



Lion watches over West Charlotte High Wednesday night.

What's next for West Charlotte?

To end speculation, school board chair Joe White has scheduled a June 2 board workshop at 3 p.m. in the Education Center's Board Room to force County Commission Chair Tom Cox onto the record about his ideas for West Charlotte High School.

School Principal Delores Lee has met with parents and alumni about Cox's ideas. Cox has pitched them to the Chamber of Commerce. As White put it Tuesday, the plan has been "presented to everybody but the people that make the decision" – and the public.

People were worrying this week about West Charlotte being renamed for Clinton Blake, principal from 1938 to the late '60s; about it becoming a charter school no longer under full CMS control; about

Continued on Page 2

Promises, promises

Divided community weighs in on likely decision to downsize renovations, build new classrooms

Tuesday's school board hearing was all about whether the board would break trust with all or just some voters in a decision June 8.

The decision will likely shift about \$29 million to new construction by downsizing or delaying renovation projects promised during earlier bond campaigns.

The suburban parents who were out in force at the Education Center seemed focused less on past promises than on their plea for new classrooms.

Center-city residents, many of them personally familiar with decades of broken promises, asserted that the likely reallocation would ensure defeat of future bond referendums.

Former board chair Arthur Griffin warned the board of the damage it had done to its Bond Oversight Committee. That advisory group, created in 1997 to reassure voters that bond money would be spent as promised, was instead directed in March to screen all bond projects for ones where some or all the money could be taken away.

There were two clear outcomes from Tuesday's hearing.

One was the emergence of two powerful, conciliatory voices: Michael Murdock, a white southwest Mecklenburg parent; and John Minter, a black east Charlotte grandparent. Their comments are quoted below.

The other outcome was that school board members Wednesday were talking with renewed interest about revisiting the board's student assignment decision – as the board promised when the con-

troversial choice plan was set in motion in 2001.

A number of speakers Tuesday pressed for such a review. They asserted that the temptation to reallocate bond money springs directly from the board's refusal to make efficient use of its existing resources. In the language of an earlier era when the assignment mantra was SPUD – stability, proximity, utilization and diversity – the school board has sacrificed U and D for S and P.

Compared with predictions of a marathon budget hearing before county commissioners Thursday night, the school board's hearing was short. And it was quaintly polite: Many in the audience applauded all speakers, irrespective of their conflicting views.

Dehumanizing rhetoric

Michael Murdock speaks often for FLAME, a group of southwest Mecklenburg parents that sought, likely unsuccessfully, to reallocate renovation funding to the planned Winget Park Elementary. That new school would ease overcrowding at Lake Wylie and Steele Creek elementaries.

"We're told we have no business buying houses out on the edge of the county, then expecting CMS to build us a school," Murdock told the board. "My kids won't be going to the Winget Park school when it gets built. They'll still be at Lake Wylie, so it seems to me I'm asking you to build a new school for someone else's kids...."

"We're told we have no business expecting CMS to build us a

Continued on Page 2

West Charlotte

Continued from Page 1

it and possibly its feeder schools sharing \$3 million a year for three years in an effort to dramatically raise test scores.

Cox's presentation has been evolving since April, when his funding framework presentation asked, "What would it take to double West Charlotte's score in 3 years?"

Contacted Wednesday, Cox said, "Who is Clinton Blake? I really have no idea why folks are saying that."

"Regarding designation as a public charter school, I have suggested that being a public charter school – operated by CMS – would/might release CMS from state rules/regulations that inhibit out-of-the-box thinking. I am not wedded to that idea, especially if it scares off people from supporting the major objective – namely, improving EOG test scores from 25% to 50% on-grade over three years.

"Indeed, the only question that I am asking is, 'What would it take to double EOG on-grade achievement at West Charlotte, given no financial constraints?'"

"I am interested in a believable plan that sets that goal, defines paths and organizations to achieve it, and measures fairly getting there."

Cox denied any intention to hold the school board hostage during the annual budget debate.

"I proposed the idea about West Charlotte," Cox wrote, "after I discovered the state of EOG affairs at the school and being motivated by the belief that we should not tolerate it."

