

Coming Sunday: A budget primer

Charlotte Advocates for Education will distribute in Mecklenburg copies of Sunday's Observer a guide to reading the CMS budget. The 30-page brochure covers the basics on sources of funding, and expenses both for operations and capital projects. It also contains information on how CMS and state data can be used to ensure accountability.

The peril in non-crisis

No layoffs or big losses in budget cuts of about 2%; but revenue is unequal to tasks demanded by public

On Supt. Jim Pughsley's recommendation, the CMS school board removed \$16.3 million, or about 2% of its budget Tuesday night to account for state and county cuts. For this year, "we'll be fine," said Pughsley after a long meeting.

But eight hours later, facing business executives Wednesday morning, he portrayed the situation this way:

"The cuts will impact our instructional program. They will impact our equity programs.

"We have a good foundation in terms of achievement, but we won't be able to continue that progress...."

And changing demographics are raising costs, he added. "The children we are getting will be more expensive to educate."

Details of the cuts made Tuesday are lower in this story. No layoffs are contemplated. A net 30 classroom teaching jobs have been eliminated, about the number not filled when school opened. Maintenance worth \$2.5 million

will be put off.

But the knife could have cut deeper. About \$4.3 million in one-time monies was shifted, nearly all of it for employees or training. Next year, cuts could hurt more.

The business execs, meeting as the Education Budget Advisory Committee, believe CMS must make its budget documents both easier to understand and more detailed if it is to win county support for future budget increases.

But they also have explored in some detail "the trip not yet taken" – what it will cost to bring all children to grade level. One estimate: A budget that Pughsley says is at about \$7,200 per student has a rising number of kids whose education costs \$10,000.

Committee member Deborah Ware said taxpayers "don't have a clue about the critical issues" because what they read and hear about is celebrations of small increases in test scores. "That ends up translating into, 'What do

Continued on Page 3

Ministers' group at crossroads on aiding schools

Since January, an ecumenical and multiracial group of ministers has been talking about how to support the public schools. They took the name Committed 13 from their initial roster, but attendance has varied since then. In this letter to his colleagues last week, Advent Lutheran pastor Richard Little issued a call to broaden participation, and to take the group beyond talk:

As I have tried this past week to put together a summary of our Sept. 26 meeting, I am floundering and finding that I just don't have a clear vision for where this is going.

I feel a deep need for clergy to provide leadership in ways more than as individual leaders in our congregations, but I'm finding it difficult to get a handle on it. Either it is TOO BIG for us to

grasp or the dream of a variety of clergy coming together and seeking consensus is just that – a dream – in a context where all of us don't need another "meeting" no matter how important the issue.

[Presbyterian Church official Rev.] James Thomas said he would like to see us continue to meet at least until the end of the

Continued on Page 7

Research advice: Mamas, talk to your babies

In "Inequality at the Starting Gate" published by the Economic Policy Institute, University of Michigan writers Valerie Lee and David Burkam use a federal database on kindergartners to argue two points: that low-income children bring fewer skills to school. And that, for most of them, the schools they attend have the fewest resources.

"There are many factors preventing education from serving this role as 'the great equalizer,' according to an executive summary. "Schools serving low-income students receive fewer resources, face greater difficulties attracting qualified teachers, face many more challenges in addressing student's needs, and receive less support from parents...."

CMS's Bright Beginnings program for 4-year-olds is designed to break these patterns.

The book argues that "it is unreasonable to expect schools to completely eliminate any large pre-existing inequalities soon after children first enter the education system, especially if those schools are under-funded and over-challenged."

The following excerpt is from the book's introduction:

"A few carefully designed studies have focused on very young children's development of language skills (e.g., Hart and Risley 1995; Huttenlocher, Haight, Bryk, and Seltzer 1991). Such studies often require repeated and regular observations in children's homes to investigate family dynamics that are associated with infants' and toddlers' vocabulary development.

