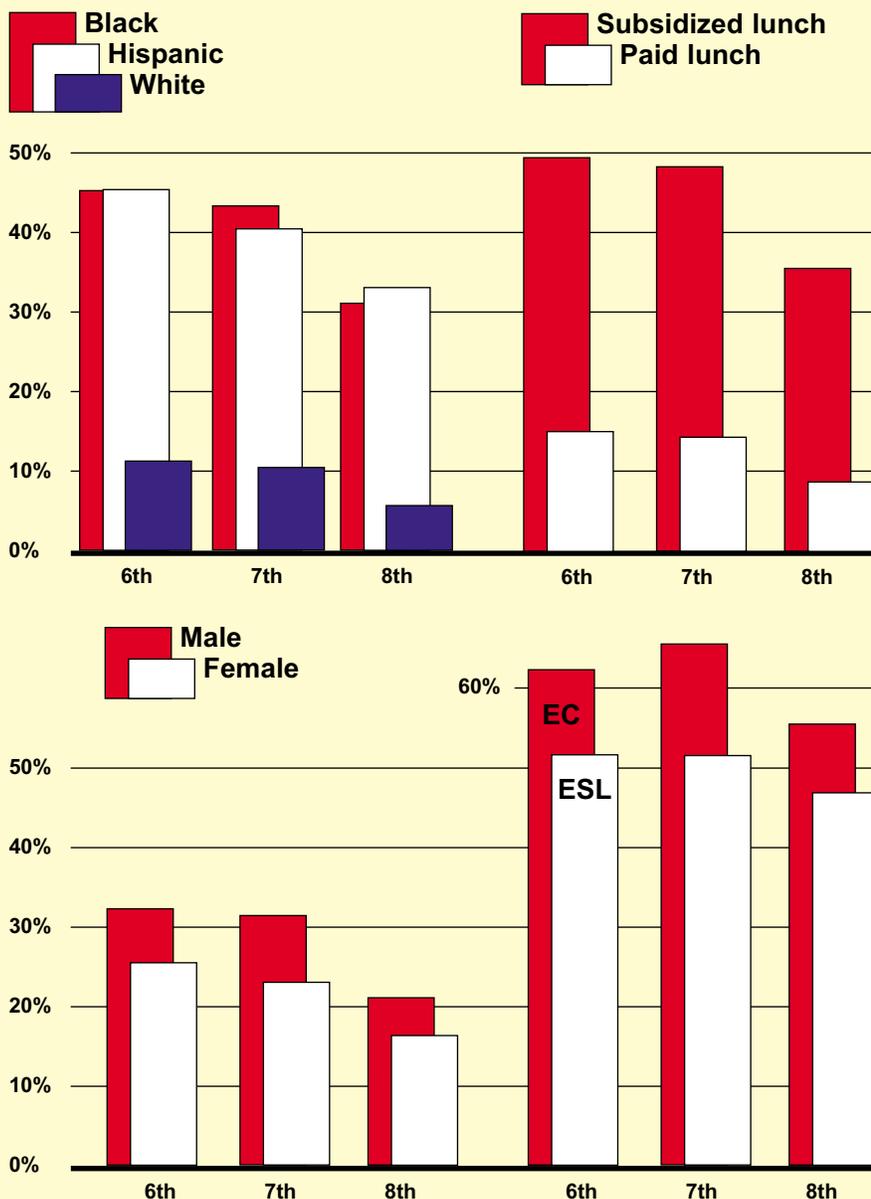


Below-grade readers in middle school

Percentage of CMS middle school students reading below grade level as tested last spring on state end-of-grade tests, by group:



Officials pondered the grim data above: Progress is being made from 6th to 8th grade, but thousands of middle schoolers aren't reading well. And the 2005 goal is that no 8th-grade bar above be taller than 5%.

"It was clear again that we were not making the gains we

need to make," assistant superintendent Terri Mazingo told the school board last week.

To make those gains, CMS last week put in place a "charter" or work plan to link practices already under way with a tighter assessment effort. The

Continued on Page 4

A Big 9th

Tougher promotion rules may be tripping up kids, causing 9th-grade bulge

The Class of 2006, today's ninth-graders, has grown 29% from last year when the students were in eighth grade.

