



By Sloane Whaley, Northwest School of the Arts.

Curbs in at 55%?

High poverty at schools impairs learning, Pughsley asserts; one-third of schools fail that standard; proposed tinkers in assignment plan won't eliminate issue

By STEVE JOHNSTON

Supt. Jim Pughsley on Monday renounced an evil now embedded in Charlotte-Mecklenburg's choice assignment plan, saying that high-poverty schools threaten the academic achievement of all students assigned to them.

But the devil is in the details, and the superintendent hasn't shown his Board of Education how to extricate itself from a 2001 plan aggressively pushed by

Pughsley's predecessor that has turned a third of CMS schools into places that Pughsley now says are a threat to academic achievement.

At a school board work session Monday, Pughsley did not elaborate on how he came to his decision, except to say he had consulted with his staff. But he said that when a school reaches 50% or 55% of students on subsidized lunch, the concentration of poverty threatens achievement.

Pughsley is in his second year as superintendent. He was Eric Smith's deputy when the board approved the choice plan.

Pughsley has argued that achievement is the district's core business, and that all decisions should contribute to reaching the board's 2005 goal of having 95% of all students on grade level.

More than a third of CMS schools last year would have violated Pughsley's new standard. The appropriate school statistics for this fall have not been released.

While Pughsley's reassignment proposals could blunt the poverty ratios at some schools if the public cooperates, it appeared Monday that the plans, even if adopted, will leave most high-poverty schools intact.

And if the systemwide percentage of children eligible for subsi-

Board candidates' comments sketch their aims, priorities

If attendance at recent school board candidate forums is any evidence, Charlotte-Mecklenburg voters haven't tuned in to election issues yet.

All 11 candidates on the Nov. 4 ballot for three at-large Board of Education seats were present Tuesday morning for one such gathering, at the Tuesday Morning Breakfast Forum.

But the audience topped out at 25.

Comments Tuesday morning indicated a variety of views among the candidates on issues ranging from choice to equity. Some candidates are focused on narrow issues, while others espouse a more cosmic approach.

The Forum, convened by Sarah Stevenson for more than two decades, has long been a place where affairs of the African American community are hashed out, and the candidates were grilled on a number of such issues.

Reassessing choice

The candidates were asked if the black community benefited from the choice plan and, if not, whether they would support ending the home-school guarantee.

Larry Bumgarner said the black community "profited by the fact that it was a wake-up call. They... were able to look at those that

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Capital improvements temporary; focus instead on paying higher teacher salaries

Please stop sending us *Educate!*. Please pay teachers more. The results of doing so will surprise you. Quality will then come. Capital improvements are temporary.

Susan Tompkins

Moving students would cut education expense

When the school board hired an expert to advise them concerning the "choice plan," he advised them that, if they chose the choice plan, they would be choosing the most expensive and the most difficult way to educate children.

If Dr. Pughsley wants to alleviate the expense and minimize the difficulty, moving students makes sense.

The enrollment in low performing/high poverty schools is far less than the capacity of the school. This must be done to create room for smaller class sizes, additional support personnel, additional learning labs etc.

By shifting students from low-performing schools to non-low-performing schools, Dr. Pughsley is able to fill all schools to their full capacity. This is one step in filling the need for additional classroom space and cutting the cost to the taxpayer.

It is well-documented that students, regardless of their economic status or educational backgrounds, in low-performing/high poverty schools do not achieve on the same high level as other students. Dr. Pughsley is not trying to hide low-performing students by putting them in high-performing schools. Dr. Pughsley is trying to provide low-performing students with the same educational opportunity as their counterparts in high-performing schools.

The adoption of and implementation of the choice plan has

resegregated our school system. It has reduced our chance to be the "premier integrated urban school system in the nation" to a struggle to be the most integrated school system in the state.

If we intend to make the choice plan work for all children, we must allow Dr. Pughsley to be concerned with putting every student in Charlotte in a good school and, to the best of his ability, put every student in Charlotte in a seat in their neighborhood school.

Richard McElrath, Sr.

Board should sign off on large school purchases

On Nov. 4, voters will be asked to elect three new members to Charlotte-Mecklenburg's Board of Education. Setting policy and overseeing the budget is part of their public charge.

Currently this governmental body must approve any purchase over \$15,000. Dr. Pughsley's proposed change would allow purchases up to \$100,000 without Board approval.

The power to spend is the power to control. Taxpayers elect members of the school board for the purpose of budgetary authority. The give and take of wrestling out resources helps to clarify and validate spending, encouraging thrift.

If money can be spent without governing approval, staff, insulated by bureaucracy has control of the money.

CMS welcomes public comment, but with a pack of blank checks in the amount of \$100,000 made to the order of... they may not listen.

