



At Clear Creek Elementary Tuesday, as 2nd-graders performed for the PTA, Tamara Pareza (left) and Caroline Meyer of Northeast Middle worked at the back of the room on algebra. Both had younger siblings performing.



Hopeful signs on cutting gap in achievement

CMS has role in national debate, but can draw on successes elsewhere, too

Two articles that applaud Charlotte-Mecklenburg education reforms have additional suggestions on how to narrow the achievement gap among students.

That gap, whether tracked by CMS SAT scores (box, page 3) or by results for 17-year-olds on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (box, page 4), leads to huge public debates. Fingers point in multiple directions. But as an Illinois educator told the Annenberg Challenge Journal, "we do ourselves a disservice and get stalled if we get in public debates about whether the problem is (race or income or another factor). We have to acknowledge that it is all of them."

Issues analyst Cynthia Prince, in a paper issued in January by the American Association of School Administrators, reviewed some of the academic literature on the achievement gap. Among the findings noted:

-- A Texas study found that, after controlling for socioeconomic issues, "the achievement gap between black and white students was almost entirely explained by differences in teacher qualifications."

-- Tennessee studies found that even three years after having a weak teacher, a student might not have caught up from that bad year.

It's a Red Tag Sale: CMS tries 2nd lottery to fill unclaimed seats

School officials last week took another lesson from retail marketing and announced a second choice lottery to fill unclaimed seats at 22 schools.

Just about all the schools involved have been or will be serving large percentages of low-income and/or underperforming children. Most offer one of the system's most expensive investments: small class size.

A number of restrictions have been added to this vacant seat lottery.

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Tests? No big deal!

Washington-based Public Agenda polled in December about standardized testing:

71% of students said most students at their school "do the bare minimum to get by."

56% said they could "try a little harder."

45% said some students at their school "graduate without learning."

Among other findings: A majority of adults worry about "teaching to the test," but only a quarter of teachers say they do so.

— www.publicagenda.org

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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.

It's a Red Tag Sale for unclaimed seats

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If seats are available for all who apply at a given school, all will get in. If there are more applicants than seats, a lottery will be held.

In such a lottery, siblings will have no priority, meaning families could be split between schools. Transportation will be provided only to applicants in the choice zone or magnet feeder area. Applying will void any request for reassignment filed after the first lottery. And applying will also cancel any place a child has in a wait pool for an earlier choice that was not received.

And parents may apply for only one school this time, not for three.

School officials say they will now limit the vacant seat lottery to schools that are less than 70% full. And presumably additional students will be added only up to 70% of capacity. Why? Most, if not all, of the schools involved are likely to be eligible for smaller class size. Allowing for smaller classes cuts a

school's capacity. In effect, the schools are full at 70% if the administration adheres to the school board's commitment to cut class size at these schools.

Application forms are at schools and on the Web. They are due back to the child's current school or the Education Center by April 12.

Where the seats are

Open seats will be filled by mid-May; deadline is April 12. When the first lottery closed, the schools had the listed percentages of children on subsidized lunch (FRL) and minorities. Schools operating this year with reduced class sizes are preceded by a star (*). Magnet programs are in *italic*.

School	Grades open	FRL	Minority
ELEMENTARY			
*Allenbrook	K - 4	77	85
*Ashley Park	K - 4	85	96
*Berryhill	K - 5	75	68
<i>Beverly Woods</i>	1 - 5	23	31
*Briarwood	K - 5	78	99
Bruns Avenue	K - 5	87	99
*Devonshire	K - 4	80	98
<i>Druid Hills Trad.</i>	K - 4	86	97
*Hidden Valley	K - 5	86	98
Highland Renais.	K, 2, 4	88	90
* <i>Idlewild</i>	1 - 4	66	90
*New Greenville	K - 5	90	98
*Oakdale	K - 5	56	67
Reid Park	1-3; 5	84	98
* <i>Sterling</i>	K only	72	87
* <i>Tuckaseegee</i>	2 - 5	56	66
*Windsor Park	K - 5	71	82
<i>Winding Springs</i>	K - 4	46	76
MIDDLE			
Marie G. Davis	6 - 8	81	89
* <i>Ranson</i>	6 - 8	58	82
Spaugh	6 - 8	81	89
* <i>Wilson</i>	6 - 8	75	79

Source: CMS

Underwrite an edition of *Educate!*

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.

