

Whither school board?

As national media gather to view transfer of power Tuesday, longtime observers of CMS's struggle for quality schools outline tasks ahead for board, community

Friends, family – and representatives of the national press corps – will gather Tuesday afternoon as three new school board members are sworn in.

It won't be Tuesday – it may be weeks or months – before it's clear what the Nov. 4 election of those new board members signaled.

But for a media machine revving up to commemorate the 1954 decision that declared segregated schools illegal, the drama of a community so indelibly tied to desegregation choosing so determinedly to resegregate by race and class and income is an irresistible story.

There is no question that voters reshaped the face of the board when they elected three whites to replace two blacks and a white. And the reshaping could go far beyond the ethnicity of the incumbents.

Reporters who linger in town the longest may leave with hunches about whether Charlotte-Mecklenburg is renegotiating an old truce between old and new, poor and rich, urban and suburban.

The '90s truce split the school bond baby roughly down the middle and said we'd move on two fronts simultaneously – rebuilding inadequate facilities and building new schools to handle a growing population.

The truce also led to a costly commitment that the schools serving the neediest children would have both the staff and materials needed to be successful.

The board coming to an end Tuesday has tried to keep that



CMS photo from www.cms.k12.nc.us

At last week's televised meeting, board members greet staff from schools winning honors in the state's testing program. Such events boost morale and tell the public about CMS's success stories. They can, however, also fuel public skepticism that the board takes its deliberative and watchdog responsibilities seriously.

commitment, but arguably failed to convince voters that the investments it had made were key to the district's academic gains. There were other failures, missed opportunities and strategic mistakes.

What should the new board aim to accomplish, be prepared to deal with, stand firm to defend?

Educate! asked 62 of its readers for their observations.

The results, below, are occasionally contradictory, but in the main speak to the overwhelming variety – and complexity – of issues that the new board must quickly master.

Some of the authors below are identified. Others wanted to remain anonymous. Not a one

who responded offered a snide or flip comment. The comments reflect a community heavily invested in quality public education, a community determined to find solutions.

Teacher quality

High-poverty schools full of children years behind in their schoolwork need the best teachers CMS has to offer.

But traditionally those schools have not attracted, or held, the best and the brightest. Use differential pay to hold the best, says one reader.

"All teachers should not be paid by the same grid because all teachers are not equal and some

Continued on Page 4

Set-aside for education will prove best

The writer represents District 5 on the Board of County Commissioners.

Your write-up on the CMS funding issue was relatively thorough (*Educate!*, Nov. 20). I hope you will continue to watch this debate closely. I suspect you will see that this option [a 50% set-aside of county budget for education] will be best for all the parties involved. I am happy to discuss it with you.

Ruth C. Samuelson

County timetable tight

The writer represents District 6 on the Board of Education.

You are right: It's going to be a real challenge to do something of high quality. We don't swear in the new Board until Dec. 9, so are in "lame duck" time right now, without anyone having authority or taking strong leadership.

Winter holidays are Dec. 20-Jan. 4, and as you know, staff availability during that time is really limited. I'm still awaiting data on the Board of County Commissioners Retreat date, so don't even know how to plan informally.

Even so, this is a real opportunity for a major change in the way we do business. If we can develop a different way of addressing the budget and capital funding process, we could focus much more time on teaching and learning, and optimizing resource use and equity needs. Today we all waste way too much time and energy lobbying grenades across Third Street or through the Internet (this also makes us all look ineffective to the community).

We will definitely be looking for good ideas as we develop this work. Your thoughts are welcome. Thanks for the clear and correct reporting.

Lee Kindberg

No social experiments

The writer represents District 6 on the Board of County Commissioners.

I read your latest newsletter. I don't agree that I am a "radical" but you are entitled to your opinion. Using such commentary is sort of like [former appointed school board member] Bob Simmons' comments a few years ago (after losing) branding all suburbanites who support neighborhood schools as "zealots."

I am no more "radical" for my side than Swannites are for theirs. I am just not going to sacrifice the suburban children I represent in District 6 as a social experiment in diversity (racial or socioeconomic). Either way: I am elected by the people of District 6 so if Swannites have a problem with my neighborhood schools views they should take that up with them.

Bill James

Where county dollars go

The writer chairs the Citizens Capital Budget Advisory

Changes in *Educate!*

Page numbers move to the left on even-numbered pages this week as we prepare to publish a printed edition. Other small changes will be forthcoming, but the PDF version will continue to be distributed Wednesday nights.

This edition and future PDF editions should print out in the normal way. If you experience difficulty, please message us at swannfello@aol.com.

Committee.

In the ongoing debate about funding I would like to add the following.

Of the \$265 million CMS receives annually from Mecklenburg County for their operating budget, only 34% goes to teacher salaries and benefits. Only 23% goes to the maintenance budget. The rest, \$113 million, goes to administration.