Kim and Nick Holley

Policy DJ would bring CMS policy in line with other districts, and would set the limit lower than Mecklenburg County's, according to policy committee chair Lee Kindberg. A hearing will be held Oct. 28. A vote may be held at the same meeting.

This journal has only
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dized lunch remains at last year's 43% – or continues to rise a couple of percentage points annually as it has been lately – it will be impossible for CMS to avoid poverty concentrations at some if not many schools.

Details of Pughsley's proposed assignment changes are below. But the week also brought news on the growth front.

For some weeks the board has been negotiating with county commissioners for money to quickly build two new high schools. At its meeting Tuesday, the board amended that request to add a plea for \$9 million to build a north Mecklenburg middle school to full size, in an effort to reduce crowding. Parents who have been pressing for construction in the north end took credit for lining up county commissioner support for the additional \$9 million.

Pughsley said he wants the \$9 million to be on top of other funding already sought. But "what the county commissioners do is another question," he acknowledged during Tuesday night's board meeting.

Later, board member Arthur Griffin said commissioners had been "crystal clear" about money that they would make available for school construction during 2003 and 2004. For those two years, the \$9 million would be on top of already pledged amounts.

But Griffin, who's been involved in the negotiations, added, "What's still out on the table is what's going to happen in 2005."

The 2002 bonds, approved in all but 11 precincts and by a 63%-37% vote countywide, represented a "balanced approach by the board of education... a commitment to trying to deal with growth, it was a commitment to trying to deal with the central city schools," Griffin said.

DidYaHear?

✓ Dressed for a TV appearance, board member George Dunlap was driving from one public appearance to another Tuesday when road debris flattened a tire on his SUV. An acquaintance stopped as Dunlap surveyed the damage and insisted on changing the tire, saying: "You looked so clean...."

✓ Well into the fourth hour of Tuesday's school board meeting, and long after most members of the public had left the room, Supt. Jim Pughsley asked his staff to expedite their presentation of a middle school charter – a document designed to spell out how CMS will increase achievement via curriculum changes, redeployment of staff and so forth. Later he suggested that the board schedule such presentations early in meetings "so that not only the board has the benefit of the presentation, but also the audience, which has a tendency to leave after they present. If we're going to have a captive audience, let's have it for the core business."

– Send intelligence to swannfello@aol.com

"The rules changed – not by this body, but across the street. I wished people would realize that."

The Davidson-area middle school had been scheduled to be built in two phases for lack of funds. If the \$9 million is approved this year, all work will be completed before the first students arrive, and construction "will go faster" as a result, building services chief Guy Chamberlain said.

During a Tuesday night public comment period, the board heard from a number of North Mecklenburg residents demanding construction of new schools.

But the board also heard the first protests of even the possibility that the \$9 million for classrooms to serve suburban growth will be taken later from renovation dollars pledged to central-city neighborhood schools.

The board approved a long-range planning document that represents the board's attempt to pursue the "balanced approach" Griffin mentioned. Pughsley made a point of noting that the 10-year plan includes 23 schools, 10 of which are in the northern end of

the county. Board member Larry Gauvreau, who represents most of the north end, voted against the long-range plan but in favor of asking for the \$9 million.

First Baptist-West pastor Ricky Woods told the board, "It is my hope as a clergyman and prayerer that school assignment will not swing on the whims of real estate or property value, nor be confined to monolithic communities, because our children will have to be able to compete in a world which is much larger than their neighborhood, and much larger than their economic concerns."

Pughsley's reassignments are focused on avoiding very large schools. Blythe Elementary had 1,329 students on the 20th day. Bradley Middle had 1,653. Vance High had 2,420. All serve north-end parents.

A new organization that claims to speak for north-end parents says it would rather be overcrowded than bused out of its end of the county to schools where seats are empty. Parent Rhonda Lennon told the board Tuesday night that it should aggressively

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market its magnet programs, and offered to help CMS do so.

The board's own Equity Committee made a statement Tuesday that appeared to place it squarely in opposition to some of Pughsley's proposals.

Equity Committee chair Julian Wright, after a flurry of committee e-mails Monday and Tuesday with committee members, offered the board a standard by which to judge any shifts of students:

"Are the opportunities for any students that you are going to be moving around under this new student assignment plan," Wright said, "better or worse than they are now? And if too many of them are worse, don't do them. We suggest that those types of changes will only make equity harder to achieve throughout the system....

"Uncertainty, instability... is equity's long-term enemy."

In earlier board discussions this fall, Pughsley said overly large schools do indeed reduce educational opportunity, and contribute to staff morale problems. Many parents complain that their children's odds of participating in any limited-enrollment activity, from sports teams to AVID, is reduced in overcapacity schools.

