

County backs off from idea of owning school land

Mecklenburg County commissioners Tuesday put to rest, maybe for awhile, a long-simmering tussle with the school board over control of the dirt the community's children play on.

After hearing a report of conversations among school, college and

county officials, the board reaffirmed its existing practice of deeding to the school board land for educational purposes.

And it followed up on the policy by deeding over land for the south Charlotte middle school to be built off Community House Lane,

and agreed to the purchase of six parcels the schools say they need to expand Northwest School of the Arts on Beatties Ford Road.

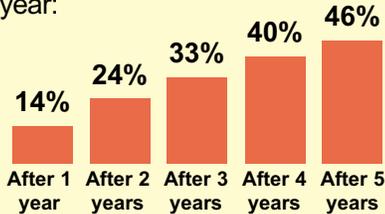
The issue, which school board chair Arthur Griffin said Tuesday night was "all about power," was

Continued on Page 5

Inside

A leaking bucket

Percent of new U.S. teachers who have left the profession, by year:



Barnett Berry had a group thinking Wednesday about what it will take to reverse the high teacher turnover rates reflected in the above chart. More about his address and this chart, Page 6.

A CMS teacher says grouping by ability allows a school to raise its schoolwide average test score. But low-achieving students may pay the price. Page 3.

United Family Services again seeks public support as it partners with neighborhood groups to make holiday gift-buying an empowering experience. Page 2.

Happy Thanksgiving!

Educate! will not publish on Nov. 28. The next regular edition will be Dec. 5, with special editions as warranted.

Trust breaking down

Battle sparked by bond sale divides blacks from new majority of board holding schools' purse strings

The battle lines were drawn on the most arcane of turf: the timing for sale of local government bonds to keep the schools' construction program humming.

But the issue appeared to be a simpler matter – trust. And trust is in short supply in Charlotte-Mecklenburg.

At a Board of County Commissioners meeting Tuesday night, the outgoing Democratic majority led by chairman Parks Helms decided 5-4 to sell \$369 million in bonds, mostly for the schools, in January. The incoming Republican majority led by Tom Cox will in all likelihood reopen the issue Dec. 3, and instead decide 5-4 to sell \$233 million in January, and wait a year to decide on selling the rest.

Cox characterized the strategy as a way to save \$7 million in bond interest this coming fiscal year. Helms characterized it as simply delaying an expense into a later budget year.

But for the mostly African American audience that chastised the board and heckled its GOP members, the strategy sounded like a promise of future action

that could be broken.

Outside the meeting hall, NAACP leader Dwayne Collins said there could be no trust "when you've heard the same thing articulated for 30 years." Collins was a plaintiff in an unsuccessful suit challenging Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools' adherence to desegregation orders.

Cox asked the crowd to set aside what they'd read in the media and what they might have heard from pulpits on Sunday. "What you've read in the paper ain't going to happen.

"We, the next board, are not going to go back to the bad old days of the Board of County Commissioners giving the Board of Education money for suburban schools and neglecting inner-city schools....

"Those bad old days are not going to come back. The only thing I know to do is say, stay with us and in two years judge this board.... What you're saying is that there's something intrinsic about Republicans that is against progress."

For District 1 Republican Jim

Continued on Page 4

Give a holiday gift that also empowers a neighborhood

This holiday season you or your organization can give the gift of dignity to parents who are eager to spread Christmas joy for their children but may not have the financial resources to buy gifts at the market rate.

United Family Services is partnering with the Southside Homes Resident Association and Brookhill Community Association to set up the 2nd Annual Parent Choice Holiday Store for several days in December.

Rather than accept anonymous sponsorship gifts (which sometimes feel demeaning and perpetuate dependency) parents will be able to shop at this store because its prices are truly affordable. The prices will be low because the items will be donated from the community.

Proceeds from sales will go into the neighborhood organizations projects.

Last year, the Store raised \$2,000 from the 150-plus families that shopped.

You can help by bringing new (or very gently used) items for children birth-18 years to the UFS office at Cotswold, 200 N. Sharon Amity or South Tryon Community Church, 2516 S. Tryon St. by Dec. 10th.

From Readers

Wish lists usually include gift certificates, books, games, puzzles, clothing, dolls, cars/trucks, Legos, baseball cards, sports equipment, hair & beauty products for teens, fast food coupons, movie passes, nail care kits, jewelry making kits, wallets, watches, handbags, Sony Walkman, journals/diaries, art supplies, etc.

Tell your friends, community groups, house of worship, work team, etc.