West Charlotte is the last formerly segregated black high school operating in CMS. For decades after desegregation it remained the pride of the African-American community. But since the choice assignment plan radially stripped it of some of its middle-

income families, nearly all its white students and some of its teachers, achievement has lagged.

Last year's scores showed fewer than 32% of students on or above grade level in eight of nine end-of-course tests. Only a quarter of 10th-graders passed a comprehensive exam. About 67% of teachers were fully licensed, compared with 82% statewide; teacher turnover was 25% compared with 16% statewide. Student attendance was 89% compared to 94% in CMS and 95% statewide.

One person who talked with Cox recently said the \$3 million would come out of the \$11 million hike County Manager Harry Jones budgeted for CMS. But the money would be paid only if the board adopts accountability goals.

The school board asked for a \$25 million hike. Its Education Budget Advisory Committee said the schools need an additional \$50 million from the county.

Cox, a Republican, is occasionally a swing vote between four Democrats supportive of more money for the schools, and four conservative Republicans, often joined by Cox, who have kept county funding for schools static for the last two years despite an influx of 7,000 students.

One observer said Supt. Jim Pughsley and the school board appear unfocused on struggling students at all high schools, including West Charlotte, adding, "It might cost them dearly."



Cox

Moving bond money divides community

Continued from Page 1

school because other people have lived here longer than we have, and we're probably not going to stay that long anyway. I'm sure some of my neighbors whose families have been in Steele Creek since the 1760s would find that quite interesting! I find it interesting because my 5-year-old has lived here just as long as any of the other 5-year-olds she'll start kindergarten with this fall. So if we say it's all about the children, then what difference does any of that make?

"What did saying all that accomplish? Am I any closer to gaining your support and that of people who see things differently from me for having said it? No.

"This kind of rhetoric serves no purpose other than to dehumanize and delegitimize people on both sides of these discussions, who want nothing more than your help in addressing their legitimate concerns, whether it's children denied equitable resources or children packed into overcrowded schools. It takes rhetorical opponents and turns us into enemies.

"We endorse the Bond Oversight Committee's recommendations,

Continued on Page 6

Educate! is a journal on public education focusing on Charlotte-Mecklenburg and N.C. Our aim is to supply information useful to you in your role as student, parent or citizen.

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Calendar change questioned

Plan backed by tourist industry may cost N.C. school systems plenty

A position paper circulated this week raises fundamental questions about a bill gathering steam in the N.C. legislature that would mandate when N.C. school districts begin and end their school years.

The paper says the proposal, championed by tourist interests, will cost the state heavily, is full of unintended consequences, and may leave struggling school systems with even less time to educate low-performing children.

The three groups collaborating on the paper are the N.C. Association of School Administrators, the N.C. School Boards Association, and the Public School Forum of North Carolina. Excerpts:

The 2004 session is being asked to consider a proposal that would have the following act:

1. Public schools could not open before Aug. 25 and must end by June 10.

2. Ten "teacher work days" (i.e., days for staff development, planning and paperwork) would be eliminated, but it would not reduce salaries of teachers and other employees now required to work on those 10 days.

The bill is being supported by tourism and real estate interests who contend that North Carolina's tourism industry would realize larger profits if families had more August vacation days.

The bill is opposed by mainstream education groups who contend that the bill removes needed flexibility and could set back the education progress that has been made in recent years.

What is missing in the debate to date are answers to critical questions: What is the real cost of the proposal? Is the State running the risk of discrimination lawsuits? Will student performance scores move backward? Are there alternatives that could result in earlier school openings without giving

Potential loss from 10 days' lost work

The position paper written by three N.C. education organizations includes an estimate of the money to be spent paying teachers and other school employees for days they would no longer work.

