

Scrub to schoolhouse to ease crowding



The school board Tuesday approved construction of a new elementary school at this Endhaven Lane site off I-485. The \$11 million, 800-student school will ease crowding at Hawk Ridge Elementary just south on Elm Lane beginning in fall 2003. At 1,438 students, Hawk Ridge is expected to be CMS's largest elementary this fall. Another look at overcrowded schools, page 3.

Making high schools smaller is no panacea, new study suggests

Will smaller schools solve educational problems at the high school level? Don't bet on it, says a new national report a year in the making.

In fact, the Public Agenda report makes two things clear.

One is that "contemporary problems seem to shadow teens no matter what size school they attend, and some long-standing concerns plague high school teachers regardless of how few students are in school."

The second is that parents and teachers alike place a higher priority on small classes than on small schools.

In an earlier era, a good-schools movement pushed for larger high schools. In

Mecklenburg County, for example, 16 or so very small county high schools were consolidated into today's North, South, East and West Mecklenburg Highs. The movement succeeded in giving all students access to a broader range of classes and electives. That effort continues today, in the current school board's effort to bring to all corners of the county its most rigorous coursework, International Baccalaureate.

The passion for small high schools burns brightest today in urban areas, where some large high schools are failing. Small-school reformers are focused on making schools

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Schools budget for next year to be 'austere'

"Lean isn't the word for it," Supt. Eric Smith said Tuesday about the annual school budget under preparation.

"Austere might be a better word for it."

Facing county requests for a smaller budget even as schools face the "largest amount of growth in Mecklenburg County history," Smith told the board and a countywide TV audience that the budget would "cut deep into the organization."

Smith said he hoped the public would understand that many of the students coming into the schools this fall, who already live here but are now at private, parochial and home schools, represent new costs for the schools, but not "new tax dollars" to pay the bills.

Smith repeated his message given the school board at its Feb. 1 retreat: Despite budget cuts, he will maintain resources for academic achievement, safety and the progress being made toward equity throughout the system. Advanced classes and all activities geared toward helping students pass end-of-grade and end-of-course tests

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An opening line for when you next see a county commissioner

By STEVE JOHNSTON

"Commissioner, you can count on my vote this fall if you will raise taxes enough to keep the schools from falling behind again."

That's a message short enough to be delivered in the grocery line, across a church pew or a board room table. It might even work at a traffic signal.

It's a message commissioners apparently need to hear. There seems to be a

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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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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.

Charlotte talks about the volume of spheres

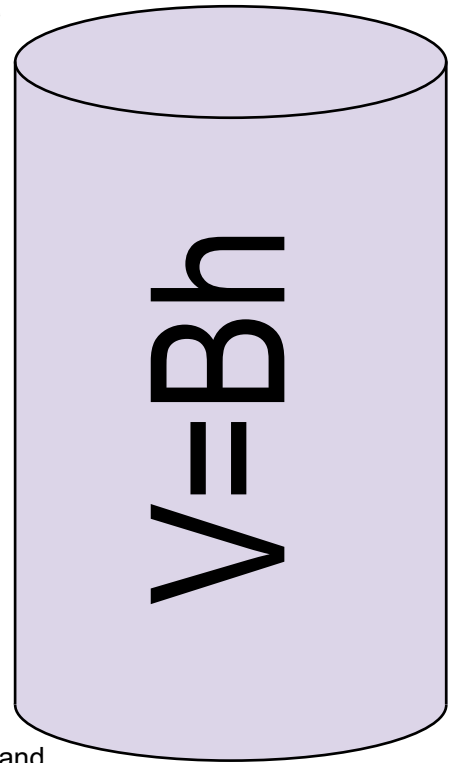
Middle school kids are tuning in to math. Right there on live television Tuesdays and Thursdays at 4:30.

Math Extra may not have the punch of Oprah, but it's definitely live, fast-paced TV. And the time's right for kids doing homework.