The more donations the more likely the store will succeed in drawing parents into this empowering approach to charity!

Financial gifts also accepted. For more details contact Zanolandria Hardin at 704-375-0587, Kristen Galloway at 704-338-1915 or me at 704-971-2634.

Joanne Stratton Tate

Correction

In the Nov. 14 Educate!, a column of numbers in a chart about busing loads should have been marked October '92, not October '93.

Walk in my what?

Friday is Walk In My Shoes Day, when civilians get to shadow teachers and administrators for a day. Any shadows who would like to write about their experience, please do so and send your words to Educate! via e-mail at swannfello@aol.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.

Educate! is published by The Swann Fellowship, 1510 E. 7th St., Charlotte, NC 28204. Voice and fax: 704-342-4330. E-mail: sjohnston@educateclt.org Lucy Bush, president; B.B. DeLaine, vice president; Steve Johnston, executive director. Published since September 2000; 6-week average circulation through last issue: 2,495.

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.

To be removed from distribution, message: imailsrv@educateclt.org. In body of the message, type: unsubscribe swann name@domain.etc. To be added to our distribution list, subscribe at www.educateclt.org.

THIS ISSUE OF *EDUCATE!* WAS MADE POSSIBLE IN PART BY DONATIONS FROM:

THE VALDER FAMILY

SUPPORTING EXCELLENCE, EQUITY
AND DIVERSITY IN EDUCATION

COLLINSWOOD DUAL LANGUAGE
ACADEMY

PARKS HELMS

Grouping boosts school scores, at kids' expense

The writer teaches math at Ranson Middle School and chairs the education committee of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg chapter of the NAACP.

By **RICHARD McELRATH**

Steve Johnston hit the nail on the head by raising the question, "Does middle-school grouping work?" (*Educate!*, Oct. 31)

To answer that question, you would have to know what the purpose is:

If the purpose is to make sure that there are no low-performing **SCHOOLS** in CMS, then the groupings work.

But if the purpose is to have no low-performing **STUDENTS** in CMS, then the groupings don't work.

I am a middle-school math teacher. I am not certified nor, in my mind, qualified to teach middle-school language arts and have had no experience teaching middle-school language arts. Despite this, I was given an all-black and low-performing language arts class to teach.

Clearly, these students were not grouped together and given to me because a principal thought this was the best way to educate these students.

This was a way to make sure that those certified and qualified teachers had the time to teach the students that could produce the type of test scores that would meet the demands of the Board of Education to produce a school that was not low-performing.

When you have groups of low-

performing students being taught by non-certified, lateral entry, first-year teachers – or teachers like me with little to no experience teaching the subjects they have been assigned to teach – this



McElrath

a clear indication that the school is more interested in the performance of the school rather than the performance of the student.

Grouping low-performing students together as part of their core curriculum (math, language arts, science and social studies) only validates the kinds of educational practices that resulted in these students becoming low-performing.

The mindset of these students is one in which they believe that if they are so bad, why is everyone in this class just like me?

What do we hear from low-performing students all day? Statements such as, "Why are you yelling at me? I'm not the only one who didn't do my homework."

Low-performing grouping not only validates all the negatives in these students, it invalidates all the positive things a teacher can say to a student.

If educators believe these students are as good as any other students, why separate them from everybody else?

If educators believe all children can achieve at a high level, why give these children a low-level book?

Grouping students because of low tests scores addresses the weakness of each student, not the strengths.

These groupings are regressive, and they turn a core class into remediation. Remediation should only be a supplement.

When remediation is used as a core class, students are placed in low-performing tracks that, for most students, are impossible to get off.

If you are concerned with the growth of students, you would implement multi-level groups in all core classes. This is progressive grouping. It demonstrates your expectations of all students to achieve on a high level.

Progressive grouping gives students who have not met academic expectations a chance to see that all students are not like them.

Having multi-level groups in all core classes still gives you the option to pull out small groups of students for remediation.

Most importantly, it says to the student, I believe in you.

And it demonstrates your effort to give them the extra help to meet both the academic expectations and their needs.

Comments?

Your comments on this article are welcome. Message *Educate!* at swannfello@aol.com.

Teachers: Tell us if, in a roster of below-grade students, you have found high-achievers who appear to be there only because of disciplinary infractions.

Sound off!

How to submit letters to media:

The Charlotte Post: By e-mail: thepost@clt.mind-spring.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.

Trust in short supply over bond sale issue

Continued from Page 1

Puckett, the annual sale “just makes more sense.”

