

After the court case: Citizens speak

The U.S. Supreme Court last week closed the books on *Belk vs. Charlotte-Mecklenburg* and its predecessor, *Swann vs. Mecklenburg*, the long-running legal battle over school desegregation in CMS.

By declining to hear appeals, the justices left standing a 4th Circuit Court of Appeals ruling that declared the system free of vestiges of legalized segregation, and lifted court supervision of the school board's man-

agement of the district.

Last week, *Educate!* asked readers to offer their thoughts on the ruling, and the schools' future. Those comments begin on **page 3**. School officials' comments are excerpted on **page 2**.



College stretched thin

CPCC officials shared with county commissioners last week details of their program and how a worst-case cut in CPCC's budget would affect students.

157 nationalities among students.

22,000 students take college credit courses.

13,000 enroll in literacy programs.

26,000 are in workforce development or personal interest classes.

9,000 take courses for dislocated workers.

22% hold bachelors or graduate degree, meaning they're retraining or preparing for new careers.

Last among 58 N.C. community colleges in funding per student.

3rd from last among peers in space per student.

1,339 courses affecting about 10,000 students to be canceled if county budget is deeply cut.

Hot topic: Pay freeze

State decision on raises may be key to balancing budgets

County commissioners met with school board members last week to resolve questions over the schools' budget proposal.

Commissioners asked questions about the \$4 million or more that would supplement the state's \$54-per-student allotment for textbooks. Some commissioners say books are the state's responsibility. But Griffin came to the meeting with two boxes.

In one box were the texts used by the average 11th-grader. Cost: \$359.20. In another box were the texts for an International Baccalaureate student. Cost: \$489.00. With new books purchased every five years and worn or lost books replaced more frequently, the state allotment never covers the cost of books, he said.

Griffin also made a plea that commissioners and school board members funnel their questions through vice chairs Becky Carney and Wilhelmenia Rembert. That "keeps us on track, and it keeps us out of the paper," he said.

Supt. Eric Smith defended his estimate of 6,500 new students for the fall, more than twice the usual increase. He noted that

planners had actually projected an increase as high as 8,000.

Smith also defended his staff cuts, which he said numbered 347, compared with the county's planned 110. (The plan for layoffs among fifth-grade band and orchestra teachers goes before the school board Tuesday night.)

There was also discussion of salary increases. Smith argues that, for legal and morale reasons, if state-paid teachers get a raise, locally-paid teachers must also. Some commissioners challenged that argument. The state hasn't decided yet about raises.

Smith predicted that if county funding is less than requested, there will be more children in each classroom this fall "because that's where our dollars are."

Commissioners chairman Parks Helms said he had asked Gov. Mike Easley to consider suspending pay raises for a year for all state employees. If Easley does, the county could fund its programs and all of what the schools requested, minus pay raises.

"I would like to give... increases, but we have to make some tough choices," Helms said.

School officials comment on Supreme Court's decision

Hours after Monday's decision was announced, school officials held a press conference. Among the comments:

Board chair Arthur Griffin:
...We have made great progress in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools and we have every reason to be proud. But... our job is far from over in terms of providing equity and excellence in education for all of our children....

We are just now beginning to realize the dreams envisioned by the Swanns and thousands of other parents who, like them, recognize that education...is the key that unlocks the door to the American Dream....

This is not the time to pull the rug out from under thousands of children whose best hope for a bright future rests in our hands – and in the policies and budget decisions we must make over the next few weeks. We, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education ask each of you – every parent and every citizen in this great city and in Mecklenburg

County – to join with us as we prepare our young people for greatness. Most of you will probably want to focus on this decision as a final chapter. It is a final chapter with respect to pupil assignment. The book and the chapters that will follow this one will determine what kind of community we live in....

Supt. Eric Smith: ... As we move to unitary status, the responsibility and the obligation to ensure that every child in Mecklenburg County is educated with fairness and justice moves from one of court direction and court supervision to one of community responsibility and community action. It is our responsibility now to ensure that those challenges found in the past never, ever occur again, and that we, as a community and as a school system see to it that we fulfill the

obligation and responsibility of public education – opening doors and fulfilling dreams for the children that we are here to serve.... I would like to again, commend all the educators, elected officials and community leaders that have helped to move Mecklenburg County to this point....

Vice chair Wilhelmenia Rembert: I, too, would like to reiterate how important this decision is today in reaffirming the school board's local responsibility but also the responsibility that lies with our community. I would like to thank Dr. Smith and his staff for the... plan that will work for all schoolchildren. Now we have an opportunity as a community to back that plan... making sure that every child in every school has access to an excellent education and the resources they need to be successful.

From Readers

160-page CMEF report is available

The writer is managing director of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Education Foundation.

Thank you for your significant coverage of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Education Foundation's 2002 State of Public Education Report. Several points and inaccuracies need clarification for your readers.

Tom Bradbury, former CMEF Director of Research and Publications, did an outstanding job in producing the 2002 State of Public Education Report and the summary document after six intense months of research and writing.

Both reports were completed prior to Tom's end-of-January departure, which explains the absence of recent CMS operating budget decisions.

The second annual report is quite extensive at 160 pages. The 12-page report referenced in the article is entitled "Destination: Excellence" and is a summary document produced for community distribution.

This summary document, first released on Feb. 14 at the Education Foundation's annual meeting, was intentionally "downsized" in response to many reporting the previous report was too much for the majority of our community members to digest and utilize.