Last Tuesday, a number of the calls Raylene Bryson of Wilson Middle School fielded were about how to calculate the volume of spheres. Some children knew the formula that's required; others did not. But for each student, Bryson worked the problem right through to the answer. Calculators were used to do some but not all of the arithmetic tasks. The focus is on doing the problem with as much help from the student as possible – and explaining the rules governing each step along the way.

Math Extra's sessions this spring are led by middle school teachers Stacy Beard from McClintock, Ormond Cottle from Sedgefield, Bryson from Wilson and Curtis Kendrick from Martin. To reach children in homes without cable, the system may revive Dial-A-Teacher.

Assistant Supt. Terri Mozingo says that if the show expands, Fridays might focus on math tasks that many children across the system are most challenged by. And she says she'd really like for the show to air on Sunday nights, when students are doing their homework and sometimes could use a bit of guidance.



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Individuals and businesses interested in supporting the publication of this community journal on education should inquire about our underwriting program. Let our readers know you or your company support quality public schools for all children, and the kind of regular communication about school issues that *Educate!* is striving to deliver.

For more information, call Steve Johnston at 704-342-4330, message him at sjohnston@educateclt.org, or read the "You Can Help" page at www.educateclt.org.



Mobile classrooms line the back and side lots at Hawk Ridge Elementary, and more could arrive over the summer at what is expected to be CMS's most overcrowded school next fall. But Hawk Ridge is also one of the schools that may be less crowded than was projected four months ago. Area parents keeping their fifth-graders at Pineville will hold down Hawk Ridge's numbers.

Crowding widespread?

Total of over-enrolled schools little worse than expected; vote against schools isolated by race, economics possible

Last October, school officials expected some schools to be moderately overcrowded if home school choices were all granted. The school board also directed that fifth-, eighth- and 12th-graders be allowed to stay a year to graduate from "their" school.

Given what data is thus far available, it appears the parent choices have made few additional overcrowded schools, and some schools are less crowded than anticipated. Hawk Ridge, now expected to be at 163% of capacity with 1,483, had been projected at 1,583 students and 175% of capacity. Supt. Eric Smith said that result came about because many area parents chose to keep their fifth-graders at Pineville.

Construction of an Endhaven Lane school will relieve Hawk Ridge crowding in 2003.

The chart below, which has nothing to do with school capacities, uses very rough estimating to suggest that Crown Point could

Estimated Over capacity	Before lottery	After lottery
111%-120%	5	7
121%-130%	5	3
131%-up	2	3
Total	12	13

have 11 more classrooms than had been expected just last October. Providence could have 27 more. Another issue emerges: Schools losing students tend to be those that are, or next year will be, predominantly low-income or high-minority. Significant numbers of minority parents appear to have voted against sending their children to these racially and socioeconomically isolated schools. Was that the case? The school board should be interested in raising that question.

Otherwise, it could well be pursued by some court of law.

Schools chosen more – and less – than expected during choice period

What schools were more – or less – chosen than expected? Comparing choice plan results to October projections, Crown Point is expected to fill 11 more classrooms than expected, the combined Bruns Avenue/Oaklawn about 15 fewer. Data for all schools was not available. The numbers are based

on a 24-student class, and only schools with at least five more or five fewer classrooms of students are listed.

Schools currently serving a largely high-poverty or low-performing student body are in **bold** type; magnets are in *italic* type.

ELEMENTARY

11 Crown Point
8 Pineville
7 *First Ward*
6 Blythe
6 Davidson
6 Selwyn
6 Bain
5 **Westerly Hills**
5 Matthews
-5 **Highland Renaiss.**
-5 **Pinewood**

-5 **Irwin Avenue**
-5 **Windsor Park**
-6 Long Creek
-6 **Hidden Valley**
-6 **Pawtuckett**
-7 *New Greenville*
-7 *Druid Hills*
-8 **Tuckaseegee**
-8 **Idlewild**
-8 **Briarwood**
-9 Huntersville
-9 Beverly Woods

MIDDLE

-9 **Smithfield**
-10 New Grier Road
-11 Newell
-12 *Chantilly/Billingsville*
-12 *Reid Park/A. James*
-15 *Bruns Ave./Oaklawn*
9 Alexander
7 Bradley
7 Northeast
6 **Coulwood**
5 **Kennedy**

5 Crestdale
5 Quail Hollow
5 Carmel
-7 *Marie G. Davis*
-7 **Sedgefield**
-12 **Wilson**

HIGH SCHOOLS

27 Providence
18 Butler
16 Myers Park
10 Vance
5 **West Mecklenburg**

School budget likely to be 'austere'

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would be maintained, he said.