These figures are from the 2003-2004 budget request. The percentages may have changed in the actual budget.

Lewis Guignard

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We're all in this together

Schools that will be up to snuff by 2008 ● and those that still won't be ■ by then are spread all over the county

One of the more damaging bits of demogoguery this year was to falsely pit suburbs against central city over use of school bonds. Suburban parents want new seats to handle growth, but they have their share of schools ■ that still aren't scheduled to be brought up to what educators need to deliver today's curriculum. Schools that meet standards today or will do so by 2008 ● are all over the county. The '90s

con-
sensus
for a 50-50
balance to
meet growth and
repair needs has erod-
ed in both the suburbs
and the central city. A board
dominated by members primarily
elected by suburban voters will heal
the wounds, or risk bringing central-sub-
urban splits to a boiling point again.

- Not scheduled for repairs to meet current standards.
- Meet standards now or will by 2008 if planned work is funded.

schools are more challenging than others." How do you get them there in the first place?

"Require staff to assign seven experienced, talented teachers from each of Myers Park, Providence and South Meck High Schools (21 in all, no more than 7 per school so as to not disrupt those schools) to Waddell, West Charlotte and Garinger, effective in August 2004," offers a reader.

"Pay these 21 teachers each a \$10,000-\$15,000 supplement (perhaps funded by the private sector). In turn, fill at least some of the emptied positions at Myers Park, Providence and South Meck with teachers from Waddell, West Charlotte and Garinger."

Teacher pay is a broader issue, says county commissioner Parks Helms.

"While it is important to have a school system that is efficient and cost-effective, it is also important to recognize that the men and women professionals who teach our children deserve to be paid a fair wage," he says.

Curriculum, instruction

UNCC College of Education professor Jeff Passe says, "School assignment issues are important, but the way things are going, all of the school assignments will be substandard because teachers are being told to teach for the test, rather than for the overall curriculum goals of the North Carolina Course of Study.

"It seems that Board members shy away from those issues because they choose to let the experts (i.e., the professional educators) carry out the policies that the Board sets.

"My advice is to take a good hard look at those policies. Right now, there appears to have been one goal for the past several years – higher test scores.

"The result is a test-preparation curriculum that ignores many of the important, but not easily measured, goals of the excellent N.C. Standard Course of Study.

Whither School Board?

Brown v Board: A calendar of commemorations

The following events have been scheduled to mark the 50th anniversary of the 1954 Brown ruling ending school segregation. Listings compiled by UNCC College of Education. Details will be added as they become available.

JANUARY

- 31 Opening of "Courage: The Carolina Story that Changed America," Museum of the New South. Through Aug. 15.

FEBRUARY

- 1 Exhibit, "Impact of School Desegregation on the Charlotte Area," Atkins Library, UNCC. Through May.
- 11 Book discussion, "Jim Crow's Children: The Broken Promise of the Brown Decision" by Peter Irons, led by Louise Allen, 5 p.m., UNCC Library.
- 13 Professional development conference for CMS teachers, "Teaching about Brown v Board and Issues Related to School Desegregation," 8:30-3:30, Myers Park High.
- 23-27 UNCC Africa and Its Diaspora Week.
- 23 Lecture, "Issues facing African Diaspora and Education," Harvard's Prudence Carter, UNCC.
- 26 Lecture by Mary Dillard, Sarah Lawrence College, "Issues Facing African Diaspora and Education," UNCC.
- 27 Lecture by Anani Dzidzienyo, Brown University, "Issues Facing African Diaspora and Education," UNCC.

MARCH

- 2 Film, "The Intolerable Burden" about school desegregation in Drew, Miss., presented by filmmaker Constance Curry, Queens University.
- 3 Panel discussion, "Why celebrate the decision?" 7 p.m., Moore Hall, UNCC.
- 18 Book discussion, "Thurgood Marshall: American Revolutionary" by Juan Williams, led by UNCC's Ann McColl, noon-2 p.m., Cone Center Room 101, UNCC.
- 25 Book discussion, "Brown v Board

of Education: A Civil Rights Milestone and Its Troubled Legacy" by James T. Patterson, led by UNCC's James Lyons, 5-7 p.m., UNCC library.

- 31 Lecture and reception for the Brown sisters, Linda Brown Thompson and Cheryl Brown Henderson, 7 p.m., UNCC Cone Center.

APRIL

- 9-11, 17-18 "Pass the Peas," a play based on the story of Clarendon County, S.C., performed by the Afro-American Children's Theater, time and place TBA.
- 14 Book discussion, "Mixed Emotions: As Racial Barriers Fell, a University President Remembers" by former UNCC Chancellor Dean Colvard, led by UNCC's Cynthia Jackson-Hammond, 4-6 p.m., UNCC Library.
- 20 Panel of photojournalists James Peeler, Bruce Roberts, Don Sturkey and Cecil Williams explaining their work in "Focus on Justice: Carolina Photographers and the Civil Rights Movement," Levine Museum.