But District 3 Democrat Darrel Williams, who was defeated for an at-large seat, and at-large Democrat Becky Carney, who won a seat in the N.C. House, framed their opposition on the basis that they would not be present a year from now to fulfill the promise.

“We may be able to save a few million... but I won’t be here to vote in January 2004 to make this work,” said Williams.

Reducing the sale to \$233 million “might be a better idea, but most people understand the history of where we have come regarding this issue....” He said the board needed to “send everyone a message that we support the choice plan... we’re going to make sure all schools are equal for all children. That’s more important than saving a few million dollars.”

Carney too said that a smaller sale to cover 12 months of construction might be “fiscally a better way to go,” but added, “If this is the road the next board of county commissioners wants to go down, they need to educate this community.” She said she was not prepared to support any change “from what we have been doing.”

“I have a real concern when I... hear comments like, ‘Can’t commit, but we’ll do it.’”

Helms, who will stay on the board but see his chairmanship end, said it was time “to put our money where our mouth is.”

District 6 Republican Bill James, the butt of several citizens’ angry attacks during the meeting, was mostly silent during the debate, merely pointing out that the issue was already on the agenda for the new board’s first meeting in December. “You might want to come back,” he said. Members of the audience said they would, and in even greater numbers.

A compromise hinted at some time ago in the halls of the Charlotte Chamber received its public launch too late to derail Tuesday’s confrontation.

Early reports about the bond sale suggested that the county might sell \$115 million – only enough bonds to finish projects already under construction. Such a decision would have delayed for at least 18 months dozens of school renovations and new-school design projects. The new schools are on the county’s edge, but most of the renovation projects are in black communities. All of the bond-sale scenarios would also affect library and parks bond projects.

CMS officials said the plan backed by Cox Tuesday night, to sell \$233 million in January, would keep their program on track for the coming year.

On the basis of that information, Lucy Bush, president of the Swann Fellowship, which publishes this journal, endorsed the \$233 million sale.

After Tuesday’s meeting, school board chairman Arthur Griffin said he and vice chair Wilhelmenia Rembert had been asked about holding back on the sale of some portion of the \$369

million at a recent Chamber meeting. “We didn’t give it another thought,” he said, because they had been told the county would recommend the \$369 million figure.

In fact, county manager Harry Jones recommended the \$233 million bond sale Tuesday night because it gave schools the needed money and, “for me as a manager ... it also is helpful in that it reduces the amount of the debt service budget.”

So why wasn’t the proposal out on the table earlier? Collins of the NAACP wanted to know after the meeting. The fact that the compromise was sprung on people at the last minute helped raise the trust issue.

County finance director Harry Weatherly said the memos outlining the proposal were dated Tuesday, and Becky Carney mentioned that she had just received them before the meeting.

One note about Dec. 3: An ugly confrontation Tuesday could have been uglier: Board rules limit opponents of any agenda item to 10 minutes. Thirteen speakers had signed up. Carney asked that the rules be suspended, and each speaker was allowed two minutes.

– Steve Johnston

Last stand

St. Martin’s Episcopal made some sad news this week: Root rot would require removal of some of the 7th Street church’s 80-year-old willow oaks. The trees had been planted to honor World War I casualties. The tree canopy dominates the view from a small church-donated office where Educate! is published.



County drops idea of owning school land

Continued from Page 1

first brought up last April 16, when at-large commissioner Tom Cox proposed using a new statute in all dealings with the schools. The law, designed to legalize a new form of financing called certificates of participation, has the county retain ownership of land while the school board owns the building.

According to the April 16 minutes, "by retaining ownership of the land, the Board would have a greater role in the development of the parcel for joint use. Further, by retaining ownership of the land, the Board of Commissioners can insure that property continues to be used as originally intended, and eases the Board's ability to recycle land for new uses when the property is no longer needed to fulfill its original purpose."

County staff member Bobbie Shields said a committee reviewed the proposal, and found that "the joint use task force as currently constituted is doing an effective job."



Shields

Shields said 11 school properties had changed hands since 1996, and that 9 were transferred to the county.

District 3 commissioner Darrel Williams, who served on the committee, said the members "didn't see any big advantage to changing the policy.

"If we recommended change," said Williams, "We would have to go to the school board and ask them for their support.