| Employees | State-Funded | | County-Funded | | Total |
|---------------|----------------|--------------------|---------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| | Number | 10 days cost | Number | 10 days cost | |
| Teachers | 76,314 | \$132,040,564 | 5,973 | \$10,334,648 | \$142,375,212 |
| Ins. support | 8,878 | 17,217,670 | 2,052 | 3,979,574 | 21,197,244 |
| Tea.Assist. | 21,053 | 15,763,912 | 2,879 | 2,155,717 | 17,919,629 |
| Assist. Prin. | 1,735 | 3,748,389 | 774 | 1,672,192 | 5,420,581 |
| Total | 107,980 | 168,770,535 | 11,678 | 18,142,130 | 186,912,665 |

Figures do not include average local salary supplements paid to teachers and instructional support personnel, or the average local salary supplement paid to assistant principals. The cost of 10 days of average salary supplements for teachers alone add another \$11.5 million of county funds that will be lost under the proposal.

up to 107,980 employees plus any clerical, or custodial employees paid on a 10-month calendar, the same pay for two weeks less work?

Should the State consider converting the 10 days to instruction, making North Carolina's school year for students more like school years around the world? The following will raise those questions in the hope that the issue will be resolved with all of the facts on the table.

1 How many school employees will receive the same pay for 10 fewer days of work?

The current Labor Day bill proposes to eliminate 10 teacher work days in exchange for a later school opening date. The bill is silent, however, on whether employees other than teachers who would ordinarily be working on teacher work days would also receive the same pay for less work or whether their pay would be reduced for the 10 days not worked. Above are the numbers of school employees potentially affected by fewer work days and the current cost of 10 days of

work. If non-teachers have their pay reduced by 10 days, will the potential savings be reflected in the budget?

The figures do not include the average local salary supplements paid to teachers and instructional support personnel or the average local salary supplement paid to assistant principals. The cost of 10 days of average salary supplements for teachers alone adds another \$11,531,082 of county funds that will be lost under this proposal

2 Is the state exposing itself and school boards to discrimination lawsuits?

In light of the large number of employees, nearly 120,000, who potentially stand to earn the same salary for less work, is the State running the risk of a discrimination lawsuit being filed by other state employees, contending that the same treatment should be extended to all?

There are 11,678 locally-funded teachers and others employed at local schools. If school boards, as a result of this bill, pay those

Groups question calendar proposal

Continued from Page 4

employees the same for working 10 fewer days, will the General Assembly have made local school boards vulnerable to discrimination suits from other school system employees? If, on the other hand, a local school board decides to cut the pay of locally-funded employees for the equivalent of 10 days pay, could they? Have bill sponsors consulted with the school boards about the impact of this bill on locally-funded school personnel?

3 What impact will the elimination of work days have on retirement benefits or on severance pay liability?

Currently teachers can use accrued vacation days on “unprotected” work days. In the current school calendar, school systems can require that all teachers work on protected (i.e., required) work-days; on unprotected days, teachers can use vacation leave. If teachers can no longer use up to 10 vacation days a year, the state will accrue liability either through teachers applying larger numbers of unused vacation leave to retirement credit or through higher severance pay to teachers who retire or resign.

Currently teachers can accrue up to 30 days of unused vacation leave. The proposed legislation insures a dramatic increase in the amount of accrued unused vacation days. Based upon estimates from the Department of Public Instruction, the additional payout for unused annual leave could range between \$10-20 million per year. What is the potential economic impact of this change over time both on the retirement system and on severance benefits legally owed to employees who retire or resign?

Will there be a financial impact on county governments? Will the change force local school boards to

petition county commissioners for additional funds to pay higher severance costs for locally paid teachers? Has a fiscal note been requested?

4 How much will substitute teacher pay increase?

Substitute teacher pay is determined based on the daily rate of pay for beginning teachers. If teachers work 10 fewer days with no reduction in pay, the daily rate of pay for beginning teachers will increase. That will cause substitute teacher pay to increase.

Based upon preliminary estimates, the cost of increased substitute pay would be \$3.7 million per year. Has a fiscal note been requested?

5 What will the education impact of late school openings be?

Many communities, especially low-wealth counties, challenged by large numbers of at-risk students, are attempting to squeeze in as many days of schooling as possible in advance of state testing dates – and, based on rising student performance rates, those extra days seem to be making a difference. Many of those counties are among the poorest and most diverse in the state, Hoke County among them.