MAY

- 13 Film, "With All Deliberate Speed: The Legacy of Brown v Board of Education," 6 p.m., Levine Museum.
- 16 Drama, dance, music and art related to "Courage" exhibit, by Northwest School of the Arts students, Levine Museum.
- 17 Anniversary of Brown decision. Levine Museum open.

JUNE

- 10 Conference, "Through the Eyes of the Law": Lawyers and historians examine case's impact on education and civil rights, all day, Levine Museum.

We will continue to lose disaffected parents and teachers if this continues. We are already losing thousands of bored students.

"Much of the problem stems

from previous superintendents' promises to raise the scores, from the newspaper's overemphasis on scores as a way of reporting

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School construction by the decades

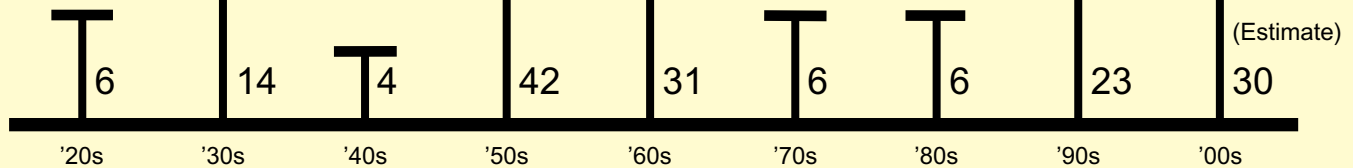
Total newly constructed schools in Charlotte-Mecklenburg.



Myers Street in 1920s



Berry Tech, 2001



Sources: Data, CMS 10-Year Capital Needs Assessment, Myers Street photo: www.plcmc.org

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school success, and the general public's lack of understanding about assessment. No Child Left Behind hasn't helped.

"The school board can be courageous and take on this issue, educating the public, and doing the right thing for students. They can, at least, begin the discussion.

"Perhaps they will merely endorse the prevailing test-based curriculum, but the discussion needs to be held just the same."

For Kushite Institute founder Gyasi Foluke, one of the board's key curricular failures has been in not following its own 1993 policy mandating a multicultural curriculum.

He also blames the board for failing "to teach African American history-culture to its teachers – who cannot teach what they do not know – in the professional education program of CMS.

"And these two failures alone, in the context of the larger per-

centage of black students within CMS, constitute nothing less than 'a crime against humanity,' to use the memorable words of the late Thomas Paine in describing American participation in the slave trade and slavery."

Student health

The papers are full of stories about flabby teenagers. One reader suggests:

"Require athletic directors and principals to work with local Ys, PTAs, youth clubs and students to organize strong intramural sports programs for middle-school and high-school students that involve significant numbers of kids in physical activity.

"Existing programs are far too limited given the size of the middle and high schools.

"Far too few kids are involved in interscholastic sports.

"Far too few kids are active physically.

"Reward bonuses to ADs that create strong programs."

Safety

CMS seems to respond when there are dangerous situations on campus. But one former school board member is not satisfied, saying the district must "aggressively address school violence in a very public way."

Equity

The average annual cost to educate a CMS student is around \$7,000. But an increasing number of students cost \$10,000. These are the children learning English, or the children still learning their name when they arrive at the schoolhouse door.

"Recognize that adequate facilities, classroom tools and resources should be available to EVERY student," says commissioner and former state legislator Helms.

"The Board of Education should not shrink from advocating this on their behalf."

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High-poverty schools

“Charlotte is a community with great wealth and great poverty,” says one longtime Mecklenburg resident.

“We have children with many, many blessings and those with few. It is the responsibility of the community and the job of the community officials to lead in such a way that our community wealth is used to benefit all of the citizens.

“In general, geographically, those with more riches are in groups together and those with fewer privileges are in clusters together. This is a gross generalization but it holds much truth.

“If schools are populated mainly by neighborhoods, they will differ in many ways that are based on the wealth of the families in the neighborhoods.

“Schools that vary from one another vastly in the privileges of the families of the students attending will NEVER offer equal opportunities.

“There are differences in 100 ways (including but going way beyond) the stimulation of other students, kinds of support, parental time for PTSA and other volunteering, attractiveness to teachers, behavior of students.

“We must admit, even vast sums of extra money cannot equalize these differences.

“For the last 30 years, the Charlotte schools have helped integrate this community. I fear that current leaders who promise to ‘equalize’ schools with different resource bases are doomed to take us backwards and to fail to serve our community as a whole.”

Public relations

Educate! readers appear deeply divided over how CMS handles its communications with the public.