Room to grow

CMS photo shows campus of Northwest School of the Arts. Beatties Ford Road crosses the bottom of the photo. Six parcels (marked in red) adjoining the land-locked campus will be acquired during work at the school, which was begun in 1937 as the original campus of West Charlotte High. The \$9 million project, funded with 2000 bonds, will construct a new gym and convert the current gym into a new kitchen and cafeteria. Project completion date is August 2005. Last week the school board agreed to take two of the properties through condemnation.



"We just didn't think it was necessary."

Said Cox Tuesday night, "If we get land back into alternative uses, then I'm all for doing what we're doing."

"I would like to use some of that land that's locked up for different uses, for housing, for tax-base uses," he said. "If this gets us further down the road I'm all for doing that."

District 1 commissioner Jim Puckett, a former school board member, said he would still like to change the policy but acknowledged that it had become "clear that it is not something easily changed." He succeeded in having the board ask the school board for an annual review of all land in school inventory, to ascertain that "the assets we paid for are being used... that is the easiest solution until the state decides to change

it."

District 6's Bill James said he still wanted to know what it would take to remove legal barriers to county control of school land. If the county were to ask the legislature for a law change, "we might find the reception in Raleigh friendly," he said.

The board's reaffirmation of existing policy was approved by unanimous vote.

Shopping for a cause?

On Nov. 28 and Dec. 18 from 5-7 p.m., toy merchant Zany Brainy at Aboretum Shopping Center will donate 10% of store proceeds to Charlotte Habitat for Humanity. Mention Habitat at check-out. Info: (704) 544-7704.

Expert pushes for systemic changes in teacher training

Teacher quality expert Barnett Berry says an N.C. principal told him recently, “New teachers today are the best prepared they have ever been. But they are not good enough.”

“There is a tendency,” says the leader of a Chapel Hill research agency, to blame most school problems on “our teaching force, that they’re not prepared well, they don’t know enough, they don’t work enough. It’s not that simple.”

A key unaddressed problem, Berry told the CMS Partners for School Reform at the Charlotte Chamber, is that teachers shouldn’t as much concentrate on how to teach children as on how children learn.

Another goal, he said, should be to compare professional development in fields similar to teaching, with a particular eye on how the training is financed, then put pressure on school districts to do the training and enforce the rules.



Berry

“Our cosmetologists have to adhere to standards more than our teachers,” he asserted.

States have adopted mentoring programs, but only about a third are actually funded, he said.

CMS regional superintendent for high schools Ann Clark said “we don’t have enough qualified people.” She said the district will hire a person with little more than knowledge of a foreign language to teach specialized English as a Second Language because the alternative is an untrained substitute. “Over the next 10 years North Carolina will lose 70% of its teaching force. What

Fastest not cheapest in teacher training

Three types of teacher training programs: Percent of graduates who enter profession, percent who remain after three years, and cost:

Program description	Graduates enter profession	Remain after 3 years	Cost per teacher*
5 years: B.A. in subject field and M.A. in education	90%	84%	\$36,500
4 years: B.A. in subject field or in education	70%	53%	\$43,800
6 weeks: Summer training for lateral entrant with B.A.	80%	34%	\$45,900

Note: * Cost per teacher includes teacher preparation, recruitment, induction, and replacement.

Source: Southeast Center for Teacher Quality, based on L. Darling-Hammond, “Solving the Dilemmas of Teacher Supply, Demand, and Quality,” available at www.nctaf.org/publications/index.html

are we going to do? Our teaching colleges are not producing enough volume.”

Wachovia executive Dee Merrill said higher educational institutions don’t have “parents or a governing body that is pushing them to... do it better. It’s just a setup for total disaster.”

“We are pouring money into higher education with very little evaluation of what they are doing with their money. With K-12 we require assessments.... That’s just the way things have always been done.”

Berry said there was no simple answer to providing the more qualified teachers his N.C. principal would like to see.

But one necessary change is to sweep away the idea of a single classroom teacher dealing with a set number of children. “We’ve got to turn that idea on its side,” he told a dozen or so educators and business executives.

Berry suggested a school of “small pods” of about 100 children each. The three or more teachers assigned to the pod would each bring different skills to the work. One might know a lot about how children develop, while another might have deep roots in a subject field. The suggestion, Berry said, is not well received.

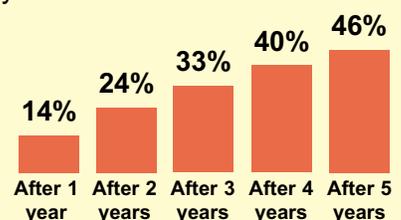
“It’s very difficult to engage the powers-that-be to think differently about organization.”