The Education Foundation will provide the complete 160-page report to those that make the request, while the supply lasts. For a copy, please call or e-mail Laurie Dufour at 704-335-0100 or ldufour@cmeff.org.

Educate! a journal on public education in Charlotte-Mecklenburg

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.

Educate! is published by The Swann Fellowship, 1510 E. 7th St., Charlotte, NC 28204. Voice and fax: 704-342-4330. E-mail: sjohnston@educatecl.org Lucy Bush, president; B.B. DeLaine, vice president; Steve Johnston, executive director. Published since September 2000; 6-week average circulation through last issue: 2,160.

The Swann Fellowship, named for Darius and Vera Swann, was formed in 1997 out of several Charlotte religious congregations to be a witness to the value of diversity in public education and to educate 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.

Out of bad law can come a good community result

The writer is a lawyer and former member of the school board.

By **BOB SIMMONS**

The decision of Judge Potter on unitary status, confirmed by the one-vote majority of the Fourth Circuit, was the wrong decision based on the facts and the law, but it was probably the best decision for education in CMS.



Simmons

And the denial by the Supreme Court of the Belk petition for certiorari now finally allows us to prove that we can provide for all of our children an equally excellent education without court supervision.

Although this freedom is an opportunity fraught with peril, it is an opportunity full of promise: Out of bad law, we can now build an even better future on what has been accomplished through desegregation over the last 30 years.

Judge Potter's decision in the District Court was riddled with error and inconsistent with both the facts presented at trial and the applicable law.

It was a political decision consistent with a backlash which ignores the continuing legacy of past racial discrimination, denies the existence of current racial discrimination and confuses race-based remedies with the racial discrimination they cure.

The panel of the Fourth Circuit made the correct decision: Reversing Potter on the constitutionality of the magnet school assignment structure (the issue which originally brought the system back into court through Cappachione), reversing Potter on

his injunction against the use of race in any way in the administration of CMS, reversing Potter on legal fees and reversing Potter on unitary status and remanding that portion of the decision for the presentation of further evidence to correct Potter's multiple errors.

The white plaintiffs lost on all four holdings. The findings and analysis of the majority were thorough and exhaustive. Judge Traxler wrote a typical dissenting opinion that was long on conclusions and short on support.

It was no surprise that the conservative Fourth Circuit decided to rehear the case en banc, and it was no surprise that Traxler's thin rationale became the holding of the one-vote majority on the issue of unitary status. They found what they wanted to find. Still, the white plaintiffs lost on three of four holdings as the entire court confirmed the panel's reversals of Potter on magnet schools, the injunction and legal fees.

It was also no surprise that the Supreme Court which selected George Bush as the winner of the presidential election made the political decision to deny the Belk petition on unitary status. At least they got right again the issue first decided correctly by the Fourth Circuit panel and denied the white plaintiffs' fee petition.

The denial of the fee petition reflects the real victors in this parade of incorrect decisions: The people of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County.

The white plaintiffs did not win; the courts have confirmed that Cappachione had no claim, that the white plaintiffs showed no

individual harm from desegregation justifying the recovery of their legal fees and that CMS cannot be restrained in advance from considering race in its analysis of the equal delivery of education to all children. Unitary status was the goal of the court order mandating desegregation of CMS, and achievement of that goal is a victory for the community that made busing work.

Was CMS unitary under the facts of 1997? Of course not. Is CMS unitary now? The trial of that question will be held in the schools under the new plan beginning this fall.

Unitary status is the legal fiction of a moment at which the discriminatory effects of segregation are eliminated to the extent practical. But truly equal educational opportunity is a process developed and maintained over years by a community working together for the good of all its children.

Anticipating the predictable political action of the courts, the Board of Education last year adopted a plan for implementation this year which keeps control of the transition from court-ordered desegregation in the hands of the people of our community. We now have the opportunity to prove that we can be the community that makes unitary status work.

But this is more than an opportunity; this is an obligation. This is a duty we cannot shirk and a promise we cannot break. As long as we have the good will to pursue equity and excellence with equal fervor, we cannot fail.

We need to focus on teacher mentoring

The writer is the Charlotte Chamber's group vice president for education.

By KIT CRAMER

Now that the ruling has come in, I really hope we can focus in on the issue of ensuring that all schools have great teachers.

The Education Trust has said that the single greatest factor in improving achievement is the quality of the classroom teacher.

We know that right now the Equity Plus II schools have a greater share of teachers who have less experience. Those folks need to be mentored in order to build their skills in working with all kids, as well as to retain them in the profession.

There's a 32% teacher turnover rate for first- through third-year teachers in our district. If we can really get to the issue of improving our teachers' working conditions, including providing them with a mentor in the early years, we can make a significant impact on the situation. This issue is critically important to our Equity Plus schools and students.

Parents still have a lot of questions

The writer will have two children in CMS schools this fall.

By ANTHONY BROWN

Has anyone asked if the school board will guarantee that each school is equally equipped and staffed? Can it be mandated that funds for schools be directed to those schools that have the most needs for resources and upgrades?

I have heard that due to the choice plan, there may be some schools that will be closed due to low enrollment. Where will these students attend?

Does anyone have a breakdown of how the bond monies have been spent thus far?

Revisit policy on locating schools

The writer is a member of the Community Relations Committee.