CMS has role in national debate

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-- Dallas schoolkids who had three strong teachers in a row scored 35 to 50 percentage points higher in reading than students who had had three of the least effective teachers in a row.

CMS efforts

Prince's article focuses on teachers as the key to closing the achievement gap. She applauds CMS's effort to lower student-teacher ratios at hard-to-staff schools and subsidize tuition for teachers at those schools who will enroll in master's degrees.

In the Challenge Journal's winter edition, author Robert Rothman writes that CMS Supt. Eric Smith "credits the efforts to enhance teacher quality in high-need schools for the huge increase in performance among African American students." Those efforts included Smith's widely reported carrots: higher pay and better working conditions, and the subsidized tuition toward master's degrees and lower class sizes mentioned by Prince.

Rothman's article offers a number of other examples of reforms at other school districts:

-- In middle school math, reteaching material students didn't get the first time -- what CMS calls "relooping;" and adding a remediation teacher at 8th grade.

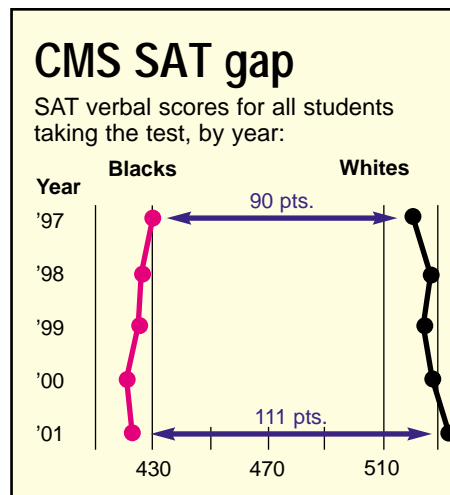
-- English instruction refocused on "meaning" of passages; and development of "reader stamina."

-- Diversity training for teachers.

-- Inclusion of contributions of people of color into the curriculum.

-- Alteration of discipline policies "to reduce the impression that African American students were treated more harshly than their white counterparts."

-- To break down minorities' reluctance to take advanced class-



es, schedules were adjusted to create a sizable minority presence in any class taken by minorities.

-- Afterschool opportunities in partnership with community groups and parks departments.

-- Smaller high schools that appear to give more support to teens at risk of dropping out.

-- "Parent Universities" and other literacy programs that engage parents in their own, and their children's, learning.

Stereotypes triggered

Rothman cites the work of Stanford psychologist Claude Steele, who believes tests trigger black students' self-doubt, which they've absorbed from racial stereotyping. Steele's study: When students were told a test would measure ability, blacks trailed whites. When students were told a test was a lab experiment on how they solved problems, blacks scored as well as whites.

Rothman also cites unidentified Michigan research. A study of sixth-graders "found that teachers' perceptions of students' abilities were based largely on past performance, not on race. But these perceptions appeared to affect African American and white children differently: Teachers' perceptions were three times more likely to affect African Americans' test scores than whites'. As a result, African American students, whom teachers tended to perceive as lower performing because of past performance, did substantial-

ly worse on the test than low-performing white students."

In February's teacher.net Gazette, teacher mentor Bill Page says that for these and other children, remediation never works.

"When a remedial teacher is successful with a given student, as they frequently are, it is not the remedial procedure," Page asserts. "It is because the teacher as a person has been able to change the student's attitude. Only then can he or she become successful in learning the material."

Page says kids learn their attitude from teachers: "They know whether I value the use of class time. They know whether I care about every student, or just about the 'good' ones. They know whether I mean what I say. They know whether I care about real learning, or just answers on the test." By implication, Page indicts some teachers of contributing to bad student attitudes. So his first prescription is for teachers to "make sure we have our own heads on straight."