It's a class that's now 23% larger than the class behind it, as shown in the bars at right.

Is this the effect of new residents?

Or the arrival in public school of students from home schools and private institutions without upper grades?

CMS officials point to a far more ominous problem: retentions.

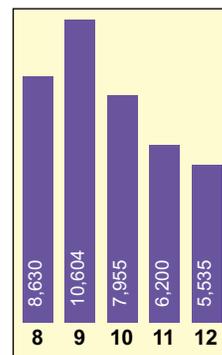
"The criteria for a 9th-grader being promoted to 10th are higher this year than in the past," said John Fries, CMS executive regional superintendent.

Fries, paraphrasing a CMS compilation of promotion standards, said:

"Effective with the 2001-2002 school year, to be designated as a 10th-grade student, a student must have earned a D or above and completed six units of credit in courses which include English, a math course, and four other units of credit."

"I have the feeling that this is what caught some of the kids," Fries said.

"Traditionally, we moved them on a little bit more and then allowed them to make up some of those units." But the days of



Continued on Page 3

Raleigh series looks at black parent school participation

In a rare look by a daily newspaper at a school issue through a racial lens, the News and Observer in Raleigh Sunday and Monday presented a series on black parents' participation in their children's schools. Two excerpts:

—
 “Last May, as the school year neared an end, [teacher Debbie Pethel] stood before a group of seventh-grade students who had failed the state math exam....

“She was surprised at first to see that all the students were girls. Even though she expected many to be minority students, she was also surprised to see that all the girls were black. But she wasn't the least surprised at something only a teacher would know.

“These were the kids whose parents I never saw,” she said. “They were the ones who didn't sign the papers that went home or return phone calls. They were the ones who didn't send things in

when asked.’

“She paused briefly before making one last point.

“I know they weren't all poor'....

—
 “Preyer Distinguished Professor at the UNC-CH School of Social Work Oscar Barbarin... found that regardless of family income, black parents placed less importance than other ethnic groups on the ability of their children to master letters and numbers in preschool. Such skills are important, the parents said, but it mattered more to them that their children find the classroom friendly and accepting.

“There appears to be more of a belief among black parents that once their child acclimates to the classroom, they can catch up quickly if they are behind,” Barbarin said.

“The children in the study did catch up on the simplest of skills such as recognizing numbers or sounding out letters one at a

time. But by the end of kindergarten, a clear gap emerged along lines of race when the children were asked to add, subtract or identify the sound of a letter at the end of a word — skills that mark a child's readiness to tackle first-grade challenges.

“The research doesn't tell us if those differences were the result of something the parents did, something the teachers did or a bit of both,” Barbarin said. “But you can see the children arrived with a small deficit that grew noticeably larger by the end of the year.”

The full series can be read at www.newsobserver.com

Educate! is 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.

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What to cover during parent conference

In the October issue of Teachers.net Magazine, Barbara and Sue Gruber list things parents and teachers ought to expect to cover in a parent conference:

- “Let parents know:
 - “If their children are attentive during lessons.
 - “Where their children stand academically.
 - “Areas where their children excel.

- “Areas where their children experience difficulties.

- “Let parents know specific ways they can provide help in areas where children are having difficulty.

- “How well their children get along with classmates.

- “How long homework should normally take.”