By CURT BRADLEY

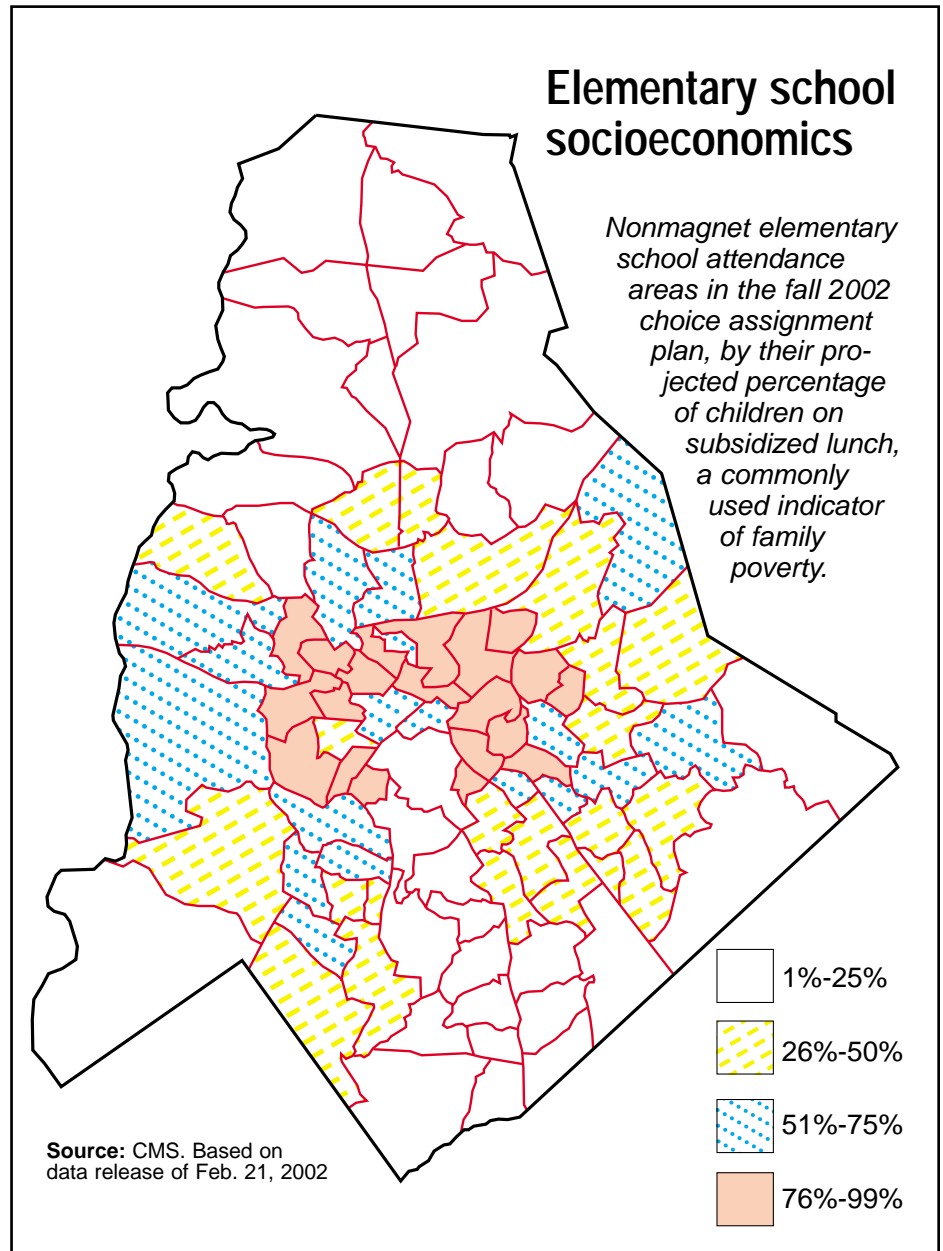
I do not have the history in Charlotte that many others do, but as a relative newcomer who has followed school issues for several years now, I would concentrate on the following:

1. Promote Equity Plus schools in a substantive, committed way.
2. Develop and follow a Locational Policy that puts new schools in areas where they can

draw on diverse populations even if it means paying more for sites.

3. Establish budget priorities that insure Nos. 1 and 2 are followed even in times of budget crisis.

4. Organize grassroots watchdog groups that are broad-based and can be sustained over more than one generation of students and parents to promote and monitor equity, locational and diversity issues.



Blacks need to know their history; it's not being taught

The writer, a retired career Air Force officer, has written extensively, and in this article refers to his upcoming book, "The Crisis and Challenge of Black Mis-education in America." He is a county commissioner candidate in District 3.

By GYASI FOLUKE

... I wrote this book to black folks primarily because I am convinced that without a better vision and much greater initiative by African Americans, we blacks are doomed-destined for a "permanent" marginalized status in America, including our status within the present Euro-centric system of mis-education in Charlotte-Mecklenburg....

Now that "our" Supreme Court has spoken to resegregate the schools, the truth of this unjust system of mis-education, already revealed, in part, in the courts, will be aggravated in multiple ways; that is, unless the black community, belatedly, decides to "take charge" or to exercise greater control of the education of our children.

Unfortunately, however, the demonstrated record and concurrent mental orientation of black "leaders" in this community do not offer much optimism for the future education of black children....

If you want at least one good idea from my book, here it is:

Tell the corporate-Chamber of Commerce "power structure" and the politicians in this community to allocate about \$40 million for a "Pyramid Project" for our black community – a Wholistic Development and Tourist Center where we could provide Afro-centric education to our students.