Page's other advice is that students change their attitude when they see learning in a new light. "If a student saw that a particular unit of learning were going to affect his or her life this year, next year and throughout his schooling, he or she would keep me after school and make me teach him or her." Break tough material into parts, Page advises. Turn slow learners into tutors of younger children. Give those who misbehave in the halls some training, then turn them into hall monitors.

Not just for teachers

If teachers respond that changing attitudes is more than they alone can undertake, they may well be right. There may be roles for mentors, religious congregations, community leaders -- and families.

In a recent look at how racial achievement gaps in Ohio transcend socioeconomics and home

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CMS has role in national debate

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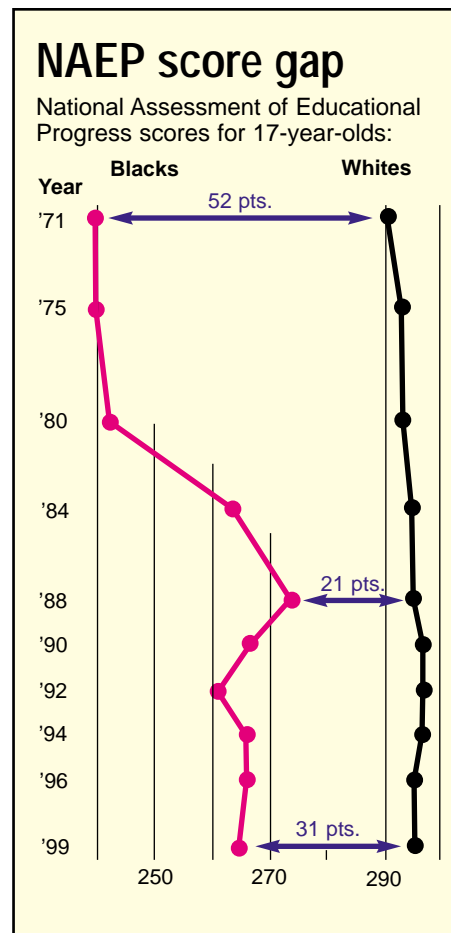
location, the Akron Beacon-Journal quoted Harvard lecturer Ronald Ferguson as saying black parents need to have their children reading and thinking more.

"That's hard to talk about in public," Ferguson told the Beacon-Journal. "Black folks don't want white folks coming into their communities and saying, 'You ought to be more like us.'"

A citizen study of Louisville, Ky., schools pointed to several reforms that had helped narrow the achievement gap. In an article for Middle Ground Magazine published by the National Middle School Association, Anne Henderson and Beverly Raimondo write that a study found substantial operating differences among five middle schools. At high-achieving schools, the group found high-interest lessons in progress, smaller -- and longer -- classes for struggling students, and individually tailored instruction. At low-performing schools, struggling students had "weak teachers and simplistic work."

Mixing things up

Perhaps the biggest difference, however, was that high-achieving schools mixed up kids by achieve-



ment levels. A teacher reported: "We had some research ... that said kids benefit from being in multi-level classroom settings. Once we tried it and found that there were fewer discipline problems, we were able to (teach) much more content at a much deeper level ... everyone (felt) like they were part of an advanced

program because there were not labels."

A former Charlotte-Mecklenburg educator tells a story of teaching a multi-week unit in two nearby CMS schools. At one school, most of the children are at or above grade level; at the other, most are below grade level. At the first school, top students pull the slower ones along; at the other, there are no peers to help the teacher do the pulling. Struggling students at both schools have the same teacher, the same materials, and similarly adequate schoolhouses. But the struggling children are not only achieving at different levels: Those most in need of help are offered distinctly different opportunities to learn, based entirely on their school assignment.

The CMS choice assignment plan now in the works for the fall creates more schools with heavy concentrations of struggling students. As grandfathering ends in 2003, there are prospects that the concentrations will rise, that fewer and fewer of the struggling students will have peers in the classroom who can "help the teacher do the pulling."

CMS educators insist that all children can learn, but that's not really the question. The question is how to narrow the achievement gap so that all children are adequately prepared for life and work in the 21st century.

N.C. board gets first look at 'closing gaps' plan details

A key recommendation of the N.C. Advisory Commission on Raising Achievement and Closing Gaps will cost, oh, \$313 million.