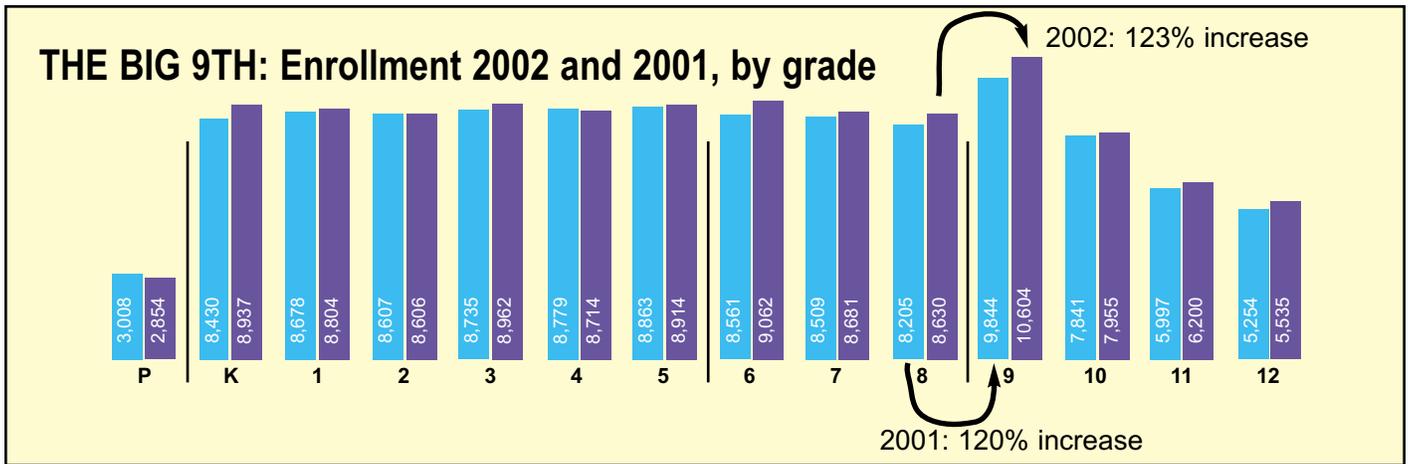
The Grubers added, “Allow time for parents to ask questions.”

Underwrite an edition of *Educate!*

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

The Educate!ors

Our thanks to Stephanie Cole and Andrea Huff for proofreading assistance with last week's school enrollment edition.



Retention may play role in big 9th grade

Continued from Page 1

social promotion are over.

As one high school principal adds, students “are being held accountable at a different level” from what they were accustomed to in middle school.

Another factor: End-of-course tests now count 25% of a grade. A student with a low grade coming into the test who fails the test will likely fail the course, with no recourse but to take the course again. This is what critics call a “high-stakes” test.

Historically, CMS retention rates at 9th grade have been high, as noted in the chart at right. If the entire bulge in the ninth grade this year were from retentions, the retention rate last spring would have been 25%, as it was in 1998-99. But new students no doubt account for part of the bulge this year.

While CMS officials pointed to retention rates, they were unable to provide data to back up the assertion. What portion of this fall’s ninth-graders are new to the county? What portion moved to CMS from home schools or other schools? What portion were ninth-

graders last spring who were retained for one reason or another? By Wednesday evening, there were no answers to an line of inquiry that began last Friday.

Traditionally, nonpromotion has been heaviest at 9th grade statewide. In 2001, for example, 14.6% of retentions were in 9th. A decade ago, retentions were heaviest at ninth, then 10th, 11th and first grades.

But Southern Regional Education Board official Tom Bradbury, who closely followed CMS when he worked at the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Education Foundation, says retentions regionally are rising at lower grades.

The reasons, he said, “could be no-social-promotion policies in third grade, or an understanding that if we retain this kid in kindergarten maybe we can do something with him because if we wait until ninth grade there is no hope.”

A study by the SREB in 2001 said, “Repeating a grade is particularly ineffective for students who struggle with reading.” It notes that social promotion also leaves students behind their peers. The report suggests that the best answer is the time-tested but expensive solution: one-on-one attention.

Reducing retentions at 9th grade – not by calling them another name but by assuring that ninth-graders are on grade level in all coursework – is a vital

public policy goal because of the high probability that this year’s ninth-grade retentions will be next year’s dropouts. And next year’s dropouts tend to be tomorrow’s inmates.

—
Excerpts from CMS policies for promotion to the listed grade:

10 Effective with the 2001-2002 school year, to be designated as a tenth grade student, a student must have earned a grade of 70 (“D”) or above and completed six (6) units of credit in courses which must include English I, a mathematics course, and four other units of credit.

11 Effective with the 2001-2002 school year, to be designated as an eleventh grade student, a student must have earned a grade of 70 (“D”) or above and completed twelve (12) units of credit in courses which must include English I and II, two math courses (one of which must be Algebra I/II), and eight other units of credit.

12 For the 2000-2001 and 2001-2002 school years, in order to be designated as a twelfth grade student, a student must have earned a grade of 70 (“D”) or above and completed twelve (12) units of credit in courses which must include English I, II, and III, two units of mathematics, two units of science, two units of social studies, and three other units which include .5 unit of health/physical education.