For this critically important project would serve, in part, as a supplemental educational center, to correct some of the "mind destruction" or mis-education that has occurred for nearly 400 years and is ongoing within CMS....

It is nothing less than outrageous that CMS does not provide either its teachers or students with any measurable degree of African American history and culture – although about 47 percent of its students are black.

And clearly, white parents would initiate a violent revolution or dismiss the superintendent if they were placed in a similar situation.

Indeed, our proposed "Pyramid Project" would also address a related, very serious problem – scholarly documented low self-esteem among black students – that Dr. Eric Smith, by public admission, has conceded that he does not know how to address....

I encourage the Swann Fellowship to take a very close

look at CMS data, as reflected in their annual CMS profiles, and to talk to some Afro-centric black folks... both within and beyond CMS. Hopefully, then, you and your organization would derive a new sense of mission, with a strong focus on many destructive aspects of this school system, including a Euro-centric curriculum; "tracking" ... or malassignment of black students to dead-end "academic" categories (BEH, etc.); disproportionate punishment of blacks; the predominance of white teachers; and all teachers who have received no education of African American heritage-culture; the potential misuse of Ritalin or other dangerous drugs on students whose problems, mainly, are traceable to inadequate nutrition and poverty-broken families, etc., etc., ad nauseum.



Foluke

Development community has role

The writer is a former member of the Student Assignment Oversight Committee.

By NANCY PIERCE SHAVER

While I adamantly do not want to see our schools segregated by race or income, I think we have to move past using the court system to achieve our ends.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg, with the leadership of Dr. Smith, Mr. Griffin, the board and many others, can be unique in America by providing a good education to all children in each one of its schools.

But this will take out-of-the box thinking not only from CMS, but also the development and real estate community. The latter MUST stop talking to newcomers about "low-performing schools"

and other such garbage.

We must be courageous enough to admit that we assign an inordinate amount of chronically low-performing students to certain schools as rising 6th and rising 9th graders, then we have the gall to blame the teachers and resources of these so-called "low-performing schools" when the students continue to show low performance.

We need to convince people that bright kids can be challenged at every school in the system. We need to ignore the whining of those who don't want anyone outside of "their" neighborhoods to attend "their" schools. All the schools are for everyone.

The choice plan is the most intelligent way to begin achieving equity. Let's get on with it.



Shaver

Parents are the key; focus on them

By ANN AITKEN

Your message makes the assumption that the schools will be “resegregated.” How do you think that will happen? What forces can you identify in our new school assignment plan which are pushing “resegregation”?

The old cases tend to make a distinction between the treatment of “black” and “white” children. However, the faster-growing groups in our system now are Hispanic and Asian.

I believe that to maintain a viable school system... we need to consider a much broader view of the groups we select for particular needs and opportunities.

Parents are the key.

We (and I am one) tutor for free (both our own children and others), give supplies and money to fill in budget shortages, provide free administrative help, lobby for the best principals and teachers for our particular school, lead extracurricular activities and on and on. Smart parents and teachers and principals know this.

Why doesn't our school system have a way for parents to participate formally in the system? Although parent views are informally accepted, no decision-maker at any level in our system is required to pay any attention to parents at all.

In my view one of the interesting results of “no parent input” this particular year is the existence of half-empty schools that clearly do not and have not met the requirements of the parents whose children are assigned there.

Now that parents are to choose schools appropriate for our children, we are doing just that. Empty schools show clearly that someone is not listening to the needs of the parents in those schools.

As my son says, “DUH.”

People of faith need to organize

The writer is a member of the school board.