"These studies demonstrate quite conclusively that mothers' speech (its frequency, elaboration,

and verbal interchanges with children) is closely linked to young children's vocabulary development. Moreover, early vocabulary development is strongly associated with later school performance.

"One study, in which researchers observed mother-child interactions every month for the first two years of children's lives, concluded that the elaboration of mothers' language interactions with their young children was strongly differentiated by social class (Hart and Risley 1995).

"Moreover, socially linked language development observed in very young children was found to be quite stable throughout elementary school (i.e., schooling did not ameliorate these socially based language differences developed in infancy)."

—
More info is at www.epinet.org

Public must keep CMS accountable

The writer, an ex-school board member, directs the Children's Scholarship Fund - Charlotte.

While we may not agree on everything, we do agree that we must make educators responsible. Your article on middle school achievement is good (*Educate!*, Oct. 10); now the public must make the system accountable.

CMS is doing better than others! It is a delight for me to work with many families – the majority are minority – and give them an option of another education provider. While we do not have the money to help all on the waiting list, we do help over 400 free and reduced lunch students in the Mecklenburg area.

I never have a parent call me who says, My child is succeeding. May I have a scholarship to go somewhere else?

We must make schools accountable! The teacher is the most

From Readers

important factor in the child's learning. Much more than a building, or equipment or even if the class is racially balanced.

I work with schools that have very little but have great teachers! There is a charter school in Miami, in one of the worse areas of town. The students get to school and take a nap before any work! Then they eat and then they study! The teachers knew what their students needed and the charter school could quickly respond! It is working. It can be done.

Keep up the good work making academic achievement the goal for every child. It has and will continue to break the cycle of poverty!

Lindalyn Kakadelis

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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Board cuts budget by a net \$16.4 million

Continued from Page 1

they need more money for?"

Said committee vice chair Geoffrey Curme, "I'm not a tax-cutter in a sheep's uniform. First and foremost we've got to stand before those who can write checks and talk about the efficiencies... to get more. We've got to tell the story and tell the story and tell the story."

School board chair Arthur Griffin, who attended Wednesday's meeting, said that in the late '90s, when CMS was defending itself in a desegregation case, it fully disclosed its funding needs and how it was failing to meet the needs of many students, mostly those of color. The outcry then from business leaders, he said, "was, 'Don't put out this dirty laundry.'"

Some of those community leaders have now retired. A new crop of executives say they want more data before they will support additional school expenditures.

To prepare for the cuts, Pughsley froze some positions, delayed spending and held 25% of the instructional supply budgets earmarked for each school.

The state cuts come from two sources: There were statewide cuts in programs, ordered by Gov. Mike Easley or by General Assembly action. There were also cuts in the per-pupil allocation from the state, a result of CMS enrollment coming in 1,533 below the earlier projection used for state funding.

County cuts of \$10.4 million are from commissioners' decision last June not to fund the school board's full budget request.

In the list below, statewide reductions are marked (s). Reductions caused by the enrollment overprojections are marked (e). And the reductions made to cover the lower county funding level are marked (c).

Lunch on the Numbers

What do all these numbers mean? Or how about last week's enrollment numbers?

If you're confused, or if you have all the answers, join us for lunch this Friday, Oct. 11, at 12:30 p.m. Call the Fellowship at 704-342-4330 by Thursday 6 p.m. so we know the, uh, number of people to be fed. A donation to our lunch host would be appropriate. Meet us at:

Friendship Trays, 2401 Distribution St.
(off Remount Rd. near South Blvd.)