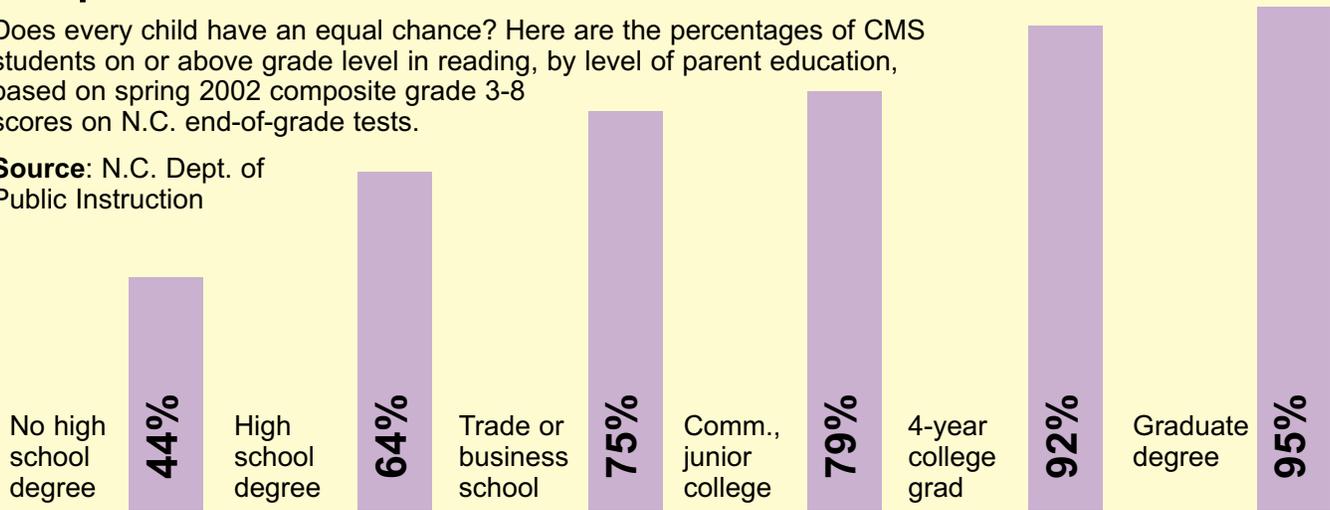
	CMS 9th	
	Not promoted	Pct.
'98	1,668	23.6
'99	2,034	25.9
'00	1,798	21.7
'01	1,531	17.8

Source: N.C. Statistical Profile

The parent education effect

Does every child have an equal chance? Here are the percentages of CMS students on or above grade level in reading, by level of parent education, based on spring 2002 composite grade 3-8 scores on N.C. end-of-grade tests.

Source: N.C. Dept. of Public Instruction



Middle grades work program laid out

Continued from Page 1

lengthy document doesn't itself change students' routines. But it gives evidence of more staff training, and more close supervision by curriculum and instruction support staff. It also puts in place timetables for completion of the work guides and assessment tools that teachers use to be sure that what North Carolina says should be taught is actually learned.

"Progress doesn't happen by accident," board member Lee Kindberg said after the staff presentation of the charter. "It's the result of careful planning and then working that plan."

Referring to the charter, she added, "This thing took my breath away.... This tells us how we're going to do it and how we're going to measure it and how we're going to be sure we're doing it in every school...."

Mozingo told the board that the staff is focused on meeting the needs of students who learn differently; sustaining progress already made; closing the achievement gaps that graphs on page 1 illustrate; and pushing high-achieving students ahead.

For students who are behind in reading, there will continue to be 90-minute reading lessons. There will be more mini-assessments at the end of each block of material. There will be full-blown assessment tests at the end of each quarter, and those results will be carefully reviewed downtown.

Reading programs, tutorials, extended day programs and summer school are some of the tools being used to bring all children up to grade level.

The charter represents "a commitment to flawless execution and collaborative inquiry at all levels,

district and school," said Louis Layne, regional superintendent for east-area middle schools. "No child, no school left behind is our commitment to excellence, equity and beyond."