By LOUISE WOODS

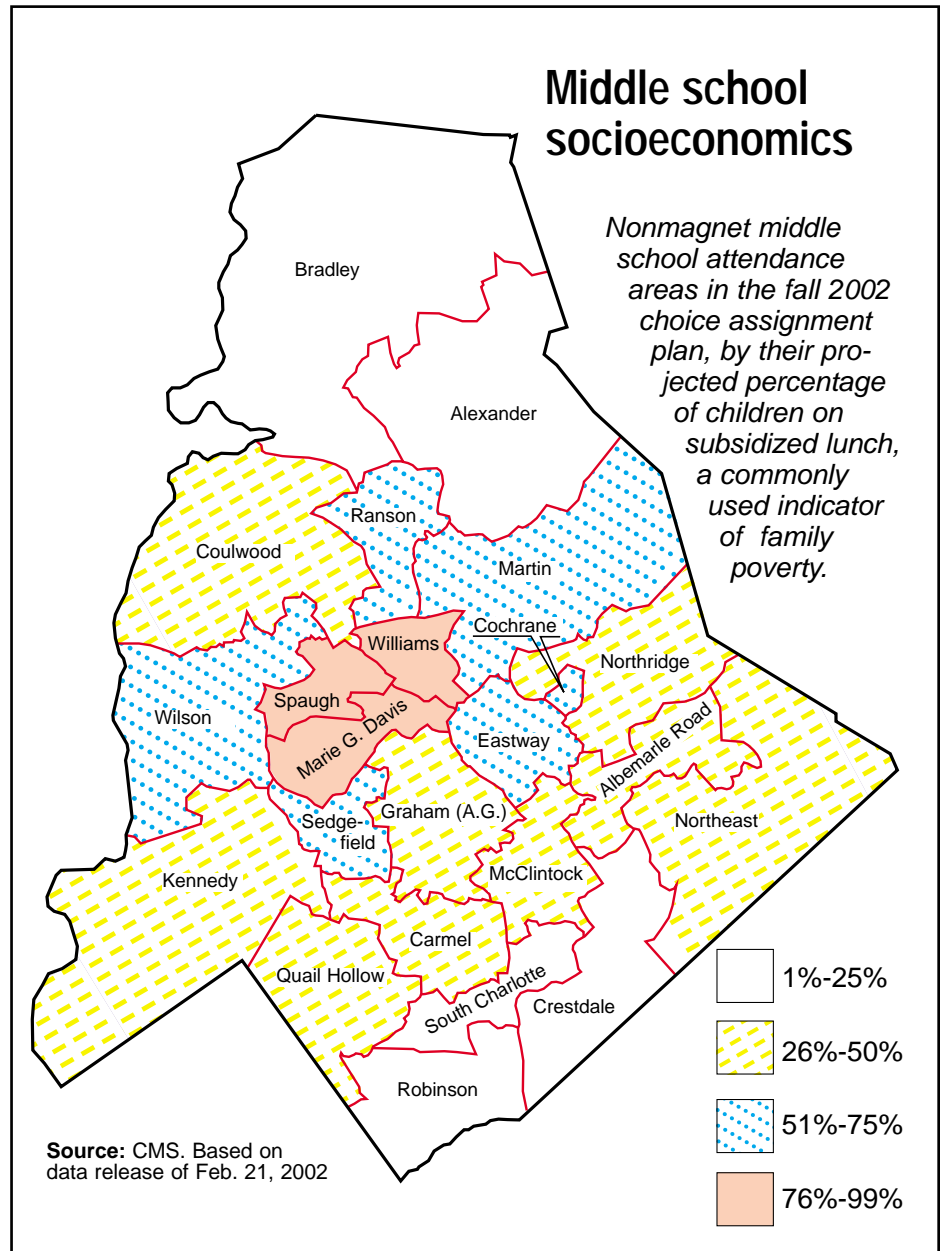
I believe we need to consider this time as critical to education in our community as it was 30 years ago – equally in need of volunteers to make our schools work.

Where is the public response from those who know the challenges ahead? Will we rally to make our schools work, or only become critics?

Also, this is the time for those

who support diversity not just through words, but by sending their children to diverse schools, to speak up. Can we create a cultural change, or will active parents continue to avoid schools with significant numbers of children of poverty and minority students?...

I feel passionately that people of faith need to organize around that awesome task that we know is facing us....



Our shared job is to serve every student, every school

The writer is chairman of the Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners.

By PARKS HELMS

The United States Supreme Court, in refusing to hear the appeal in *Swann vs. Board of Education*, has effectively ended more than 30 years of busing to promote an integrated school system in Mecklenburg County. Some will contend that this has been a “failed social experiment.” I believe the efforts to integrate our schools, and the resulting integration of our society in general, has been a major force in defining and shaping Charlotte and Mecklenburg County into the prosperous, healthy and vibrant community we know today.

The end of court-ordered busing presents a new and demanding challenge for those who value education as a cornerstone of a free and independent, yet interconnected society. Citizens and policymakers need to heed the lessons we have learned over the last three decades.

The plaintiffs in the *Cappachione* case have succeeded in removing court supervision from the operation of our school system and ending busing as a means of providing an integrated system. Neighborhood schools are now a reality.

However, our neighborhoods are not equal. The U.S. Supreme Court has long held that “separate” is not “equal,” and declaring unitary status for Charlotte-Mecklenburg does not change that fact.

The quality and effectiveness of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system will be measured by the quality and effectiveness of each school. And to the extent that excellent educational opportunities are not available to students in poorer neighborhoods, the quality of life will diminish in every neighborhood.

The implications of education

reach far beyond the classroom – affecting the health of our economy, the strength of our society and the ability of individuals to live lives of value and purpose.

This fundamental change in pupil assignment brings with it cost and responsibility – fiscal and personal costs, and moral and ethical responsibilities. The highest court in the land has expressed confidence that this community is equal to the task. We are compelled to accept our collective responsibility to leave no school and no student shortchanged.

We also must acknowledge that equity does not mean treating all students the same. In fact, true equity means treating each student differently – because each comes to the classroom with different abilities, different struggles, different backgrounds, different gifts and different needs. Equity in education is less about per-pupil dollars and more about enabling students to reach their full potential as human beings.



Helms

So we must commit to educating all of our children equitably. This commitment must extend to “at-risk” children, including those at the pre-kindergarten level. It must also extend to those who are losing hope and dropping out. It must extend to those who have unusual talents in the fine arts or academics.

Finally, developing and sustaining a successful public school system will not be accomplished by continually increasing funding for school operations and capital improvements. This is a time for Charlotte-Mecklenburg to take advantage of the creative energy and ingenuity that has marked our progress thus far. The court’s ruling should encourage educational professionals and public policy makers at the state and local levels to design a more focused, efficient and effective system for delivering quality educational services to an increasingly diverse and disparate student population. Anything less will be a rejection of the worth and dignity and potential of every child of a loving and compassionate God.

We fought for the right to choose

By WANDA BUTLER

From a period of our history in the '60s and '70s we the parents went through the same thing. We were forced away from our neighborhood schools to be bused across town. This was all to fill some quota to desegregate a school across town.

We the parents of today’s children fought so our children would get a better education.... Now you are telling us and our children that we cannot choose to have a better education....

Now, they are saying let’s go back and relive those years. If we have learned anything, it should

be not to repeat that part of our history.