“Tell your good news!” says one. “Find more exciting ways to inform the public of the successes of the students and staff. Hire an enthusiastic spokesperson.”

Whither School Board?

Choice: A call to extend it to all, wisely

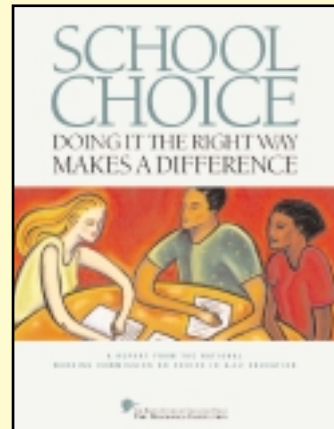
“Communities can decide whether to make expansion of choice a conscious strategy, or they can let choice happen to them. Expanding choice implies that communities will provide some schools in new ways and also eliminate inequitable policies that plague district-run schools serving the poor. Doing new things well is not beyond human capacity, but it requires time, experience, and close analysis of what works and what does not.

“Events in many ways may outrun plans, particularly as the choice elements of the new federal No Child Left Behind legislation become more salient. Families will continue to pursue schooling options, regardless of whether public funding and oversight are well-structured or poorly considered.

“If choice is not deliberately extended to those who now suffer because they don’t have it, it will be extended nonetheless via private actions – private voucher programs, homeschooling, use of the Internet, growth of self-starting private schools, and the like. These actions may or may not benefit those who most need them, but if they develop haphazardly it will be more difficult to maintain a coherent system for educating the public’s children.

“Some believe that even careful, measured expansion of choice is a threat to public education. As this document makes clear, a lot depends on how communities and policymakers proceed. It is equally possible that, just as Franklin D. Roosevelt used the power of government to save capitalism from itself, current state and local leaders can employ the power of choice to improve their chances of achieving the great goals of public education.”

– *The conclusion from “School Choice: Doing It the Right Way Makes a Difference,” November 2003, by the The National Working Commission on Choice in K-12 Education within the Brookings Institution’s Brown Center on Education Policy, www.brookings.edu/browncenter*



But says another: “Use the CMS-TV station for real discussion of what’s happening within schools. Now it comes across as pure propaganda.”

CMS says it broadcasts press conferences. But typically it broadcasts only officials’ opening statements at such events, dropping the questions asked by local reporters and the answers that are given.

Another writes that when CMS goes out into public forums, there can be so many staff present that the members of the public are

overwhelmed – and intimidated. At board meetings, a third or more of the Board Room’s seats are filled with staff, only a few of whom will be called on for information. (Supt. Jim Pughsley requires his senior staff to be present.)

But far more irksome, says one reader, are the hours of board meeting time devoted to celebrations, awards, recognitions – and PowerPoint presentations.

Most times when a child is at the Board Room lectern, you

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could hear a pin drop. Fifth-grader John DeKemper's analysis of the open education magnet program (*Educate!*, Oct. 30) was met not only by hearty applause, but a comment from the chair that he had "set a new standard" for presentations to the board.

The atmosphere is quite different as staff plows through a multiple-slide PowerPoint with a platoon of presenters. On one recent evening, as it neared 10 o'clock, Pughsley nudged his staff to cut to the chase.

The presentations are designed for television. The question is whether anyone is listening.

Board relations

The board's naysayers constantly complain that members are uncivil at their meetings. They are not, one should note, throwing chairs or engaging in other antics reported nationally. But the reputation persists.

"Be nice to each other," advises one reader.

"The new school board," says another, "should address through the way it works the basic lack of confidence within the community about how it works and serves the community and the children.

"Can they establish a respectful environment in which diverse, even opposing, positions can be discussed, debated and perhaps resolved?"

"Can they serve as a model for the community as to what we would like to see and/or experience in the community?"

Other readers find the disputes that break out in the Board Room to be reflective of real divisions in the community. And for Helms, airing those divisions is important:

"While it is important to engage in discussion and debate in a respectful and deliberative manner," he says, "it is also important that different points of view be discussed and considered, and that robust debate be permitted and encouraged."

Ponder ye, all who expect that N.C. schools will grow forever

Projected percent change in grades K-12 enrollment, public schools, 2001-2013

United States	4.3%
West	13.2%
South	3.9%
Midwest	0.0%
Northeast	-1.8%

States:

Alaska	17.0%
Hawaii	16.1%
California	15.7%
Idaho	15.1%
New Mexico	14.9%
Nevada	13.8%
Wyoming	13.1%
Utah	12.7%
Arizona	12.0%
Texas	11.2%
Colorado	8.8%
Georgia	6.8%
Washington	5.7%
Florida	5.4%
Oregon	5.4%
Montana	4.6%
Virginia	4.3%
South Dakota	2.6%
New Jersey	2.5%
Michigan	2.4%
Tennessee	2.4%
Nebraska	2.0%