Other recommendations will cost unspecified staff time. Others will be free.

The State Board of Education last week got its first look at what educators say it could take to implement last year's suggestions from a citizen panel determined to close the student achievement gap in North Carolina.

The most expensive recommen-

dation by far is that, every fourth year, veteran teachers be paid during the summer while they take training "in working with diverse populations." The cost of the training itself appears to be separate from the \$313 million price tag. On other matters among the 11 recommendations and 25 pages of implementation strategies:

-- Institutes for special education teachers in reading and math will cost \$800,000 annually.

-- Funds for incentives to low-

wealth schools to teach Advanced Placement courses will be paid from a \$1 million federal grant.

-- Costs to design a media campaign to reach parents of under-achieving students will be \$10,000. Costs of the campaign itself are not listed.

-- A recommendation that teachers voluntarily visit children's homes will take staff time. An advisory council noted that "some teachers and other staff already do this. DPI can encourage this practice."

Briefs

Charter update: Charter schools that opened in the late '90s with innovative curriculums found their test scores in the basement, so innovation has mostly been dropped for traditional instruction, the News & Observer reported. A consultant told the state last fall, "charters seem little different from other public schools." Legislators seem willing to let the 100 charters continue, but aren't willing to commit to a long-term future for the movement, the N&O wrote.
www.newsobserver.com

High schools: Ten foundations will contribute \$20 million to remake 9 neighborhood high schools in Baltimore where the dropout rate is about 60%, the Baltimore Sun reported. Redesign efforts at this point focus on cutting school size to no more than 850 students.
www.sunspot.net

State control: In big cities nationwide, pressure mounts to move school control from elected boards to mayors, the Christian Science Monitor reported. Fiscal mismanagement, noisy disputes within the board, or lagging test scores seem to be precipitating most of the takeovers. Most states are only recently footing most of the bill for local education; North Carolina made that change in the 1930s Depression.
www.csmonitor.com

Bonuses: A Missouri task force suggests the state pay \$10,000 annual bonuses to top teachers working in low-performing schools, the Post Dispatch reported.
www.post-dispatch.com

Full service: The Boston Globe profiled Robert L. Ford School in Lynn, Mass., where it's taken a decade to create a place that

meets families' needs: It's open 7 a.m. to 9 p.m., except Thursdays and Fridays when workers get paid and didn't show. Evening parent classes (with child care) include ESL, citizenship and GED prep. Typically, such community-based schools offer health, mental health and social services for the entire family.

www.bostonglobe.com

Teacher training: The Chronicle of Higher Education reported that a number of states are giving community colleges a direct role in training teachers. Students at those institutions are more racially diverse and could fill up to a quarter of the need for teachers over the next decade.

http://chronicle.com

Supplies first: An Alabama legislative committee slid a 3% pay raise for teachers into the if-we-have-money column and put about \$53 million in real money

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

Donate toward \$250,000 start-up needs for a free supply store where teachers at Equity Plus II schools will shop free to outfit their classrooms next fall. For information: Kit Cramer at 704-378-1301 or kcramer@charlottechamber.com

into textbooks, supplies, buses and other current expenses that many superintendents cut last year to lessen layoffs, Education Week reported.
www.edweek.com

Calendar

- 12** School Board, 6 p.m., Board Room.
- 13** Education Budget Advisory Committee, 7:30 a.m., Government Center, check signs for location.
- 14** Curriculum Committee, 9:30 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.
Board budget work session, 6 p.m., Board Room.
- 20** "High Schools That Work," CMS Partners for School Reform, 8 a.m., Charlotte Chamber. Reservations: emccoll@charlottechamber.com.
- 21** Finance, Capital & Facilities Committee, 4 p.m., Room 414, Education Center.
- 26** School Board, 6 p.m., Board Room. Includes budget work session and public hearing on 2002-2003 budget.
- 27** Education Budget Advisory Committee, 7:30 a.m., Government Center, 11th floor conference room.
Board budget work session, 5 p.m., Board Room.

WHAT YOU CAN DO