If we fought for the right to live where we want, to eat where we want, drive the type of automobile we want, then why can’t we choose the education programs we want for our children?

If a school in my neighborhood doesn’t provide the educational programs I wish or my children wish, I should have the right to take or send them to a school that has those programs.

We fought to have the right to choose, so why throw it away by reverting back and starting over in the '60s?

Implement the lessons we've learned from this history

The writer is a former member of several CMS citizen committees on student assignment and a District 4 candidate for school board in 2001.

By **JULIAN H. WRIGHT Jr.**

I fear your rhetorical questions reflect Educate!'s bias. "Will we regret resegregating our schools?"?! There are those of us in the community who still dare to hope we can avoid doing so.

Those interested in moving CMS forward have the great advantages – should they choose to embrace them – of standing on the shoulders of giants and enjoying the progress in our community that 30 years of mandatory integration in our schools has brought

about.

I hope and pray that such progress will not be fleeting and that the work of giants will not have been in vain. Instead of mourning the loss of court supervision of our school system, we need to embrace the opportunity we have to implement the lessons integration has helped teach: that change, though frightening, can be good; that all children can succeed when given the right chance; that people learn from one another's differences when education helps move them beyond fearing one another's dif-



Wright

ferences; and that our community rises or falls as a community, not as a bunch of squabbling special interest groups.

Granted, if we fail to learn from our past then perhaps your dire, foregone conclusion of resegregating our schools will come shamefully, regrettably true. For the sake of our children and our community's overall health and prosperity, I hope and pray – and will continue to work – for a much different future, one in which we wean ourselves from dependence on a court order and actually implement the lessons we should have been learning from this significant chapter in our community's history.

What Humpty Dumpty needs is us

The writer is a music educator and author who has volunteered in CMS schools for decades.

By **THOMAS MOORE**

Some in our community have searched for ways to take us back to a time when schools were separate and unequal. In order to accomplish this, the courts renamed the practice of unequal distribution:



Moore

We are now a unitary system.

Because we are unitary, we are fair in our delivery of educational services to our children.

Tomorrow's adults will have to face what we didn't do today. Tomorrow, the adults will recognize the unequal distribution.

Tomorrow, the truth will provide this community with tools to put the pieces together again.

I experienced the effects of unequal educational distribution. I know what it looks like.

Most parents of economically advantaged children recognize the

personal and direct advantages their children will receive under the new court order. They do not see the disadvantages. They do not recognize the dangers. Well, I do.

It is difficult to fix the Humpty Dumpty School System when the community gives up on the process.

Choice is good, if all have access

The writer is a retired minister and has been active in Senior Democrats.

By **JEAN A. FEILER**

For me and for all who care about equity and quality in education, we must now be vigilant in demanding quality teaching in all schools and that schools continue to be upgraded.

Every student must have access to opportunities which give their lives meaning and prepare them for adulthood. Choice can be

good... but only if everyone has access to it.

I rejoice in the decision of Dr. Smith to remain in Charlotte. I look now to the school board to work with him and with the county to do for CMS what can and must be done.

I cannot agree with school board member Larry Gauvreau that the school budget must be cut. I do, however, promote a careful monitoring of expenditures to assure the best for the most.

Help HELP's audit

The writer helped create the open schools in the early 1970s.

By **JAN VALDER OFFERMAN**

HELP (Helping Empower Local People) has its big meeting on April 21st. I understand the action being prepared for is an audit of the schools.

It seems to me to get as many people as possible there to help with this audit and to show interest in the inequity of the schools would be a good move now.

4 paths toward equitable outcomes

The writer is a former member of several CMS citizen committees on student assignment.

By STONEY SELLARS

1. Engage and galvanize the community to support true “equity” as defined in the Committee of 33 (Community Advisory Task Force) recommendations.

2. Develop Academic Assistance Centers in the at-risk neighborhoods with high levels of low-achieving students. (This involves leveraging existing resources such as local church tutoring programs, neighborhood resource centers, etc. and ensuring that they have the appropriate resources to increase the number of children served or the quality of the program.)

3. Actively monitoring and “motivating” our school board, school administration, business community, and community at-large to assure that the choice assignment program adheres to previously documented goals (e.g., facilities, resources, teacher assignments, etc.) for those students/schools that are considered low-achieving or “equity need” schools.

4. Continually and consistently reporting the results of student performance instead of waiting for end-of-grade reports or standardized test reports. This would involve a request to CMS to provide monthly or grading period updates on student achievement levels.

Busing wasted kids' time, and our money

By EVERETTE PASSALAY

Busing has been a waste of time and money.

I believe that the schools should have the same access to the school money and that all students should go to the school closest to their homes.

We wasted students' time by making them ride buses to schools that were one hour or more from their homes.

The black students bore the brunt of the busing and this should never happen again.

Desegregation goal was what, precisely?

The writer, an economics professor at UNC Chapel Hill, was the lead researcher on a state study on how to boost minority enrollment in advanced classes.

By SANDY DARITY

So now we are back to determining how to produce quality education for black kids under essentially separate schools.

But wasn't the big issue really quality schooling regardless of the racial composition of the schools?

PTAs can make all the difference

The writer, a native, attended Briarwood Elementary and has a child at Oakhurst, a magnet.

By HEATHER PIERCE SMITH

We are not resegregating the schools. I am happy about the court's decision to drop the whole thing. It has gone on entirely too long. Court battles have done little to help schools anyway. It is just a lot of wasted time, money and effort.