North Mecklenburg parent Steve Gilmore, however, told the board Tuesday, "We do not want lower property values. We do not want longer bus rides. We do not want overcrowding. We do not want continued inequities.

"We do want brick and mortar, neighborhood schools, and a quality education for all students."

Pughsley's proposals drew their first opposition Tuesday night. A full public hearing on the plan will be held at a time yet to be scheduled, but probably later this month.

The board is to vote on the plan in November, in time for changes to be made in January's choice

The challenge in the middle

Percentage of CMS middle school students at or above grade level last spring, in reading and math, by demographic group. Scores below the CMS average for that grade are highlighted.

Group	Reading			Math		
	6	7	8	6	7	8
All students	76.9	81.9	83.8	88.4	82.4	80.8
Black	64.8	71.8	74.4	81.2	71.2	68.3
White	92.2	94.1	95.2	96.9	94.4	93.6
Hispanic	64.2	68.3	69.4	81.8	75.1	75.3
Asian	80.8	87.2	89.0	96.2	92.5	92.5
Native American	71.9	71.4	80.7	84.4	85.7	64.5
Multiracial	91.4	90.9	91.1	91.5	90.8	91.1
Exceptional children	34.3	45.4	43.2	59.6	46.4	41.1
Limited English	46.9	57.2	54.5	75.9	69.2	66.8
Free/reduced lunch	61.6	68.2	69.7	80.1	69.7	66.1
Paid lunch	89.4	91.6	92.8	95.2	91.5	90.4
Male	72.7	78.1	80.3	86.7	80.3	79.1
Female	81.3	85.6	87.4	90.1	84.4	82.8

Source: CMS Middle School Project Charter

lottery. The proposals:

Nonmagnets

- Combine home-school areas of underutilized Byers Elementary and overcapacity First Ward, two uptown schools, and expand First Ward's Accelerated Learning program into a full magnet.

- Combine home-school areas of Bruns and Oaklawn elementaries at Bruns near Johnson C. Smith University, and open a Spanish/French learning immersion at Oaklawn. Oaklawn and Bruns have been combined for two years while Oaklawn is rebuilt. Smith Academy parents applauded the new immersion magnet, but asked Tuesday night to be grandfathered into their existing assignment.

- For 2005 onward, combine the home school areas of Chantilly and Billingsville at Billingsville, and open a third Montessori elementary at Chantilly. The schools were combined last year while Billingsville is being rebuilt. The change would not only affect the elementaries, but would send stu-

dents from Eastway Middle and East Meck High to A.G. Middle and Myers Park High.

- Send Oakdale Elementary School on to Ranson Middle, to reduce Coulwood crowding.

- Send part of Nathaniel Alexander and part of Hornets Nest to West Charlotte, to relieve Vance High. No parents spoke to this proposal Tuesday.

- Feed Devonshire Elementary to Garinger High to relieve Independence. No eastside parents were on hand Tuesday to raise objections to this move from a higher-performing to a lower-performing school.

- Two other boundary changes affecting about 30 students off Providence Road fix problems identified by parents last spring.

No grandfathering

In a sharp break from 2001 practice, Pughsley said that none of the children affected by boundary changes would be allowed to stay next year to finish out their terminal grade. All parents would

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need to apply for seats under the new rules. The complaints on that decision began Tuesday night, and are likely to be heard again.

Magnets

- Drop the K-2 learning immersion program from Villa Heights to make room for more Talent Development seats. Parents heartily objected Tuesday night, saying many were drawn to the magnet because it was a K-5.

- About the Oaklawn language immersion magnet, Smith parents Tuesday question the announced goal of eliminating waiting lists at Smith, saying there really weren't any students on the list.

- Open an Early College program at Waddell High, which is both underutilized and underperforming. The magnet is to use a Guilford County model.

- Instead of moving Northwest Arts middle-schoolers to Hawthorne as planned, keep Hawthorne as swing space to serve schools being renovated.

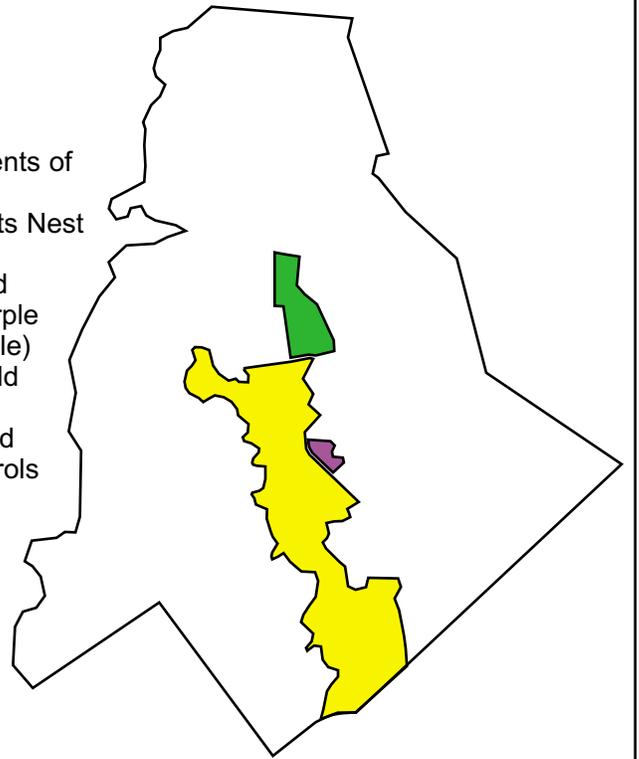
- Expansion of the First Ward Accelerated Learning magnet creates seats that might draw uptown workers away from overcrowded suburban schools. It also moves the neighborhood children to the empty seats at Byers that have been a political problem for board members.