Beyond that, he said "we will be aggressive in our cuts." He was more specific Wednesday morning with the Education Budget Advisory committee.

The weeks after the budget is adopted will be full of bad news, he warned. Outside agencies will be told they will not get any funding. Operations departments will be cut. "Certain services parents have come to depend on" will be eliminated. Employees in central administration will either be terminated or their jobs will be eliminated if they leave. Companies will see contracts not renewed.

Unless such actions are taken now, Smith warned, the schools could find themselves bankrupt in January 2003.

"As you spoke I could feel your blood pressure rising," committee member Geoffrey Curme told Smith.

Quotable

"Despite our discussions about pupil assignment, when people are faced with the data, the accuracy of the need, citizens of all walks of life have stepped up to the plate, and I would expect that with regard to this referendum."

— School board chairperson Arthur Griffin on a proposed bond issue

Smith presents his budget to the school board in two weeks. The next morning, the Education Budget Advisory Committee meets again to see if it has a recommendation to the county commissioners on the school budget. "Will we have a recommendation?" asked committee chair Ken Harris. "That's going to be an interesting situation."

Smith acknowledged Tuesday that success this fall with a proposed \$215 million bond issue would be followed by a request for a second bond issue in 2003.

Smith said the list of bond proj-

ects had been pared for 2002. "If these were normal (economic) conditions we would be recommending a \$439 million bond program in 2002."

When a question from board member Louise Woods revealed the existence of plans to seek a second bond issue, board member Larry Gauvreau said he would "urge some restraint."

"This is a staggering number," he said.

As reported in the Feb. 24 edition of Educate!, the \$215 million proposal for this fall has money allocated mostly for the design of projects, not their construction. Building Services Director Guy Chamberlain said the strategy would allow work to get under way on more projects. The construction phase then would be financed with the second bond issue. Design work on schools often takes a year.

Separating project financing this way is common practice of state departments of transportation, but this would be CMS's first use of the financing method, Chamberlain said.

Tell commissioners what you expect

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real disconnect between how commissioners are dealing with their budget problems and how many people in the community feel about their school system.

Commissioner Bill James advised his constituents Friday that proposed proportional cuts of all county departmental budgets would leave the schools with \$2.8 million less for the budget year ending June 30, and \$25 million short for the year beginning July 1. But the schools must really cut about \$50 million, because they will spend \$26 or so million more next year than this on about 5,000 new students. In short, the schools face a nearly \$50 million shortfall. No wonder Supt. Eric

Smith describes the pending budget as "austere."

Out in the community, I hear another reality.

It came up at an Education Budget Advisory Committee, where a member said she believes people want schools to improve and are willing to pay for it.

It came up at the Tuesday Morning Breakfast Forum off Beatties Ford Road, as a regular asked whether school board members were ready to insist that equity needs be funded.

It came up in James' message Friday: "In my opinion, the cuts to the poor and CMS should be less and the cuts to wealthy agencies such as the Arts and Science Council should be more...."

At Tuesday's school board meeting, member Wilhelmenia Rembert said, "As we move forward, I hope we do not have to sacrifice our commitment to equi-

ty.... While we are trying to accommodate the preferences of parents in terms of where students are enrolled, we hope there remains the communitywide support and commitment, financially and otherwise, to equity throughout the district."

In a book about Terry Sanford, John Drescher writes that the 1960 gubernatorial candidate didn't just campaign for schools. At stops across the state, people heard this same message: He would, he told an Albermarle group, "have the courage to ask for new and additional sources of revenue... to make education the first consideration... and not the second or third or fourth."