Has anyone attempted to estimate what the educational impact of late school openings will be on these counties if they lose two or three weeks of instruction before tests are given?

6 Why are bill supporters relying on flawed research?

The ECU study that claims that the economic benefit of a late school opening date would be \$1 billion-\$2 billion was based their study on 240 parent responses to a survey available only on the Website of Save Our Summers (SOS), the advocacy group working with the tourism industry in support of the bill. The survey was not available to other par-

ents, and no attempt was made to have a representative sample – one that would include families in which both parents work, single parent families, families who do not have access to a computer, or parents who do not support the goals of SOS.

A predictable 100% of the 240 respondents to the survey said they would extend their vacations if schools opened later; and, based on that response, the researchers arrived at their \$1 billion-\$2 billion estimate. Is the General Assembly going to require that a credible study be done before enacting legislation supported by inflated claims?

7 Couldn't the state make use of the 10 days rather than giving people the same pay for less work?

North Carolina, like a number of other states across the nation, has the shortest instructional year in the industrial world. The average number of instructional days in other industrial countries is 207 compared to North Carolina's 180.

Instead of giving up 10 days of work while continuing to pay for them, has the General Assembly considered adding 5 or 10 days of instruction to the school calendar in an effort to make the school year more competitive with those of countries around the world?

The only additional cost would be the cost of transportation for students to and from schools – the state is already paying the cost of salaries, utilities, etc.

Summary:

The school calendar issue, like most facing the General Assembly, is not a simple either/or proposition. The list of questions raised in this discussion paper is not an inclusive list – there are other equally difficult and troubling questions that could have been included.

At a minimum, however, these questions deserve to be debated and answered before action is taken on the school calendar bill.

Moving bond money divides community

Continued from Page 2

not because everyone gets what they want – we certainly didn't get what we wanted out of this – but because they're a step in the direction of trying to hear and respond to the legitimate concerns of many diverse groups in this community.

"They're a step in the direction of trying to build trust in our government's ability to make sound business decisions while trying to retain the trust of people who fear that promises made to them are about to be forgotten again. And if anyone can come up with a better way to achieve both of those goals concurrently, I'm sure this Board would like to hear from them."

We are not enemies

"Contrary to what I've heard tonight, I don't feel that anyone in this room is an enemy," said John Minter.

"You are of course public officials. The folks at Highland, and other areas who want to get their kids out of crowded schools, they're not the enemy of the inner city.

"And the inner city students, or the students in other schools that need facilities, are not their enemy.

What we have is a serious problem in this community that we've got to find a long-term solution for....

"The school board needs to think carefully about this issue, which is being forced on the schools by county commissioners who use the tax rate as a wedge to ensure their election, with little regard for the good of the entire county.

"The school board must take a stand for its students – all of its students – and demand that the school system is fully funded – for the good of all students.

"The parents in Highland need a new school. The folk at Cochrane, where I have a grand-

Rev. J.A. DeLaine's first ride on a school bus

The "Courage" exhibit at the Museum of the New South records the fight by the Rev. J.A. DeLaine and others for bus transportation to all-black schools in Clarendon County, S.C. That push led to the earliest of the five cases later joined in the 1954 Brown v. Board decision that ruled separate schools unconstitutional. In this recollection for Teachers College Record, DeLaine's daughter Ophelia DeLaine Gona tells a family story:

"The scores of new school buses bought in 1952 needed scores of bus drivers, and the state administrators made sure things were equal. Black school buses got the same type of drivers as did white buses – high school students. In those days, young drivers in South Carolina were often highly experienced. They had driven tractors and trucks on the farms where their families lived. They had taken family cars on rutted and narrow backcountry roads and across shaky, one-lane wooden bridges. One could feel confident when a country boy with a driver's license was at the wheel.

"That is why, in 1954, my brother B.B., a 12th grade student who had always been (and forever will be) in love with "horseless carriages," could become a school bus driver in Lake City, South Carolina. It filled Daddy with pride that his son, a child of his loins, was driving a school bus, the child of his efforts and sacrifices.

