan educators have devised a report card for schools that gives letter grades in six areas, plus a composite grade. The plan decreases

somewhat the influence of test results, the Detroit Free Press reported. Other factors to be graded are instructional quality, learning opportunities and "engagement." Critics said there was no money set aside to raise D and F schools to A, B and C status.

www.freep.com

Transfers out: A Charleston, S.C. watchdog group is helping parents with the paperwork to transfer their children out of schools that did poorly on state tests, the Post and Courier reported. Transportation is not guaranteed. The first opt-out provisions in Charlotte's new choice plan do not become operative until 2003.

www.charleston.net

Second thoughts: Maryland, which can't explain swings in its annual test results, has some people reassessing the value of annual reports, the Washington Post reported. "Ask any teacher if this is a useful exercise and she will say no. Each class is different. Some have more dreamers, more rascals, more frightened newcomers than others. One recent study suggests that 70 percent of annual score changes have little to do with what happens in the classroom," Jay Mathews wrote.

www.washingtonpost.com

Thinking small: Attacking a "state system that perpetuates failure," a California legislator has called for districts of no more than 30,000 students, the Los Angeles Times reported.

www.latimes.com

Calendar

19 Schools in session for snow make-up day.

Bond Oversight Committee, 7:30 a.m., Building Services.

Personnel Policy Committee, 3 p.m., board conference room.

26 School Board, 6 p.m., Board Room.