I agree that the schools in Charlotte are not what they ought to be and I agree that there are huge injustices within the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system. These injustices must be handled on a grassroots level by getting the parents involved, not by taking it to court.

The main reason that many high-income schools have more quality isn't because of public funding. If it were left to public funding, all of our schools would be horrible. It is because they have wealthy PTAs that the high-income schools do better. They generally have more involved par-

ents as well.

But to say that we are re-segregating the schools is ridiculous. Segregation has in fact ended.

I do think that there should be some sort of push to save the neighborhood schools. They are mostly terrible schools. What can be done?

Is race war closer than we think?

The writer, a Huntersville community advocate, is a retired CMS secretary.

By BEE JAY CALDWELL

I was disappointed with the news, but kinda expected it. Remember, this is the same body that selected Bush as president of these United States.

Today is a new day in education in Mecklenburg County because the majority of the people in the area are transplants who have no idea of the past history of Mecklenburg County.

The new folks don't care about the history; they were not here to experience it. They want what they want, and that is a school and neighborhood as white as possible. They could not have this at their former homes, but, by God, they found it here and want to keep it that way.

Since Sept. 11, people are more racist. Many issues are labeled “black” or “white.” And this spells trouble for white and black folks. A race war may be closer than we think.

Affordable housing part of solution

The writer is a founding board member of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Housing Partnership.

By TED FILLETTE

Although this [ruling] should not be a surprise, it adds the tone of finality – sort of like the dying of a loved one who was terminally ill. When it is truly over, you have to look at what the next lives are and how to make the best of them.

Perhaps now the community can begin to narrow the focus. Initially, it will probably be necessary to see what types of statistics come out of the resegregated, all-poverty schools before there is enough interest in reshaping the system.

I expect that there are two main paths to take, and it is probable that we need to pursue them both in order to have any substantial impact.

One is to consider having a new super criterion for redistributing students within the whole system:

economic status, as it has been linked to performance.

Somehow, this criterion would need to be a gloss over all school assignments, so that all schools receive some minimum number of economically/academically challenged students and all schools need to avoid having more than a certain, overwhelming percentage of their populations meet that criterion.

Perhaps there are studies or other systems that have set useful guidelines in this area.

To complement this approach, I think that the city and county governments need to make dispersed affordable housing a more significant priority.

This would enable the new suburban schools to be more accessible by some economically challenged students without having to rely on excessive bus rides and other transportation schemes that defy reason and patience of parents.

Will all our hopes blossom into reality?

The writer, a UNCC faculty member, attributes the quality of her education in part to being based in Long Island, N.Y.

By MELODY DIXON-BROWN

My hope is that the new choice plan will truly give parents and students choices in their education.



Dixon-Brown

I also hope that the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school board receives adequate funding for education in the future and uses those funds to deliver truly equitable, quality education, regardless of where you choose to go to school. That is my hope.

The reality may prove to be very different – as evidenced by the recent budget cuts and arguments regarding where those funds should be used.

As the adage goes, “the more things change, the more they stay the same.”

As the adage goes, “the more things change, the more they stay the same.”

Monitor achievement by type of enrollment

The writer was active in Sharon Elementary's efforts to involve parents living far from the school-house in PTA activities.

By BETH KINNY

We should keep an eye on the scores of our minority students, comparing integrated schools with resegregated schools. And also resources, using our voice to advocate for equitable resources in the schools.

I also like the idea of possibly targeting a school and maybe working on all of us coming together and trying to augment with resources what is in that particular school serving high-poverty children.

Will words translate into dollars?

The writer is pastor of Advent Lutheran Church.

By RICHARD C. LITTLE

... Now it is up to the wisdom and good will of this community to make certain that the race of the student does not affect her/his education. Given the fact that racism is still operative here in Charlotte, that will be a real challenge.

Do we have the relationships between/among the races here that we can get funding to make sure equity is achieved?

Are we aware of the dynamics that cause African American chil-

dren to lag behind?

I believe we have a lot of education to do with parents (both white and black) to help them see and understand the issues.

We have the community's commitment in word – but will that translate into dollars, especially when the budget is tight at both state and county levels?

The responsibility now rests on us, the community. I think we have a lot of the plans and infrastructure in place – Dr. Smith's commitment, the school board's commitment. Now the community needs to monitor and watch what happens and see that no child suffers!



Little

Community came together in 1971; we need to again

The writer, a retired CMS teacher, principal and administrator, headed the "command post" on the first morning of busing in the '70s.

By CHRIS FOLK

In my opinion it is now time to move beyond the courts. I have been involved with the school system since 1955. That was five

Tools are available, but may not be used

The writer helped represent plaintiff Terry Belk in the just-closed case.

By LUKE LARGESS

I feel too frustrated right now to say much of value, but there are obvious tools, such as assigning students by SES or test scores or both, to make sure that no school becomes too overloaded with kids who are struggling. I don't believe the board has the courage to try that right now, as the unpopularity in the white community for integration, particularly with students seen as "ghetto" children, is pretty high.

years before consolidation of the city and county school systems. Consolidation was debated back and forth throughout those years, and it was not until 1960 that consolidation was achieved. It took about five more years for consolidation of the two systems to really take place.

That leads us to the beginning of the Swann case in 1965 which was active until 1975, when it was placed on the inactive docket.

Then in 1998 the Swann case was reactivated and was heard along with the Capacchione suit until April 15, 2002, when the highest court in the land decided not to hear the case.