- Undersubscribed magnets to be dropped include communications arts at Garinger, all "open education" programs, and the traditional programs at Druid Hills, Sedgfield Middle and Wilson Middle.

Carrots and sticks

- Carrot: Offer free before- and after-school care to middle-class parents willing to choose the following center-city elementaries: Bruns Avenue, Lincoln Heights, Oakhurst, Oaklawn, Thomasboro, University Park and Westerly

Proposed reassignments of portions of Nathaniel Alexander and Hornets Nest from the Green Zone (marked in green) and Chantilly from the Purple Zone (marked in purple) would expand the Gold Choice Zone further north. The odd-shaped boundary, which controls the schools for which parents in the area may apply for assignment while still receiving transportation, was dubbed "the wedge of wealth" during 2001 assignment plan hearings.



Hills.

- Carrot: Offer free before- and after-school care to low-income parents willing to fill empty seats at Myers Park Traditional.

- Stick: To be eligible for enrollment at Davidson IB Middle, students at Lincoln Heights would have to be enrolled at Lincoln Heights from third grade on. (North end parents seeking Davidson IB now tend to apply to central city Lincoln Heights only for the fifth grade.)

Other matters

- "Cluster stops" in some neighborhoods to speed up bus routes. Board member George Dunlap expressed reservations, on safety grounds.

- Lottery priority revisions caused complaints Tuesday night from Plaza-Midwood parents, who could lose the opt-out provisions that would let them leave high-poverty Shamrock Gardens.

More proposals on way

On Tuesday afternoon, planning chief Eric Becoats held a press briefing. He was asked how close

Pughsley's proposals would come to resolving capacity issues that now embroil the system.

Becoats said the proposals would solve underutilization problems. On overcapacity issues, chiefly in the suburbs, "we will still be challenged."

Monday night, Pughsley said he would return to the board with more proposals narrowly tailored to specific overcrowding issues. His examples included assigning apartments yet to be opened in the Endhaven Elementary area to nearby schools, and reassigning new Blythe students to Statesville Road Elementary, five miles south. Responded north end parent Rhonda Lennon Tuesday night:

"The hint of moving new residents to other schools outside their overcrowded home schools undermines the real estate markets, inhibits new business development, damages community cohesiveness and, most importantly, it destroys the stability for little children who are moving in our area as a new resident."

Multiple feeds may add to high school challenges

Some of the proposed assignment changes would create new splits in which children from an elementary are split up, going to two or more middle schools, and then on to one or two high schools.

Educators have always sought to avoid such splits so children who are friends do not get separated.

At the high school level, splits create multiple student bodies. Former school board chair Arthur Griffin observed this week that high schools with

the most splits are often not high-achieving institutions.

No research was immediately at hand to resolve this question: Do splits themselves contribute to low achievement? Or do splits tend to be created in struggling neighborhoods where parents do not have sufficient political sway to prevent them?

Either way, parents may learn to take a large number of splits as a warning sign.