Teacher assistants (s)	\$3,556,187
Teacher assistants (e)	226,111
Assistant principals (s)	388,715
Assistant principals (c)	282,061
Classroom teachers (e)	1,320,234
Classroom materials (e)	69,990
Textbooks (e)	86,654
Vocational ed (e)	16,049
Retirement fund cut (c)	2,455,877
Central office freeze (s)	228,371
Central office freeze (c)	71,629
Class size grant offset (c)	3,260,800
Non-certified pay hike (c)	2,375,255
Furniture for growth (c)	302,000
Vehicle replacement (c)	516,191
Midwood security (c)	23,182
Polling by public info (c)	12,000
Curriculum writing (c)	16,000
Summer consultant (c)	25,000
Planning services (c)	40,000
UNCC math modules (c)	63,700
Leadership training (c)	75,000
Legal services (c)	200,000
Security services (c)	21,157
VIF contract pmts. (c)	225,000
Transportation (c)	500,000

Pughsley used \$4.3 million in one-time money to prevent the following from being cut:

Mentor pay (s)	\$650,000
Non-teacher support (s)	835,000
Staff training (s)	8,419
Regional alliance (s)	58,000
Class materials, eqpt. (s)	235,233
Teacher salaries (e)	1,781,368
Instructional support (e)	399,824
Non-instructional supp. (e)	332,156

The \$4.3 million came from two sources: \$300,000 in interest income, and \$4 million affected by an accounting change recom-

mended by a school audit:

Internal CMS services had been accounted for separately, and fund balances were kept in each account. Auditors advised collecting all balances in the general fund balance. Budget director Shiela Shirley said Tuesday night that with balances co-mingled, less needed to be kept on hand.

The "mentor pay" cut illustrates the complexity of school finance.

Pughsley told the board the state decided it would support mentor pay only for state-paid teachers. Most teacher salary money comes from the state. But part of the county supplement each year is spent for teachers. This year, the total county supplement is about \$265 million.

The state allocates teacher pay by teacher positions, based on enrollment. The county supplement is in dollars.

So CMS assigns its most expensive personnel to the state pay fund. That puts younger, less expensive teachers on the local fund, stretching the county dollars. This is strictly an accounting matter; teachers do not know from which fund they are paid.

Usually, that system works to CMS's benefit.

But with mentor pay, state cuts were bigger than they might otherwise have been because "mentor pay" recipients were in the "wrong" fund.

Promotion & retention '01-'02 at the gateways: 3rd, 5th and 8th

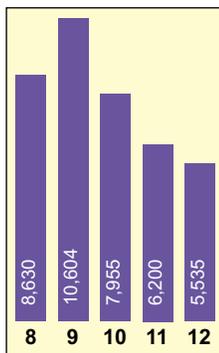
Group	3rd grade		5th grade		8th grade	
	Promoted	Retained	Promoted	Retained	Promoted	Retained
CMS	95.6%	4.4%	98.1%	1.9%	97.2%	2.8%
Black	92.5%	7.5%	97.3%	2.7%	96.2%	3.8%
Am. Indian	96.5%	3.5%	91.7%	8.3%	97.4%	2.6%
Asian	98.3%	1.7%	98.6%	1.4%	98.1%	1.9%
Hispanic	96.6%	3.4%	97.7%	2.3%	95.8%	4.2%
Multiracial	97.8%	2.2%	100%	0%	96.4%	3.6%
White	98.3%	1.7%	99.1%	0.9%	98.4%	1.7%
Female	96.1%	3.9%	98.5%	1.6%	97.9%	2.1%
Male	95.2%	4.8%	97.8%	2.2%	96.6%	3.4%
EC	94.1%	5.9%	96.4%	3.6%	94.8%	5.2%
Non-EC	95.8%	4.2%	98.4%	1.7%	97.5%	2.5%
Subsidized lunch	92.3%	7.7%	96.7%	3.3%	95.3%	4.7%
Paid lunch	98.4%	1.6%	99.3%	0.7%	98.4%	1.6%

Data source: CMS

The Big 9th: A small update

Recent CMS enrollment data disclosed an increase in the size of the 9th grade. The “bubble” is, unfortunately, an ugly tradition.

Part of the bubble may be students coming in from K-8 private or home schools. Part may be students retained from the previous year. And this year, part may be a one-time phenomenon from the choice plan.



So far, we’ve extracted one number from CMS: A total of 2,261 9th-graders were retained last year. The 2001 final number was 1,531 students.