Sanford's opponents were dumbfounded that he would support a tax increase. But as schoolchildren can tell you from their N.C. history lessons, Sanford won the election.

Study: Smaller high schools no panacea

Continued from Page 1

within schools – small groupings of students who stay together during the day and see a single set of teachers who thereby get to know them better. It is possible that the Public Agenda report won't be applicable to those schools-within-schools: Most of the small high schools randomly chosen for the project are in isolated rural areas.

Smaller classes first

In the Public Agenda survey, seven in 10 teachers said small classes are more important than small schools:

More important, in %	Parents	Tchrs.
Small class size	47	70
Small school size	8	4
Both equally important	43	23
Don't know/neither	2	3

Parents were somewhat more open to both class size and school size being equally important. But the report's last words are these:

"Sizing Things Up contains an important message for those who believe that smaller high schools have significant benefits for parents, teachers and students."

"Concern about class size hasn't gone away. For teachers especially, class size is generally a far more crucial and frustrating issue, and for parents it is far and away the more familiar one.

"Ignoring these realities, or assuming that class size concerns can take a backseat while the conversation turns to reducing school size, could turn out to be a highly painful miscalculation."

Problems cross lines

"Many students in small high schools nationally still inhabit a rough-edged world, replete with the usual panoply of adolescent risks," the report concludes.

STUDENTS, in percent	Small	Large
Kids affected by peers	57	69
Drug, alcohol abuse	55	64
Homework's not done	37	43
Bullying a problem	32	34

On many important issues, kids from small and large schools agreed. Kids felt that following the crowd rather than thinking for themselves was a problem everywhere. Drug and alcohol problems seems to be as much a problem in small schools as in large ones. Kids slide by without doing homework and there are bullies in both settings.

Parent-teacher discord

Perhaps the most striking survey results are from parents and teachers. Consider:

Results in percent	Parents	Tchrs.
School spirit is strong	65	18
Parent involvmt. strong	50	19
Kids speak, write well	50	20
Kids respect each other	39	19
Kids score high on tests	44	22
Bullying is a problem	38	26

Perhaps these survey results prove that parents really aren't aware of what goes on at high schools. Perhaps the stories that their kids tell are not fully honest. But for teachers, parent involvement is key. Public Agenda quoted one teacher as saying, "I have taught at five different schools in as many years. The better schools are not limited to size or population, but by parent involvement."

Another said, "Your survey is focused on smaller schools – this is not the problem. Parental lack of concern ... and bad parenting have made teaching difficult. Until the students change, you can change schools all you want with no improvement."

The kids' view

Students in small and large schools do have their differences. But most are about obvious things:

STUDENTS, in percent	Small	Large
Kids are of diff. bkgnds.	39	62
Parents are involved	57	48
Halls are crowded	42	71
Classes overcrowded	20	48

Halls and classes are overcrowded in large schools, and parents are less involved. And since the sample of small schools was from mostly rural areas, the kids felt small schools were less likely

to be diverse. But on many scores, kids in small and large schools tended to agree:

STUDENTS, in percent	Small	Large
I can count on friends	82	79
Work hard for college	67	68
Teach'rs like my friends	56	57
I care about my school	51	44
Teachers know subject	82	79
Teachers respect us	81	75
Teachers give us help	61	64
Teachers challenge us	67	64
They get to know us	48	44
Parents told our errors	60	45

Indeed, on most of the questions asked, teens said things were fine, whether they were at a small school or a large one.

There is much more than this in the 58-page report, of course. The report may be downloaded from www.publicagenda.org.

The study was funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which has invested millions in encouraging experiments with small high schools.

Public Agenda, a New York City nonprofit co-founded by diplomat Cyrus Vance and pollster Daniel Yankelovich, says it wasn't taking sides.

"Small indeed may be attractive both intuitively and in actual experience.

"But neither parents nor teachers in this study have yet to identify large schools as their most serious concern," Public Agenda President Deborah Wadsworth said in a statement.