Rhode Island	1.9%
Delaware	1.8%
Maryland	1.7%
Kansas	1.4%
Illinois	1.2%
South Carolina	0.9%
Missouri	0.5%
Indiana	0.4%
Louisiana	0.0%
New Hampshire	-0.2%
North Carolina	-0.9%
Wisconsin	-1.1%
Minnesota	-1.2%
Iowa	-1.6%
Alabama	-1.7%
Oklahoma	-1.7%
Pennsylvania	-1.9%
Maine	-2.4%
Massachusetts	-2.4%
Mississippi	-2.4%
Connecticut	-2.8%
District of Columbia	-2.8%
Arkansas	-2.9%
Vermont	-3.2%
Ohio	-3.2%
New York	-3.5%
North Dakota	-4.5%
Kentucky	-5.5%
West Virginia	-6.1%

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, June 2003

"My first suggestion," says Foluke, who has appeared often in front of the board for the Kushite Institute, "is that they begin to LISTEN to informed persons-voices in the community and provide some form of official feedback to those of us appearing before the board, either immediately or subsequently in writing."

During public hearings, it is board policy not to respond to any citizen comments as they are made. Those who lived in Mecklenburg during the troubled

times of the 1960s and 1970s may feel that policy is very wise.

But for presenters, who struggle to say their peace in the allotted three minutes, the lack of response can be misconstrued as evidence that public comment is a charade.

Regional issues

The Metrolina megapolis is becoming, for residents, a seamless urban whole. But its governments are bound by 19th-century

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boundary lines.

“Start a regional planning group,” says one reader, “with school boards in Cabarrus, Iredell, Gaston and Union counties to discuss ways to avoid existing turf battles over suburban schools.”

“Seek possible cooperative agreements that would be beneficial for all parties, both educationally and financially. Plan with nearby counties.”

School location

Mecklenburg is most split over not whether to serve children in new subdivisions, but how.

“Communicate a simple message,” thunders one reader. “Just because someone buys a house at Site X does not mean that CMS is obligated to provide a school within X plus 3 miles within six months of closing.”

“There are many homes for sale, at all price ranges, in Charlotte close to existing schools. CMS is not required to facilitate sprawl or subsidize Charlotte’s home-building community.”

Bob Simmons, an appointed member who has departed the school board, helped write a 2001 resolution that led to the current choice assignment plan.

“The so-called ‘home school guarantee,’” he says, “is not a guarantee of assignment to the closest school to a child’s home nor a guarantee of the same assignment for any residence in perpetuity. This would be a neighborhood schools plan.”

“There are two reasons that we can’t have a neighborhood schools plan in CMS: (1) the existing schools were not built to support neighborhood schools, but were built to support desegregated community schools, and the community can’t now afford to discard that investment, and (2) our community is growing in a manner that is overpopulating the most distant suburban schools and producing profound socioeconomic segregation – both factors proved

Whither School Board?

The case for small high schools

“Small schools are perfect for teenagers, because we need people to be warm and care about us, to be after us – otherwise, we might take the wrong road. Mostly you’re in school, so school becomes your home. And you want to make sure that you’re in a good home.”

“This is a hard age. You’re confused, you don’t know what you’re going to do, you feel alienated. You need adults around you, and friends. And in a small community, it’s more likely that you’ll find people that know you better.”

“There is a parent in school who works in the office. That’s such a great idea, to have a parent in school, believe me. You know they have a child and they understand you better and they understand the things you need. I bother the parent so much for copies and things – it’s a good mediator....”

“At my school, like many small schools, you have classes with the same group of 75 students and the same four teachers in your cluster or grade. The classes are 70 minutes long, which is longer than in most large high schools, but they go by quickly. The difference is that we’re not lectured [to] by the teacher. We teach the class to each other, we participate.”

“There are discussions, debates, group activities. If there are five questions to answer, there might be five tables; each group takes one question to discuss and comes up with an idea or a written paragraph. Everyone has to agree, and then at the end every table presents their views.”

“These are essential skills for your life—you’re going to have to be talking to people and making agreements, so it’s a good thing to learn. Of course in every classroom people have different levels. But I don’t see any difference between us. It comes naturally being with everybody else, because that’s what life is like. In every group project there has to be a leader, but we divide the work. It’s all about feeding each other, having something to offer.”

“I don’t think that just because you’re a bad student you have nothing to say. There’s something that you react to, something you like, and you have to find it. In order to find it you need to be exposed to every kind of person, not to be limited. And you have to be given the opportunity to succeed. There’s a Spanish saying, ‘Nadie nace sabiendo.’ (‘No one is born knowing.’) You learn!”

“Everyone has something to teach and something to learn. Maybe a not-so-skilled student might teach you how to be more patient – skills about life that you need! This is what you get out of high school, these little things about knowing yourself.”