Engin Konanc, chief consultant

for statistical research for the N.C. Department of Public Instruction, says he can’t tell whether those are comparable numbers. The 2,261 may include some youth who ultimately were promoted after summer school. The 1,531 is a final number, after summer school, and represented 17.7% of the 2000-2001 9th grade.

This fall, whether the number of retained 9th-graders was on the order of 1,531 or 2,261, does that mean retained kids made up the whole bubble? Konanc says no: Retained 9th-graders can be 16, they can drop out legally, and many regularly do so, he says.

Konanc, who has difficulties himself getting information out of CMS, suggested pressing officials for full information. He’s the guy, by the way, whose original estimate of enrollment growth for

The principal told parents at the PTA meeting she would introduce her staff and ask them to come to the front and stand. Nearly every teacher and aide was present for this first meeting of the year with parents.

As teachers and then aides came forward, the parents greeted them with applause.

But when all the staff had come to the front, nearly 40% of the adults in the room were standing.

Send us your story. For addresses, see page 2.

this fall, revised upward under CMS pressure, turns out to have been right on target.

– Steve Johnston

Reading on grade level: 3 N.C. districts compared

CMS is closing the achievement gap. But how is it doing relative to other districts? The charts below compare results on last spring's composite reading scores at or above grade level for grades 3 through 8 for the three districts.

Wake County is a big, mostly urban district. Its gains are sometimes bigger over the last two years than in CMS. And Wake

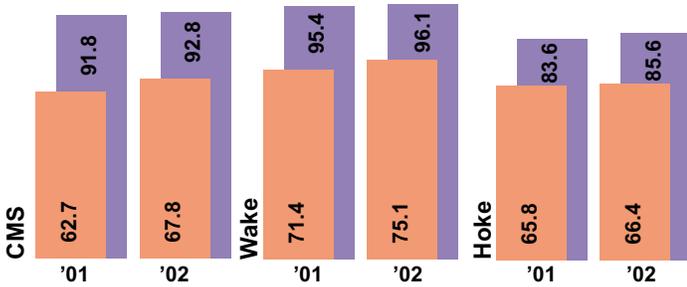
appears to be doing far better than CMS with the most challenged kids: those in poor households, and those of parents without even a high school diploma.

The other district here is Hoke, which is the key district in the *Leandro* school finance lawsuit. It's a poor county whose 6,250-student district lacks the resources of its larger neighbors.

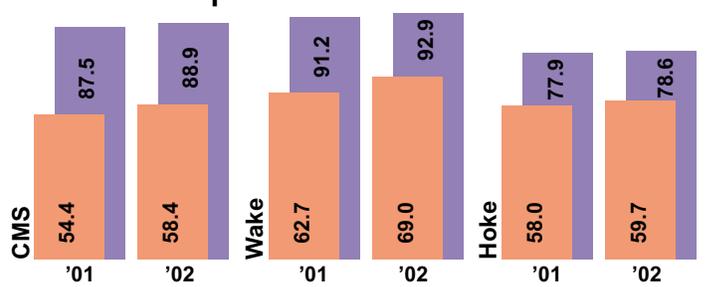
The achievement gaps are smaller in Hoke, mostly because of lower high-end scores. And some scores are falling, rather than rising as in the other two districts. But more of its poor students are on grade level than in CMS, as the judge in the *Leandro* case has noted pointedly.