Elementary	Middle	High	Elementary	Middle	High
Bain	Mint Hill	Butler	Sedgefield (E. of South Blvd)	Sedgefield	Olympic
Clear Creek (E. of Blair)	Northeast	Butler	Sedgefield (W. of South Blvd)	Marie G. Davis	Olympic
Crown Point (E. of Sam Newell)	Mint Hill	Butler	Steele Creek (E. of S. Tryon)	Southwest	Olympic
Mathews	Crestdale	Butler	Steele Creek (W. of S. Tryon)	Kennedy	Olympic
Chantilly	Eastway	East	Elizabeth Lane	South Charlotte	Prov.
Crown Point (W. of Sam Newell)	Mint Hill	East	McAlpine (E. of Seton, N. of I-485)	Robinson	Prov.
Greenway Park	McClintock	East	McKee Road (E. of Providence)	Crestdale	Prov.
Idlewild	McClintock	East	McKee Road (W. of Providence)	Robinson	Prov.
Lansdowne	McClintock	East	Olde Providence (S. of Hwy 51)	South Charlotte	Prov.
Oakhurst	Eastway	East	Providence Spring (E. of Providence)	Crestdale	Prov.
Piney Grove (N. of McAlpine)	Albemarle Rd	East	Providence Spring (W. of Providence)	Robinson	Prov.
Piney Grove (S. of McAlpine)	Mint Hill	East	Beverly Woods	Carmel	South
Rama Road	McClintock	East	Endhaven	South Charlotte	South
Briarwood	Northridge	Garinger	Hawk Ridge	Robinson	South
Devonshire	Cochrane	Garinger	Huntingtowne Farms (E. of Edgewater)	Carmel	South
Hickory Grove	Northridge	Garinger	McAlpine (E. of Seton, S. of I-485)	Robinson	South
Merry Oaks	Eastway	Garinger	McAlpine (W. of Seton)	South Charlotte	South
Shamrock Gardens	Eastway	Garinger	Smithfield	Quail Hollow	South
Windsor Park	Eastway	Garinger	Hidden Valley	Martin	Vance
Winterfield	Eastway	Garinger	Highland Renais.	Martin	Vance
Blythe (W. of I-77)	Alexander	Hopewell	Mallard Creek	Alexander	Vance
Cornelius (W. of I-77)	Bradley	Hopewell	Nath. Alexander (E. of Sugar Creek)	Martin	Vance
Hornets Nest (W. of I-77)	Ranson	Hopewell	Newell	Martin	Vance
Huntersville (W. of I-77)	Bradley	Hopewell	University Meadows	Martin	Vance
Long Creek	Bradley	Hopewell	Hunt'towne Farms (W. of Edgewater)	Carmel	Waddell
Mountain Island (N. of Miranda)	Coulwood	Hopewell	Montclair	Sedgefield	Waddell
Statesville Road	Ranson	Hopewell	Nations Ford	Southwest	Waddell
Albemarle Rd	Albemarle Rd	Indep.	Pineville	Quail Hollow	Waddell
Clear Creek (W. of Blair)	Northeast	Indep.	Sterling	Quail Hollow	Waddell
J. H. Gunn	Albemarle Rd	Indep.	Allenbrook	Wilson W. Charlotte	
Lebanon Road	Northeast	Indep.	Bruns Avenue (N. of Brookshire)	J.T. Williams W. Charlotte	
J.W. Grier	Northridge	Indep.	Bruns Avenue (S. of Brookshire)	Spaugh W. Charlotte	
Reedy Creek	Northridge	Indep.	Druid Hills	J.T. Williams W. Charlotte	
Billingsville	A.G.	Myers Park	Hornets Nest (E. of I-77)	Ranson W. Charlotte	
Cotswold	A.G.	Myers Park	Lincoln Heights	J.T. Williams W. Charlotte	
Eastover	A.G.	Myers Park	Nath. Alexander (W. of Sugar Creek)	Martin W. Charlotte	
Irwin Avenue	Marie G. Davis	Myers Park	Thomasboro	Spaugh W. Charlotte	
Olde Providence (N. of Hwy 51)	Carmel	Myers Park	Byers (NW. of Brevard)	J.T. Williams W. Charlotte	
Selwyn	A.G.	Myers Park	Ashley Park	Spaugh	West Meck
Sharon (N. of Sharon View)	A.G.	Myers Park	Barringer	Marie G. Davis	West Meck
Sharon (S. of Sharon View)	Carmel	Myers Park	Berryhill	Wilson	West Meck
Byers (SW. of Brevard)	Marie G. Davis	Myers Park	Mountain Island (S. of Miranda)	Coulwood	West Meck
Blythe (E. of I-77)	Alexander	North	Oakdale	Ranson	West Meck
Cornelius (E. of I-77)	Bradley	North	Paw Creek	Coulwood	West Meck
David Cox Road	Alexander	North	Pawtucket	Coulwood	West Meck
Davidson	Bradley	North	Reid Park	Marie G. Davis	West Meck
Huntersville (E. of I-77)	Bradley	North	Tuckaseegee	Wilson	West Meck
Lake Wylie	Southwest	Olympic	Westerly Hills	Spaugh	West Meck
Pinewood	Sedgefield	Olympic			

Source: CMS

Board candidates outline their priorities

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were being left behind in their group. You know who I'm talking about. You know exactly the kids who are out on the street now that are members of the gangs... As far as changing, a hybrid of a lot of this stuff. I'm open to a lot of it. Private schools? Vouchers? Hey, I'm open for all of it, as long as it gets kids taught."

"I hope that every child in Charlotte-Mecklenburg is going to profit from this plan," said Kaye McGarry. "It may not be perfect, but let's make it work, folks."