Tomorrow’s best teachers, he said, would spend most of their time as students on case studies of how students learn.

“They will become experts in children. These are not easy things to do. Most of these program elements are anathema to the university culture for a whole host of reasons.”

To reform teaching, he said, communities and groups must “build our own collective knowledge and galvanize the political will to make these changes.”

Percent of new U.S. teachers who have left the profession, by year:



Source: Southeast Center for Teacher Quality, based on data from Teacher Follow-Up Survey for 1988-2000 period, cited in Richard Ingersoll, “The Teacher Shortage: A Case of Wrong Diagnosis and Wrong Prescription” at www.principals.org/news/bltn_teachshort0602.html

Briefs

Disaggregated: The No Child Left Behind law's standard is that a school must have students in all demographic groups making progress. A Chicago Tribune study of last year's Illinois test scores showed that at least 40% of the state's schools, including many highly-touted suburban schools, would have failed the No Child standard. While 82% of white students passed reading and math tests, 35% of black students did. Harvard expert Gary Orfield told the Tribune, "Our society is stratified and segregated, and that affects schoolkids' opportunities.... To really solve the problem would require that we have a much more equal society. You'd have to look at social policy, housing patterns, all kinds of things.... People who think it's only a school problem are deluding themselves."

www.chicagotribune.com

Home-schooled: In a feature about African-Americans teaching their children at home, the Richmond Times-Dispatch quoted estimates that the number of black children in home schooling had increased nearly 10-fold in three years and now stands at 80,000 nationally.

www.timesdispatch.com

Setbacks: Forty-three nations comprising more than a third of humanity are expected to fail to meet UNESCO's 2015 goals of universal primary education, gender equality and halving of illiteracy rates, CNN reported. A shortage of 35 million teachers worldwide is preventing progress. Four countries – Bangladesh, China, India and Pakistan – have 61% of the world's illiterate adults.

www.cnn.com

Kindergarten: In Minnesota, where only 18% of kindergartners attend school for the full day, a

In a MiddleWeb.com list-serve conversation, Caron complained that teachers in staff development meetings would "begin to act like middle school students and talk across the room and among themselves. They make cute comments...." Later, Maureen commented: "What I hear is BOREDOM. We get inservice we already know. We teachers are like students ... engage us and we will listen. Make it meaningful and we will listen."

Story
Corner

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

Minneapolis study says full-day attendees learn far more literacy preparedness skills than part-day attendees, the Pioneer Press reported. The report suggests the all-day program may help close a racial achievement gap.

www.twincities.com

Advice: Eric Smith has formed an advisory group to give teachers some input on Anne Arundel, Md., school policy, the Baltimore Sun reported. A large group will meet six times a year, and representatives from the large group will meet four times a year with the former CMS superintendent. Explaining the need for the group, Smith said he learned indirectly that a district order to cut off the heat after school hours left teachers shivering in their rooms. Smith ordered the heat left on for several hours after closing.

www.sunspot.net

Books delayed: In Detroit schools, where the Open Court reading program is in its first year, some classes did not get a full set of materials until October, the Detroit News reported. Some teachers worry that children will

not make the gains expected of them as a result. The system is under a 1999 state mandate to improve achievement within five years.

www.detnews.com

Midyear cuts: Colorado schools face mid-year budget cuts of 1% to 2% because of a state budget crisis, the Rocky Mountain News reported.

www.rockymountainnews.com

Lower high-stakes: Changes are afoot in Washington State's high-stakes graduation test, the Seattle Times reported. Among them: Allowing good scores on one of the four subject-area tests to offset bad scores on another. Among last spring's 10th-graders, only 30% passed all four sections.

www.seattletimes.com

Setting the bar: The Texas Board of Education set the standards for passing the state's new achievement tests, the Dallas Morning News reported. In the first year of an phase-in period, passing will require correct answers on only half the questions. The standards will rise in the second and third years. The test will be taken by grades 3 through 11 next spring. Trial tests suggest that 15% of all Texas third-graders, or 42,000, will fail to meet the new standard.

www.dallasnews.com

Calendar

- 21 Finance, Capital & Facilities Committee, 4 p.m., Education Center.
- 26 Curriculum Committee, 3:30 p.m., Board Conference Room.
- 26 School board meeting, 6 p.m., Board Room.

December

- 3 Board work session, noon, Board Room.
- 12 Parents on the Move workshop, 7-9 p.m., Sugaw Creek Recreation Center, 943 W. Sugar Creek Rd.