The schools are attempting to overcome the implications of the chart on this page. That chart suggests that inadequately educated children are bequeathing to their children the very handicap with which they must contend.

Every victory with a child today offers hope of breaking that cycle tomorrow.

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.

Educate!: By e-mail: SwannFello@aol.com; by fax: 704-342-4550; by mail: 1510 E. 7th St. Charlotte, NC 28204-2410.

Briefs

Direct instruction: A Pacific Research Institute study says low-income California schools are seeing success with so-called direct instruction programs like Open Court that depend on heavily scripted, teacher directed learning, the San Francisco Chronicle reported. Critics call the methods "drill and kill." CMS adopted Open Court in primary grades and similar reading texts in secondary schools last school year. www.sfgate.com

Teacher prep: A Phoenix charter school will prepare high school students for public school teaching positions, the Arizona Republic reported. Students will take classes that will count both toward high school requirements and community college teacher-prep degrees. Enrollees could move from charter to community college to Arizona State in a seamless program. www.arizonarepublic.com

Bilingual: Longitudinal studies have never been launched that could settle whether or not bilingual education has value, the Denver Post reported. Less thorough studies suggest that kids who are in bilingual classrooms end up being paid less than those mainstreamed into regular classrooms. www.denverpost.com

Science teaching: The Cobb County, Ga., school board clarified its policy on teaching the origins of mankind, the Atlanta Journal reported. Teachers should ensure "neutrality toward religion" when they discuss creationism alongside evolution. The policy dispute has drawn nationwide attention to the Atlanta area system. www.accessatlanta.com

Virtual learning: Former U.S. Education Secretary William

Education pays

Average annual earnings for Americans, by level of education. Women's earnings range from 59% to 74% of men's in the same educational level.

Earnings	Men	Women
H.S. dropout	\$25,035	\$17,015
H.S. graduate	33,184	23,061
Some college	39,221	27,757
Associate degree	41,638	30,919
Bachelor's	52,985	37,993
Professional	100,000	59,904

Source: National Center for Educational Statistics, 2001, cited at www.all4ed.org

Bennett's for-profit company is helping run a Minnesota online elementary school, the St. Paul Pioneer-Press reported. About 60% of the students served by Bennett's K12 Inc. were previously being home-schooled. www.twincities.com

Arts education: The Los Angeles Arts Commission is pushing schools to boost arts instruction from 2% of budgets to 5%, the Times reported. But the county has no additional money to support the effort. www.latimes.com

Acting out: Teacher Ellen Berg's recent diary entry is about Brendan, a misbehaving sixth-grader who reads at a first-grade level. When Brendan's reading is discussed at a conference, the parent is shocked, but Brendan "looked relieved, like, 'Wow, finally I can breathe.' I just want to hug him tight and tell him we'll get past this, that by the time he leaves my classroom he'll be a better reader, that the words on the page will finally make sense to him." www.middleweb.com

Cheaper: Amid statewide interest in Florida in a public vote mandating smaller classes that would cost billions annually, state

officials are espousing teacher salary increases, which would cost only millions annually, the St. Petersburg Times reported. www.sptimes.com

College rates: Attendance at college is increasing among minorities, but their graduation rate still lags whites, the New York Times reported. An American Council on Education report also said black women are increasing their numbers in college while the number of black men in college is decreasing. Similar trends are affecting other minorities, the report said. www.nytimes.com

The Smith File: Anne Arundel County, Md., Supt. Eric Smith won the McGraw Prize for his work at CMS. But the Baltimore Sun reported that he's hit the ground running. He's established new academic goals and for closing the SAT achievement gap, and for moving the number of students who complete an Advanced Placement course from 15% to 40%. Oh yes, and he's located money to put air conditioning in all the schools. www.sunspot.com

Calendar

- 6** Latin American Festival, noon-7 p.m., Mint Museum of Art, 2730 Randolph Road. Admission \$5; children 9-12, \$3, children 8 and under free.
- 8** Board meeting, 6 p.m., Board Room.
- 15** Bond Oversight Committee, 7:30 p.m., Building Services.

Board lunch with commissioners, city council, noon, Room 267, Government Center.

Personnel/Policy Committee, 3 p.m., Board Conference Room.