Said Fred Marsh, "The only ones who benefitted from the choice plan were the real estate agents and developers...." The home-school guarantee "is THE cause of most of the problems that we have now. It adds to the cost involved in the equity program, which could be a lot less if you had schools integrated. It separates children. I don't think there is anyone here who would disagree that it is a more challenging job to teach in a school of 98% poverty than it is in a school of 98% wealth."

"One of the benefits of choice for black children," said Wilhemenia Rembert, "has been that many of them got to go to schools closer to them as opposed to bearing the burden of transportation across this community, which they have borne for over 30 years. There were ways clearly to have reduced that burden on all children, by midpoint schools, which were taken out of the district, and that would have allowed all of the children to have an opportunity for equal opportunities and a quality education together, which I think is better for all of the children, not just for black children, but for all of the children.... I don't want to sacrifice any children, so thus I would be willing to make the changes necessary to make sure that all children have a quality

education."

"The choice plan," said Joe White, "certainly is not Joe White's pick. It is not my choice. It is at this point what we have. It's time to make it work the best that we can for every child in this community."

"The choice plan for me," said Kit Cramer, "was a compromise between two very divergent views. It gives people an opportunity to opt out of a school that they feel is not sufficient for their children. And I think that's a positive. In terms of the home-school guarantee, I do think that was one of the fundamental bases of the creation of the choice plan. So therefore I think you've got to support it, unless we go through more political upheaval related to pupil assignment."

"I don't think [the choice plan] benefitted anybody across this county," said Mike Kasper. "And I do not agree to giving up the guaranteed seat."

"I would support any effort," said Queen Thompson, "to give all parents a choice for quality school programs in all [parts] of the city."

"The parents actually had a choice," said Nick Holley. "You know, there's problems in my school, I don't want to be here, I'm picking that one.... There is problems that they need to iron out with the program. The bottom line is to educate our kids and see that the job's done."

"There are just as many people in the African-American community who want to go to school close to home as there are anywhere else," said George Dunlap. "So they benefitted by having the opportunity. Whether or not you sacrifice choice, and whether or not people have the opportunity to take advantage of choice, I have offered a suggestion that might work in terms of providing more people choice. The problem here is we see choice as benefiting one group of people, when other people don't have choice, because they are relegated to choosing only their neighborhood school. We need to provide more opportunities for them."

Rachel Hall said all parents were "being given the chance to go to whatever school you

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Board candidates outline their priorities

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wished.... I would like to see more emphasis, in addition to maintaining our choice, on developing our inner-city schools, where they can be so attractive to our neighborhoods that a parent wouldn't want to bus their child across town...."

The equity pledge

Candidates loathe "litmus test" questions, which are often deliberately asked in a yes-no sort of way to pin people down. When the equity issue came up, all candidates dodged to one degree or another.

Equity has come to refer to two separate efforts.

One equity effort is the school board's commitment to bring all physical facilities up to the standard now used for constructing new schools. That doesn't mean every school should look alike, but that every school should be safe, healthful, and fitted out with the space and equipment needed to teach the curriculum. Before the county commissioners this fall balked at adequate funding, the school board's plans would have brought all schoolhouses up to standards within about 10 years. It may now take about 18 years.

The other equity effort focuses on providing low-performing children the teachers and other resources they need to catch up. The effort involves smaller class sizes, additional materials, higher levels of teacher and student support staff and other expensive initiatives.

The question was, "Would you continue to ensure that the equity support agreements remain in place relative to funding equity first before we fund... new growth?" The emphasis was on the word "before."

Said Larry Bumgarner about equity, "It's on the scale. The way I look at it, it's like a balloon, you

'Meet in the Middle': A conference

The Public School Forum of North Carolina, in cooperation with partners across the Southeast, will host the Meet in the Middle Conference on Thursday and Friday, Oct. 30-31 in Charlotte at the IBM Center at University Research Park off I-85 at Harris Boulevard. The Meet in the Middle Conference is for both private sector and public school leaders committed to accelerating public school student success in their local districts and states.

Educate! subscribers who register before Monday, Oct. 20, will receive a 50% discount. Write "*Educate!* subscriber" on your registration form. Download the registration form at www.ncforum.org/pdf/MITM/MITMRegistration.pdf. A partial agenda:

Thursday, Oct. 30

11 a.m.: Convocation speaker: Sylvan Solutions' Jeff Cohen.

Noon: Speaker: BellSouth's Krista Tillman; briefing on Mobile Area Education Foundation's math initiative.

1:45-3:30 p.m.: Concurrent sessions (1) keeping community-based alliances effective and sustainable; (2) business and community initiatives that work; (3) school view: how to build partnerships with business and community groups.