And so, it came to pass one day in late November 1954 when B.B. was at the end of his run, he saw Daddy walking toward home. He stopped and offered Daddy a ride.

"Daddy got on the bus, looked around, smiled his wonderful lopsided smile, nodded his head approvingly, and took a seat. But before B.B. could drive off, Daddy had changed seats. B.B., always a careful driver, slowed down when he saw Daddy change seats still another time. The smile stayed on Daddy's face, and the changing of seats continued until the bus arrived in front of our house. By that time, Daddy had tested every seat on the bus and was contentedly sitting at the back of the bus, bobbing his head up and down like a man who had not only seen but also entered the Promised Land and to whom all blessings had been bestowed.

"It was Daddy's first time on a school bus. And he was well pleased."

– www.tcrecord.org/Content.asp?ContentID=11316. B.B. DeLaine is a member of the board of The Swann Fellowship, which publishes this journal.

daughter by the way, need a school that does not have sewage coming up in the main hallway.

"So we are together on those points, and as we leave here tonight I hope we leave with that in mind. So we are not enemies. The problem is the need...."

Minter suggested filling unused seats by altering assignment boundaries. "No businessman would allow some office buildings to be underused while building new ones. Not in today's tight economy."

Speakers pressed for reallocation to suburban projects. Others

warned that reallocating a penny would perpetuate distrust. The most outspoken of those advocates was Richard McElrath, a retired CMS math teacher.

"If you deal with the reallocation of this money, you will build another layer of distrust, that this board and the next board and every other board is going to have to deal with and we'll be stuck in this quagmire forever.

"You need to go ahead and fulfill your promises, because that perception is out there and it is the most real thing people have to

Continued on Page 8

Briefly...

Education first: Los Angeles Unified School District officials say they're focused on giving Latinos an equal education, but must let desegregation slide, the Boston Globe reported. District officials say segregated housing patterns are so pervasive in L.A., and out of their control, that desegregation is not practical. But a Harvard Civil Rights Project study concluded that majority-Latino schools have less qualified teachers and educational resources.

www.boston.com

Easing dyslexia: A two-year experiment involving twice-a-day brain exercises appeared to help dyslexic children, the London Telegraph reported. Balance and agility exercises were designed to stimulate the cerebellum. After the study, students appeared to be free of dyslexia and able to join mainstream classes.

www.telegraph.co.uk

Pulling back: A report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention states that the percentage of teenagers who engage in risky social behavior such as unprotected sex, drinking and smoking cigarettes is falling, the New York Times reported. The center attributed improvements to more school-level awareness programs and state programs that promote healthy behavior.

www.nytimes.com

Equally gifted?: Some Tennessee school districts serve hundreds of gifted students each year and others serve none, The Tennessean reported. Gifted students in all districts are now able to take more challenging courses online if gifted courses are not available in their school.

www.tennessean.com

More K-8s: Educators, seeking ways to improve student achievement, are turning to K-8 schools, rather than separating elemen-

Calendar

27 School board Personnel Committee, 2 p.m., Room 414, Education Center.

27 Panel discussion of Brown v. Board sponsored by NAACP, 7 p.m., Weeping Willow AME Zion Church, 2220 Milton Road. Information: Von Pettis, 704-567-8178.

27 School board Personnel Committee, 4 p.m., Room 414, Education Center.

JUNE

2 School board work session to discuss budget, bond reprioritization. Invited guests: County Commissioners Chairman Tom Cox with suggestions for overhaul of West Charlotte High; and former state Board of Education chair Howard Haworth.

tary and middle school students, Education Week reported. New York, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Milwaukee and Philadelphia are among districts changing to K-8 schools.

www.edweek.com

Finance lawsuit: An order to force Kansas City schools to close June 30 unless they could come up with a new financing plan was blocked by the Kansas Supreme Court, The Kansas City Star reported. The Court is scheduled to hear the case on Aug. 30.