Data source: N.C. DPI

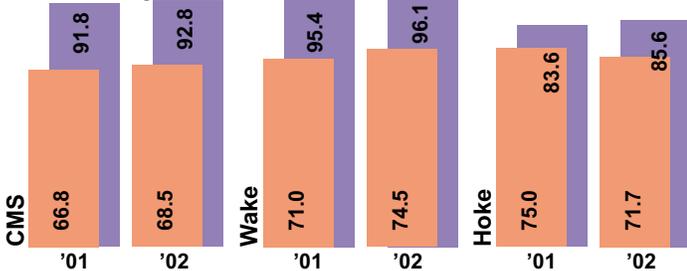
Girls: Black and white



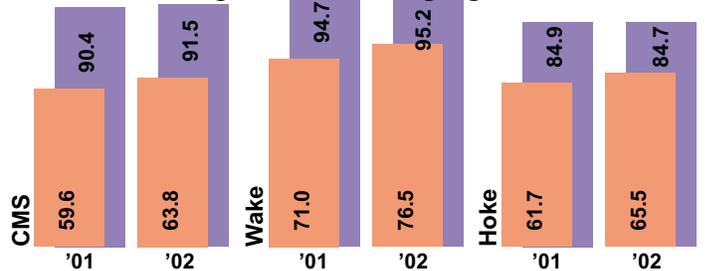
Poor and nonpoor



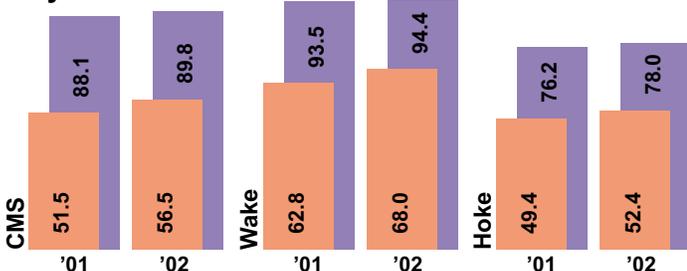
Girls: Hispanic and white



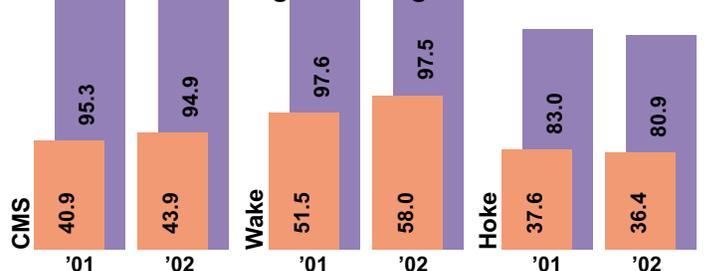
Parents: H.S. grad and college grad



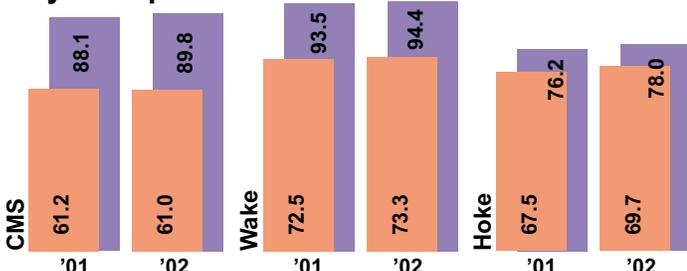
Boys: Black and white



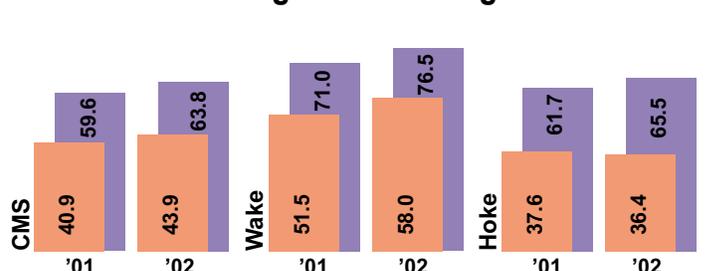
Parents: Not H.S. grad and graduate school



Boys: Hispanic and white



Parents: Not H.S. grad and H.S. grad



N.C. teacher turnover rates

Mecklenburg's teacher turnover fell to 19.3% last year, but it's still higher than in 1998-'99. It's also nearly the worst in the state, both among all districts and similar urban ones. Why? More job opportunities (scarce in the mostly mountain counties at the bottom of the list)? Local pay supplements are not a clear factor. Nor is district size. Poor students seem a factor, and turnover

Mecklenburg teacher turnover



has momentum: Systems with the most first-time teachers have the highest turnover rates.