– Rosa Fernandez, a 12th-grader at Manhattan International High, who helped design a new small Bronx school named Discovery High. Quoted in *“The Schools We Need: Creating Small High Schools That Work For Us,”* published by Carnegie Corporation, Bronx New Century High Schools and What Kids Can Do, www.whatkidscando.org



Fernandez

by research to have a dramatic adverse effect on the quality of

education received by children.”

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Assignment

Simmons doesn't use the term, but his assessment suggests that the board cooked its own goose. The board let too many students transfer out of their assigned schools, exacerbating suburban crowding. More siblings were grandfathered.

"We have produced," he says, "a system that creates the expectation of entitlement which is contrary to the balance originally sought."

One of Simmons' solutions – expanding suburban home school attendance areas toward the center city – rankles suburban parents. He also advocates setting aside seats in overcrowded schools for students opting out of high-poverty schools in the central city.

"The Board made a critical mistake in the initial implementation of the choice plan by refusing to enforce the policies in support of the resolution," Simmons insists.

"They didn't want to disappoint parents by refusing to allow transfers and grandfathering that undercut utilization and equity for the promotion of proximity and stability.

"The Board needed to take a longer-term view of the choice plan, imposing some current disappointment and dislocation in the interest of future balance.

"The result is the need, sooner than expected, of the adjustment of geographic boundaries and of the establishment of lower estimated capacities for the most over-utilized schools.

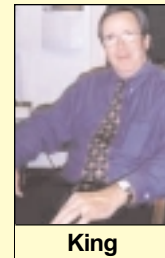
"This is the reality the current board must face, and they must face it with the willingness to dis-appoint and dislocate some students now for the greater longer-term health of the system.

"The board has to make some hard choices to achieve the balance required of the choice plan by the resolution and the policies. These choices include not only the adjustment of the geographic

'Curmudgeon in Chief'

Charlotte's own Larry King, executive director of the Council for Children, was named a Champion for Children by the North Carolina Child Advocacy Institute. In the Institute's profile, writer Damien Jackson dubs King "Curmudgeon in Chief" within North Carolina's network of child advocates. That is very good news because countless more children will benefit from his tireless championing of their interests and his astute judgments about where the 'systems' affecting their young lives can be changed for the better."

The Charlotte council was formed in 1979 by the Junior League of Charlotte and the United Way.



King

– www.ncchild.org

boundaries and the establishment and enforcement of estimated capacities that anticipate the implementation of all of the priorities of the choice plan, but also the location and timing of new schools and school expansions.

"Further failure now will only continue to make the situation worse to the detriment of the education provided to all of our children.

"But the Board is not alone; they have an excellent superintendent and staff. The Board should listen to Dr. Pughsley and the staff, who understand what needs to be done to continue the improvement of the education of all of our children."

Relations with county

As this board's time wound down, negotiations with county commissioners slowed over the operating budget, and most recently over when bonds already approved by the voters would be sold. Helms hopes the new board will be vocal advocates for children's needs.

"When dealing with the County Commission," Helms says, "tell the County Commission what is needed in terms of facilities and in terms of dollars to meet the needs of a school system that is perhaps the cornerstone of this community's economic success.

"Let the Board of County

Commissioners determine the tax rate. In other words, don't send the Board of County Commissioners a 'cheap strategy' to satisfy political agendas.

"The Board of County Commissioners was elected to GOVERN, not just reduce the property tax rate."

What's at stake

Will the new board, asks one Charlotte leader, "explore what Dr. Pughsley means by our 'three-to five-year window of opportunity' [to make all schools attractive to all residents] and help engage the community around the urgency of what we are in and where we are headed?

"Will they provide leadership and, dare we hope, vision?"

"I think," says Helms, "it is more important than ever that we maintain the credibility of the public school system and that we understand the risk of failure if the public loses confidence in the way we teach our children.

"I'm really not annoyed by anything the Board of Education does because the members have what amounts to an almost impossible job – politically, fiscally and educationally.

"But theirs is a job that must be done, and done well, if our community is to remain vibrant, cohesive and strong."

– Steve Johnston

'Choice out' represents failure: A case in point

The writer is a retired CMS middle school math teacher.

By **RICHARD McELRATH**

I tutor a student that is a fifth grader in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system. The following are notes the student copied from the board in their math class.

Objective 1.08

Prime and Composite numbers

1) A prime number is a number that can only be multiplied by one and itself. Example- 2, 3, 5, 7?

2) Composite numbers are numbers that have more than 1 multiple. Example: 24 (1x24), (2x12), (3x8), (4x6)

Here's a passage from Charlotte-Mecklenburg's adopted textbook – "Glencoe Mathematics Applications and Connections:"

Prime number: A whole number greater than 1 that has exactly two factors, 1 and itself.