Thus, since 1965 the school system has been directly or indirectly involved with the courts in regard to the desegregation of schools.

We now have an opportunity in April 2002 to do what occurred in April 1971, after the Supreme Court unanimously affirmed the decision of the District Court.

The community rallied around the schools, and thousands of volunteers pledged their support to work with the schools as tutors, hall and bus monitors, lunch pals,

etc.

It is now in the hands of the citizens of this community under the leadership of the Board of Education to provide the best possible education for all of our students without the courts looking over our shoulder.

When you look back and consider that 90 percent of the entire African-American population lived in 9% of the geographical area of the county in 1970, certainly today we have much more desegregation of our neighborhoods, which carries over to the desegregation of our schools.

Also, consider the emphasis on equity in our schools, and realize that when the two systems consolidated the per-pupil expenditure was \$265 compared with almost \$7,000 today.

We have an opportunity once again to show that this community believes in a strong public school system. Just as after the last time the Supreme Court spoke to the local school system, parents and citizens alike must step up and make a difference in all schools and for all students.

A NOTE TO READERS

IF YOU WOULD BE WILLING TO HOST AT YOUR HOME
A GROUP OF PEOPLE FROM YOUR ZIP CODE
IN THE NEXT 10 DAYS AT A TIME OF YOUR CHOOSING
TO TALK ABOUT ISSUES RAISED IN THESE PAGES
PLEASE CALL *EDUCATE!* at 704-342-4330

Briefs

Turnover rates: Teachers are leaving private schools at even higher rates than at public schools, Education Week quoted University of Pennsylvania researcher Richard Ingersoll as saying. Ingersoll's work, based on responses to a '94-'95 federal survey, showed overall public teacher turnover of 12.4% a year. It was 15.2% among teachers at schools with a large number of poor students; 18.9% at private schools; 22.8% at small private schools. www.edweek.org

Bonuses: Houston approved signing bonuses of up to \$5,000 for hard-to-find teachers and \$3,000 for regular teachers, the Chronicle reported. www.chron.com

Discipline rates: Ohio's release of school discipline data separated by ethnic groups could help districts explore fairness issues, the Cincinnati Enquirer reported. While officials said the data did not support comparisons between districts, it showed wide disparities in discipline rates between whites and blacks within districts. Examples: Finneyville, 18 actions per 100 white students, 66 per 100 for blacks; Princeton, 26 per 100 for whites, 130 per 100 for blacks; Warren County, 6.5 and 4.6; Cincinnati, 60 and 140. <http://enquirer.com>

Applied learning: Inner-city West Philadelphia High's vocational automotive academy has bested area magnet schools in a design competition for alternative fuel vehicles, wired.com reported. Teachers say the kids' desire to solve design issues motivated them to improve their math and science skills, "with substantial results" in class achievement. www.wired.com

Shut down: As a last resort to

end low performance, three Chicago schools will close, one permanently, two to be reconstituted, the Chicago Tribune reported. The three, all elementaries, had 13%, 14.1% and 12.9% of their students at norm on Illinois' reading test. January's federal education legislation mandates similar interventions after schools for five years fail to make annual progress with all student groups. www.chicagotribune.com

Prom suit: A gay teen planned to sue in Toronto to be allowed to take his boyfriend to his high school prom, the National Post reported. The case would test Catholic schools' rights under Ontario's Education Act, which funds Catholic schools but bars discrimination based on sexual orientation. www.nationalpost.com

School size: Minnesota researchers declared the ideal size for middle and high schools to be 600 to 1,200 students, the Los Angeles Times reported. Smaller schools can't support a variety of courses; bigger ones have social problems. (This fall,

33% of CMS middle schools may be out of that range, 6 of 27 being bigger, 3 smaller; 14 or 82% of CMS's 17 high schools may be bigger than 1,200, with seven having 2,000 or more students.) www.latimes.com

Achievement goals: Supt. Kenneth Burnley's goals for Detroit schools are to have all first- through 10th-graders on grade level in math, reading and science, the Detroit News reported. Elementary and middle schools have seven years, high schools nine years to meet the goals. (CMS's 2005 goals are to have 95% of third-, fifth- and eighth-graders on grade level in reading and math.) www.detnews.com

Case closed: On the same day the Supreme Court effectively closed the Charlotte desegregation case, a federal judge accepted a settlement and closed a similar case in Dayton, Ohio, the Plain Dealer reported. Dayton's 21,000-student system, the last district in Ohio under court order, had been under order since 1976. www.cleveland.com

Calendar

April

- 22** 10th annual UNCC environmental celebration marking Earth Day. School groups welcome. Free. 10 a.m.-2:30 p.m., Belk Tower quad.
- 23** School board meeting, 6 p.m., board room.

May

- 4** District 6 meeting, Matthews Presbyterian Hospital.
- 9** Curriculum Committee, 9:30 a.m., board conference room.
- 14** School board meeting, 6 p.m., board room.

16 Finance, Capital & Facilities

Committee, 4 p.m., Room 414.

18 Jump Start For Parents, UNCC Cone Center, 10 a.m.- 2 p.m., sponsored by Winners Plus Agency. Topics include father's corner, parents speaking out, suspension, family resources, CMS EC programs and services, testing, working with your children's teacher, how to volunteer. Information: Blanche Penn 704-890-4101.

20 School board breakfast with legislators, 7:30 a.m., board room.

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

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