6:30 p.m.: Educator Ron Clark.

9 p.m. Networking at hospitality suite, Holiday Inn Crown Club.

Friday, Oct. 31

7:30 a.m. Breakfast seated by states to discuss local issues.

9 a.m.: All-day session (breaks for lunch) on grant-writing to participate in No Child supplemental services opportunities (e.g., tutoring for children at low-performing schools).

10 a.m.: N.C. Supt. Mike Ward, Public School Forum's John Dornan.

Noon: Governor's Education First Partnership Awards honoring business and community groups for their efforts to improve public education, and an individual who has had a "resounding impact on both their local public schools and their community."

squeeze here, you squeeze there, the money's there. So no, I'm sorry, I can't answer you yes or no to that. I apologize."

Kaye McGarry: "I think the money's there. Yes, it is a priority, yes, but you also need build schools where your kids are."

Fred Marsh: "Yes, but not to the total exclusion of building for new growth."

Wilhelmenia Rembert: "Equity is definitely a priority."

Joe White: "Equity is a priority."

Kit Cramer: "Equity is a priority."

Mike Kasper: "Equity is a priority. It should have been done before. But not at the sacrifice of other needs too. It needs to be weighed."

Queen Thompson: "Equity is a

priority."

Rick Holley: "Equity is a priority."

George Dunlap: "Equity is a priority."

Rachel Hall: "Equity is a priority."

Diversity

One question was directed at candidates who espouse neighborhood schools. "How do you propose to make sure," said one member of the audience, "that children who live in low-wealth neighborhoods have opportunity to go to other than their neighborhood schools, or how to make those schools as successful as schools that are in higher-wealth

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Board candidates outline their priorities

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areas?”

“There are some statistics out there,” said Mike Kasper, “that show that the higher the income, the higher the achievement. I’m not arguing against that. The situation I’m look at is a more manageable school, a smaller school within the neighborhood that will build community and get parents involved....” He discussed at length the progress made at Pawtucket Elementary.

“Through personal motivation, education and parental involvement,” Kasper said, “you will overcome any segregation issues. Because you have smaller, manageable schools, elementary level, where diversity is not as important as later on because they are still working on developing those skills. Then you pull from other schools for middle schools. And for high school you pull from even a larger area. So you acquire that diversity. And in the middle school and high school level, and even at college level, diversity matters. And that’s where you’ll get the diversity in education and through education and personal motivation be able to change what you individually want to change.”

Kaye McGarry responded this way: “Of the choices available in the choice plan, yes, I do favor the home school guarantee. That doesn’t mean you can’t choice out to other schools. But when you talk about the low-performing schools I think one is the resources – putting equity of resources in every school in Charlotte-Mecklenburg. And part of that is maintaining the facilities, which have been neglected for 30 years. And that is a disservice to our community and needs to be corrected. And it needs to have vigilant watch on that to make sure that doesn’t happen again. And that has happened on the watch of those that

Our high expectations for schools

“Americans always have called on public education to help realize their images of their country. Reform of education and reform of the larger society have been intertwined from the start. Americans have expected public schools to take center stage in educating former slaves, integrating immigrant children into society, fighting racism and segregation, reducing poverty, promoting public health, and building strong communities.

“In a parallel way, public education has been relied upon to help meet the challenges of shifting demographics, developing technologies, emerging global competitors, and changing world ecologies. Yet despite the significant alignment between the ambitious goals Americans have for their education system and those they have for their society, efforts to meet these objectives often have been incomplete and only partially successful.”

– Janice Hirota, Lauren Jacobs in *“Vital Voices: Building Constituencies for Public School Reform”*, downloadable at <http://scs.aed.org>

are currently on that school board.

“The other point is that if it’s a low-performing school, then hire someone that can do a better job of making that school better, so that people will want to go to it....”

Fred Marsh responded, “The real problem that the other two candidates have talked about, and I understand what they want – they want small schools, 400 to a school, and think that that will overcome the problems of resegregation – there’s a difficulty with that, a very pragmatic one, and that is that we’re not in the best of economic times, nor are we likely to be for the next several years.

“Right now we don’t have enough money to build two badly needed schools in the north part of the county. And if you do some quick mathematics you’ll see that if we limit high schools to 400 students we’ll need 60 of them. We now have 17 and we’re having trouble getting money to continue our equity program. And the entire thing that they are talking about is financially impossible.

“There’s a way to get small schools, and that is magnet programs, which essentially are schools within a school. And they

can be built easily, you can put them wherever you want them, and they do a good deal of what these other candidates want to do, while at the same time integrating the schools, rather than resegregating them. And that is what I propose to do.”

Grading the incumbents

The candidates were asked to “evaluate the performance of the superintendent and the board – as excellent, good, bad or indifferent.”