Composite number: Any whole number greater than 1 that has more than two factors.

I thought the student had copied the notes incorrectly. I had the student call a classmate and I asked the classmate to read to me the math notes they had. These notes were exactly the same as the notes my student had.

The following day I called my student's math teacher. I was anticipating the teacher thanking me for pointing out the mistake. That did not happen.

The teacher maintained that what was written on the board

was indeed correct. The teacher went so far as to read the correct definition for a "prime number" from a math book and claimed that the definition written on the board and the definition in the book were the same.

I turned next to the teacher's definition of "composite numbers." The first thing I said to the teacher was, "If you talk about 'prime' and 'composite' numbers you should talk about factors." The teacher responded, "Factors and multiples are the same thing."

Not in my world: A factor is a part of a number. If 2 times 3 equals 6, the 2 and 3 are the parts or factors of 6. The multiple in the above example is 6 – the product of the parts.

I made arrangements to meet with the assistant principal. The assistant principal is a former math teacher. At that meeting, I expressed my concern that a person who did not know what a prime or a composite number was or did not know the difference between a factor and a multiple should not be teaching math. The assistant principal agreed.

Within the next few days my student was taken out of that math teacher's class. The student was granted "choice out." I've asked my student several times within the last month or so if that teacher is still teaching math. Each time I asked the question, the answer has been yes.



McElrath

My student is happy. I'm happy that my student, via "choice out," has a chance to learn math from someone who knows and can teach math.

But, the mere fact that the administration removed my student from that classroom means there is something wrong with what's going on in that classroom. I failed to see how "choice out" solved the problems within the classroom.

In my opinion the administration of that school has failed their moral, ethical and legal responsibility to make sure that every child in that school is in a class that provides adequate instruction for all children.

"Choice out" is not a plan. "Choice out" is a confession of failure, a declaration of surrender and a condemnation of those who did not manage to get out.

If the administration of any school feels it is necessary to remove a child from any class because the level of instruction in that class is, for any reason, below standard, then that administration should remove all students or fix the problem within the class.

No school in this system should have a "choice out" policy. Every school in this system should observe a policy of a sound basic education for every child in every classroom.

The beauty of our democracy is best observed when our institutions guarantee that success or failure is the result of an individual's effort or lack thereof – and not lack of equal opportunity.



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Briefs

No Child relief?: In an appearance in Pennsylvania, Rod Paige said the U.S. Department of Education is “discussing now what relief we can provide for school districts” from the No Child Left Behind provision that insists that virtually all special education students, irrespective of disability, be held to the same achievement standards as others of their age, the *Inquirer* reported. The provision is the sole reason why hundreds of otherwise top-performing U.S. schools may come under No Child sanctions next year. Paige said the regulations might be issued by the end of the year.

www.philly.com

Fewer honors courses: North Carolina may strip away honors-course status from all but mandatory courses in English, math, science and social studies for next fall's ninth-graders, the *News and Observer* reported. Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses would continue to carry an extra grade point, but many courses that now carry 5 points for an A would be stripped back to 4 points. State officials say they cannot verify the uniform quality of local honors courses. The effect, among students ranked near their top of their class, would be to reduce the pressure to take honors courses just to get the extra point, which might affect their college choices.

www.newsobserver.com

Fighting No Child: Oregon's governor was considering suing the federal government over No Child Left Behind provisions, the *Oregonian* reported. The governor's office believes No Child mandates \$208 million in new spending that is not reimbursed by No Child, this despite the law's provision that no state need “spend any funds or incur any

costs not paid for under this act.” U.S. Education undersecretary Eugene Hickok said U.S. funding to Oregon had increased \$115 million. “It's more important that we educate kids than that we compensate lawyers,” Hickok said.

www.oregonlive.com

Substitute teachers: The Clarksville-Montgomery County, Tenn., school district lowered its educational requirements for substitute teachers, and high school grads as young as 21 may be taking classes, the *Leaf-Chronicle* reported. The pay rate for those without a bachelor's degree is \$6.28 an hour.

www.tennessee.com

Boston review: Boston dropped use of race in student assignment in 1999, but now will review its set-aside of half of each school's seats for children outside the school's walk zone, the *Globe* reported. The set-aside allowed options for parents seeking seeking seats in the better schools, but ramped up transportation costs.

www.boston.com

Cheating: A principal crusading against cheating at Staples High in Westport, Conn., found his strongest supporters among students, the *New York Times* reported. And one of the biggest barriers to action was to get adults to take the problem seri-

ously. Incidents last spring and student newspaper stories launched a process that may lead to a new honor code.

www.nytimes.com

Falling IQs: Thai children's IQs have dropped from an average 92 in 1996 to 89 in 2002, the *Straits Times* quoted health officials as saying. Parents were asked to spend more time with children on skill development. An official said “children should not just be dumped in front of the TV or computer.”