"Summing Things Up: What Parents, Teachers and Students Think about Large and Small High Schools" is based on three 2001 surveys involving 801 parents, 920 teachers and 1,008 students.

In the lines above where survey result percentages are listed, the subject of the question is reported as fully as the space available would allow; the text of each question asked is reproduced in the report.

More information about the report is available on the Public Agenda Web site, www.publicagenda.org

Briefs

Classes by gender: Long Beach, Calif. Supt. Carl Cohn, writing in Education Week, says his initiative two years ago of a middle school with single-gender classes has raised 7th-graders' test scores and grade-point averages. "Sixty-five percent of parents surveyed had said they would send their children to such a school if we built it," and today there is a waiting list, he says.

www.edweek.org

Inspiration time: Vicky Smith's math classes at St. Anthony School in Tigard, Ore., regularly work out problems on acceleration based on students riding their skateboards in the halls, the Oregonian reported. Learning that's surrounded by laughter and physical activity sticks longer in a teen's brain, Smith asserts. After two decades of teaching, she's still looking for new ways to teach concepts to teens. The Oregonian said Smith "usually gets her best ideas just before she falls asleep."

www.oregonian.com

Parents ticketed: In Wichita Falls, Texas, when Jerry Shifflet's son cursed in the hallway at Barwise Junior High, it was the father who was given a \$300 ticket, the Minneapolis Star reported. "They're basically punishing the parent," said Shifflet the elder. Or maybe just getting the parent's attention.

www.startribune.com

Focusing on lives: "A lot of people, when they talk about the achievement gap, they talk about it in terms of student ability and effective instruction," Fort Wayne, Ind., Supt Thomas Fowler-Finn told the Washington Post. "But when you talk about the achievement gap, what you are talking about are differences in the lives of young people." The Fort Wayne

schools are making extensive use of surveys to guide school operations. In surveys, for example, black students say they "feel less connected to school," think they are punished more often, praised less frequently. Top administrators now insist that principals consider such information, along with test scores, in operating their schools. "The fact is, kids respond to what they believe you think about them," South Side High School Principal Tom Smith told the Post.

www.washingtonpost.com

Tooth decay: The American Dental Association says the rise in consumption of sugared beverages may reverse a health trend. "Tooth decay rates have declined for many years, but there's a growing concern among America's dentists," the ADA's consumer adviser, Matthew Messina was quoted as saying. ADA says U.S. consumption of soft drinks, including carbonated beverages, fruit juice and sports drinks, increased by 500 percent in the past 50 years.

www.ada.org

Removing wine stains: Andrew Waterhouse at University at California at Davis has posted the research of Natalie Ramirez, who worked in his lab last summer as part of a high school research program. The subject: What works best to remove red wine stains from fabric? Natalie

clearly learned what scientific research really involves – multiple tests, controls, a hypothesis, a lot of record-keeping. She also learned that different cloth responds differently to various treatments. Overall best treatment was 3% hydrogen peroxide mixed with an equal volume of Dawn liquid soap. But white wine was found to be among the most effective removers of the red-wine stains from nylon fabric.

<http://waterhouse.ucdavis.edu/rwstain/>

WHAT YOU CAN DO

A list of little and big tasks waiting to be tackled:

7th-grade boy is struggling in school. He avoids his failures by trying to get suspended. He has no positive male role models and lacks consistent motivation. He has a good imagination, which was recently engaged in an ancient history study activity. If you might be willing to help draw out this young man's strengths, contact Butch Backhaus at United Family Services, 704-375-0587, or bbackhaus@ufsclt.org.

Calendar

- 12** School Board, 6 p.m., Board Room.
- 13** Education Budget Advisory Committee, 7:30 a.m., Government Center, 11th floor conference room.
- 14** Curriculum Committee, 9 a.m., Education Center.
Board budget work session, 11 a.m., Board Room.
- 19** Bond Oversight Committee, 7:30 a.m., Building Services.
Personnel Policy Committee, 3 p.m., Board Conference Room.