Larry Bumgarner: “It’s too complicated to answer that way.”

Kaye McGarry: “About the school board I would say C-minus which is fair. But I will say about the superintendent the jury is still out because he needs a clearer vision, and he can do the job.”

Fred Marsh: “I choose very good, somewhere in between good and excellent, because there are still some things that he doesn’t agree with me about.”

Joe White: I don’t evaluate other public officials or employees publicly, but the school system has done good.”

Kit Cramer: “I apologize. I can’t answer your question that briefly.”

Mike Kasper: “Same here.”

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Board candidates outline their priorities

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Queen Thompson: "As far as the current superintendent, I think he's doing a good job."

Nick Holley: "I'm going to have to answer 'indifferent' because there's more to it than that."

Rachel Hall: "As far as the superintendent he's done a great job, with the potential to be an excellent superintendent. With the board... good."

One area of focus

Said one person in the audience, "I just want to know one thing that you think would really have an impact, if you could make that change..." The answers:

Larry Bumgarner: "Teach children."

Kaye McGarry: "Everything goes back to the budget, and we need to revisit that budget, reallocate some of those funds. We have the money. We need to determine how to spend it."

Fred Marsh: "I think the school system's doing a fine job, and I am really running to get the school system to continue the programs that will work."

Wilhelmenia Rembert: "I would continue to support excellent teachers in every classroom in every school, and engaging parents and the community to support all schools."

Joe White: "Proven and tested leadership that builds coalitions to get things done."

Kit Cramer: "I would focus on reducing teacher turnover and quality teachers for all kids."

Mike Kasper: "Everything in achievement goes back to the budget. We need to focus on how and where the money is spent, teacher retention, neighborhood schools and fiscal responsibility."

Queen Thompson: "Educators can have a greater impact on accountability and managing all of our resources."

Nick Holley: "I think if teachers'

hands are tied the students' education is limited. We need to give the teachers the power and get them what they need to do the job that we've entrusted to them."

George Dunlap: "I will continue to support the superintendent in the initiative to ... raise student achievement."

Rachel Hall: "We have programs on board that we need to continue to put our efforts in, to ensure that they are successful. Also to look at our dropouts. We have a lot of high school students who are dropping along the wayside. We need to take a look at that because they become our taxpayers' problems."

A few one-liners

Joe White: "I am not running to be a mini-superintendent."

Kit Cramer: "I want to look for programs that have worked with other kids to see if we can find ways to replicate them here in Charlotte."

Queen Thompson: "Could you imagine having a hospital board without having doctors and other medical professionals on the board who actually know what the job is?... No."

Nick Holley: "When you have people who have solutions to a lot of the problems and other people won't listen to what you have to say, it's not going to do any good."

Rachel Hall: "You have teachers right now in today's environment teaching in the classroom and they don't want to talk anything about black history. They shy away from it, fear of whatever. It's never been a popular subject, and yet it should be something we could consider."

Wilhelmenia Rembert: "We probably won't have a community where every neighborhood is a high-income neighborhood. That's just the way it is. So what we have to do is build alliances with people across neighborhoods to support the students in schools."

Parting advice

Forum convener Sarah Stevenson, who served on the school board from 1980 to 1988, closed the session with this advice for the non-incumbents:

"Take it from one who has been been there and who has done that: You have to work as a team. You cannot do anything by yourself."

Calendar

OCTOBER

- 16** Charlotte Advocates for Education annual meeting, 7-9 a.m., Hilton uptown, 222 E. 3rd St., Piedmont Ballroom. Speaker: Dr. Michael D. Usdan, senior fellow, Institute for Educational Leadership, on "Re-Thinking School Board Governance;" followed by moderated panel with school board candidates. Cost: \$25. For reservations, call 704-335-0100 ext. 14 or message annualmeeting@advocatesfored.org.
- 16** Finance, Capital & Facilities committee of the board, 4 p.m., Board Conference Room.
- 23** Seminar on religious diversity, 6 p.m., UNCC Barnhardt Student Activity Center. Panel includes Roshan Attrey, founding member

- of India Association of Charlotte and Livingstone College professor; Temple Israel Rabbi Murray Ezring; Charlotte Islamic School Principal Shagufta Yasin Raja; and First Baptist Church-West Senior Pastor Ricky Woods.
- 25** "Do Children/Youth Need Our Time?" sponsored by Parents on the Move, 10 a.m.-2 p.m., UNCC Cone Center. Information, Blanche Penn, 704-890-4101.
- 31, Nov. 1, 2** Faith and Literacy Weekend, a project of the Charlotte Reads Literacy Coalition to encourage faith groups to partner with schools in improving reading.
- NOVEMBER**
- 8** Education Fair, exhibits by area nonpublic, charter and public schools, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Merchandise Mart. Free admission.