Data source: N.C. DPI

N.C. school districts, in descending order of '01-'02 teacher turnover, split into 10 groups				County income per-capita	Median local supplement	Median number of students	Teachers with no prior experience	Students on subsidized lunch					
30.6	Hertford County	20.0	Edgecombe County	\$22,998	\$790	4,706	8.8%	65%					
24.7	Northampton County	19.8	Bladen County										
23.4	Hoke County	19.3	Mecklenburg County										
22.3	Weldon City	18.2	Thomasville City										
21.0	Person County	18.1	Jones County										
20.3	Bertie County	17.9	Lenoir County										
17.6	Alexander County	16.6	Wilson County										
17.6	Franklin County	16.4	Harnett County										
17.6	Newton-Conover City	16.2	Lexington City										
17.6	Shelby City	16.2	Alamance-Burlington										
16.7	Montgomery County	16.1	Richmond County	\$24,363	\$1,005	6,256	7.8%	46%					
16.6	Hickory City	16.1	Chatham County										
15.4	Wilkes County	14.5	Chapel Hill-Carrboro										
15.4	Lee County	14.4	Jackson County										
15.3	Washington County	14.4	Moore County										
15.2	Sampson County	14.3	Currituck County										
14.8	Elkin City	14.2	Durham County										
14.6	Onslow County	14.2	Kannapolis City										
14.2	Rockingham County	13.8	Polk County										
14.1	Cleveland County	13.8	Nash-Rocky Mount										
14.0	Rowan-Salisbury	13.6	Burke County	\$23,181	\$990	6,893	7.0%	50%					
13.9	Halifax County	13.6	Martin County										
13.9	Caswell County	13.6	Vance County										
13.9	Edenton-Chowan	13.5	Asheville City										
13.5	Davie County	13.2	Duplin County										
13.5	New Hanover County	13.2	Brunswick County										
13.5	McDowell County	13.0	Mount Airy City										
13.4	Robeson County	12.9	Beaufort County										
13.3	Anson County	12.9	Randolph County										
13.3	Warren County	12.9	Greene County										
12.7	Watauga County	12.1	Tyrrell County	\$23,978	\$1,116	5,590	5.9%	40%					
12.5	Catawba County	12.0	Cabarrus County										
12.4	Stanly County	11.9	Johnston County										
12.3	Orange County	11.7	Clinton City										
12.2	Granville County	11.5	Mooresville City										
12.2	Hyde County	11.5	Pamlico County										
11.4	Roanoke Rapids City	10.2	Surry County										
11.4	Kings Mountain City	10.2	Forsyth County										
11.3	Whiteville City	10.1	Lincoln County										
11.1	Union County	10.1	Guilford County										
10.7	Iredell-Statesville	9.8	Asheboro City										
10.3	Stokes County	9.8	Haywood County										
9.7	Cumberland County	9.4	Pasquotank County	\$24,250	\$1,038	6,203	5.3%	38%					
9.7	Cherokee County	9.4	Madison County										
9.6	Pender County	9.2	Davidson County										
9.6	Yadkin County	9.1	Dare County										
9.5	Wake County	9.0	Gaston County										
9.4	Macon County	8.8	Henderson County										
8.6	Pitt County	7.6	Caldwell County										
8.6	Buncombe County	7.5	Avery County										
8.3	Perquimans County	7.5	Wayne County										
8.3	Transylvania County	7.0	Carteret County										
7.9	Craven County	6.5	Columbus County										
7.8	Scotland County	6.5	Rutherford County										
6.2	Camden County	3.2	Clay County	\$20,798	\$640	1,723	3.3%	45%					
6.0	Gates County	3.0	Alleghany County										
6.0	Swain County	2.6	Yancey County										
5.6	Mitchell County												
3.9	Graham County												
3.5	Ashe County												
BIG URBAN DISTRICTS (also above)									\$31,936	\$1,781	56,777	8.1%	37%
19.3	Mecklenburg	10.0	Guilford County										
14.2	Durham County	9.7	Cumberland County										
10.2	Forsyth County	9.5	Wake County										

Ministers seek way to support schools

Continued from Page 1

year, and that's what those present [Sept. 26] agreed to do. But reflecting on it after the meeting, I believe we will be at the same place we are today UNLESS we do MORE than simply meet once a month for lunch and one-hour discussion. Something is going to have to happen BETWEEN our meetings.