<http://straitstimes.asia1.com.sg>

Talking about suicide: One of the factors limiting education and counseling efforts to reduce teen suicide is denial among parents, the *Christian Science Monitor* reported. With about 5,000 in the 15-24 age group taking their lives annually, suicide ranks third-largest cause of death in that age group behind vehicle accidents and homicide. Suicide death rates peaked in 1994, but remain three times as high as in the 1950s, the *Monitor* reported.

www.csmonitor.com

More options: Tennessee students facing must-pass tests in English II, algebra I and biology may get the option of graduating by passing different tests, the *Tennessean* reported. geometry instead of algebra or chemistry

Continued on Page 12

Underwrite an edition of *Educate!*

Educate! depends on underwriters for operating support. In gratitude for this support, we will publish notices acknowledging this philanthropy. For all the rules, consult the “You Can Help” page at www.educateclt.org. Or contact Steve Johnston at The Swann Fellowship at 704-342-4330 or at SwannFello@aol.com

Briefs *continued*

instead of biology, say; or a three-hour personal portfolio exam that would show how they tackle real-life problems. Achieving a 19 on the ACT would also be accepted.

www.tennessean.com

Supporting families: Wake County boasts a 96% participation rate in its four-year-old Partnership for Educational Success program, which provides academic and family support services to struggling students. 72% of enrolled children have shown improvement in literacy and math skills.

www.wcpss.net

Locating ADHD: A research team at the University of California Los Angeles announced they had found the brain sites where abnormalities appear to be related to the attention deficit and impulse control problems faced by children with ADHD, or attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder. The research may improve treatment for the 6% of American children who suffer from the disorder.

www.msnbc.com

Attention-grabber: And from Searcy, Ark., the Daily Citizen reports that area schools are removing chalk boards to install computer-controlled "smart boards" that keep students' interest in learning. Outfitting one classroom costs about \$3,800, but teachers report enhanced student learning in courses ranging from vocational to advanced mathematics. The boards are flat-panel computer displays, so anything that can be displayed in a computer, from teacher notes to film clips, can be incorporated into classroom instruction.

www.thedailycitizen.com

Living biology: Finally, from Fairfield, Calif., comes word that

Youth service award nominees sought

The Do Something BRICK Awards honor people under the age of 18 for service in the areas of community building, health, and the environment.

Each award includes a \$5,000 higher education scholarship, a \$5,000 grant for continued community work, pro bono services, and other support and recognition.

Winners are honored at an April 8 annual gala in New York City that has been dubbed the "Oscars" of youth service awards by CNN.

If you know of any outstanding young leaders who should be considered for this honor, please direct them to: www.dosomething.org. Applicants must enter on their own behalf. The three-essay application is due Jan. 15.

The BRICK award is sponsored by Do Something, a Manhattan nonprofit founded in 1993 by Andrew Shue and Michael Sanchez, two New Jersey boyhood friends who thought it would be cool if schools taught community service the same way they supported athletics and team sports. The nonprofit began placing community coaches teaching leadership, citizenship and character in schools nationally in 1998. About 300 will be in service in January.

grubs feeding on dead pigeon fell through ceiling cracks onto English class students in a portable classroom at Fairfield High, the Daily Republic reported. School officials condemned the 35- to 40-year-old building and scheduled it for demolition.

www.dailyrepublic.com

Joint agreement: Wake County Schools approved an agreement with the town of Holly Springs that will add recreational improvements to a high school to be built in the town. The town contributes \$350,000, the schools \$250,000 toward upgraded ball fields, tennis courts, concessions and restroom facilities.

Calendar

For events commemorating the Brown v Board case, see Page 4.

DECEMBER

- 4 Education Budget Advisory Committee, 7:30 a.m., Government Center 11th floor conference room.
- 5 Equity Committee, 8 a.m., Board

- Room, Education Center.
- 9 School board installs new members, 5 p.m., Board Room.
- 9 School board meets, 6 p.m., Board Room.
- 16 Bond Oversight Committee, 7:30 a.m., Building Services, 3301 Stafford Dr. off Wilkinson Blvd.
- 16 Policy Committee, 3:15 p.m., Room 414, Education Center.
- 17 Education Budget Advisory Committee, 7:30 a.m., Government Center 11th floor conference room.
- 18 Finance, Capital & Facilities Committee, Board Conference Room.

JANUARY

- 26-28 North Carolina character education conference, Renaissance Suites Hotel, 2800 Coliseum Centre Dr. Download details and registration forms from pink box at www.ncpublic-schools.org/charactereducation.

FEBRUARY

- 29 H.E.L.P. (Helping Empower Local People) town meeting on education for 2,500 people, time and place to be determined.