www.kansascity.com

Private schools: Minority

enrollment in private schools rose from 10% in 1970 to 25% in 2004, the New York Times reported. An increasing number of middle class black parents, dissatisfied with the public school system, are choosing to enroll their children in private schools.

www.nytimes.com

Transfer rights: A report issued by the Citizens Commission on Civil Rights concluded that the No Child requirement that students in underperforming schools be given the choice to change schools is benefiting low-income and minority children in some districts, Education Week reported. The Commission suggested that children be allowed to cross district lines if there are not seats in better schools within their district.

www.edweek.org

Lowering the bar: Fourth- and seventh-grade students will need lower scores to pass state tests this year, the Olympian of Washington State told its readers. Lower passing scores were approved by a commission, which may also lower the 10th-grade passing scores next year.

www.theolympian.com

Unequal access: Black students in majority-black schools in Georgia are much more likely to have inexperienced teachers than those attending majority white schools, the Atlanta Journal-Constitution reported.

www.ajc.com

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Moving bond money divides community

Continued from Page 6

deal with.

“You have to fulfill your promises or you have to live a life of misery starting now and lasting for God knows how long.”

Said Clear Creek Elementary parent Dee Duncan, “Let’s not set an example to our children of running our school system with bait-and-switch tactics.”

Griffin’s warning

Longtime board member and former chairperson Arthur Griffin recounted the bond advisory group’s history. “The Bond Oversight Committee was there simply to say, if the public voted for bond money, make sure that the bond money is spent for those purposes that the public voted for.”

Projects now being delayed address not just safety issues but “functional obsolescence, meaning you cannot deliver effectively the curriculum that we say every child is entitled to.”

Finally, Griffin said, “you learn before you get to kindergarten something called fairness. Who’s turn is it? If you’re playing jump rope, if you’re playing kickball, it’s basically who’s turn is it? And it comes from some sense of knowing what the rules are.

“We started some years ago in this community saying, look, we’re going to say where we spend our bond money, and we’re going to in fact live up to that commitment.”

Empty hallways

“I visited Olympic High School last week,” commented south Charlotte parent Curt Bradley. “It is a very well-equipped school. It has something on the order of 500 vacant seats. During the change between classes the halls were virtually empty. Until those seats and others like them are filled, there should be no discussion of reallocation of bond monies.

“Now I aint so sure
I wanna get
educated”

African American cartoonist Oliver Harrington published this work Sept. 21, 1963 in the Pittsburgh Courier. It is part of an exhibit, “‘With an Even Hand’: Brown v. Board at Fifty,” presented by the Library of Congress.

Harrington’s cartoon appeared just as President Kennedy was announcing the desegregation of 157 city school districts. Portions of the exhibit are at www.loc.gov/exhibits/brown/brown-aftermath.html



“In order to fill those vacant seats, you need to look seriously at significant changes in the student assignment plan. There is no reason why that plan should be considered off-limits, as it apparently is, when you are willing to consider the drastic step of reallocating bond monies.”

Voting for inefficiency

“Yes, circumstances have changed” since the bonds were passed, observed Queens University ethics professor Araminta Johnston. “Our elected officials voted to resegregate our schools, putting poor children, mostly children of color, into their own ghettoized schools, and putting children of privilege into their own golden ghetto....

“The circumstances that have changed are that this board is apparently ready to vote in favor of the inefficient use of resources.... The smart business decision, the efficient policy, is clear: Send students where there are available seats.”

‘New sense of trust’

North Mecklenburg parent Todd Williamson said the Bond Oversight Committee had recommended diverting bond money from his children’s two schools, but said it was the right decision.

It’s “common sense” that adding on at Hopewell High is cheaper than pouring money into North Meck “that, in several more years, is going to need more than just one upgrade....

“Your vote ‘Yes’ to reprioritize the bond money is not going back on promises made in the past, but recognizing and responding to changes in times in a responsible manner.

“As a result you are establishing a new sense of trust with all of the community for public school funding.”

John Minter, Curt Bradley and Araminta Johnston are members of the board of directors of The Swann Fellowship, which publishes this journal.