As a reminder of what has brought us together, here is the vision/purpose that has emerged:

The vision/purpose for the group is two-fold:

1. Gather an ecumenical group of religious leaders representing the diversity within the Charlotte/Mecklenburg community to lead this community beyond the divisions caused by the court struggle and rally community support for public education here in Charlotte/Mecklenburg

2. Identify ways in which we as religious leaders can monitor the new "choice" plan to (a) ensure that every child gets a quality education; (b) lift up equity issues; (c) address concerns in the community about resegregation; (d) rally support from the religious community to be involved in this time of significant transition in the public schools.

I don't feel we have the critical mass to accomplish what we have set out to do. The broad base has never materialized.

My suggestion is that at our next meeting (Oct. 24) we give up that goal (#1) and look at what, if anything, we who are present can do toward accomplishing goal #2?

We realize that there are other groups in the community who share these concerns and desire to play a positive role in helping to shape public education in Charlotte/Mecklenburg. Rather than duplicating efforts, should we meld our efforts with these other groups – Mecklenburg Ministries, Clergy Association,

H.E.L.P., Swann Fellowship, other? What is the strategy for helping that to happen?

What actions CAN we take, and maybe more basic, what actions are we WILLING to take?

How can we move from "lunch dialog" and move into the community and the schools? Some suggestions that have been shared:

1. Lead our congregations to adopt an "equity plus" school.

2. Write a few op-eds to the news media (Steve has encouraged us to do that, but so far I've not taken the time nor been spirited and inspired to do so and apparently no one else has either!)

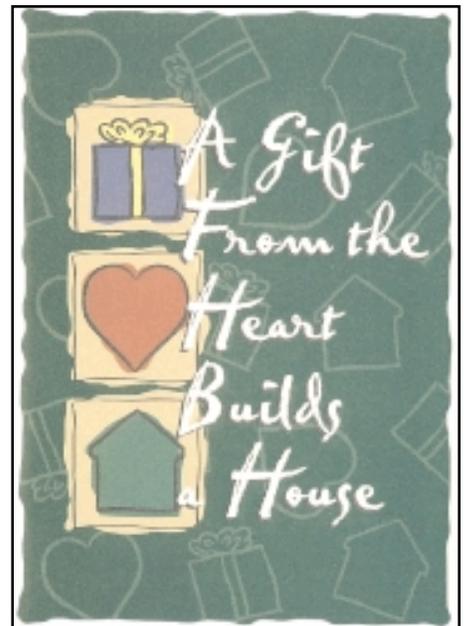
3. Identify and connect with other clergy/religious groups who share our concern and develop a joint action.

4. Invite leaders (such as CMS staff, County Commissioners) to meet with us to learn more about equity and budget issues and ways we might help interpret these to the public.

5. Develop a network of pastors (via e-mail) to give them information about what's happening (like *Educate!*, only much more concise, if that's possible!)

What are we ABLE and WILLING to do? I'd like to see us identify some action at our next meeting.

The Committed 13 meet Oct. 24 at noon at Covenant Presbyterian Church. Lunch buffet is \$5. Clergy and interested members of the public are welcome.



Businesses with client lists and individuals wanting to send holiday cards can get Habitat for Humanity of Charlotte to do the work for them, for a donation of \$10 or more per card. The front of the card is pictured above. The message inside reads, "In celebration of the Holiday season/A gift has been made/In your honor to/Habitat for Humanity by/(Individual or company name)/ to help a family in need/build a decent/affordable home." An order form for mail-in or fax use is at www.habitatcharlotte.org. Or call 704-376-2054.

The national briefs and calendar will return next week.

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.