

First things first

Community should invest first in instruction at low-performing schools

The writer is a Charlotte lawyer whose children attend CMS.

By MICKEY ABERMAN

Reading the editorials and letters (*Educate!*, Sept. 3), I am reminded of the old Light Beer commercials in which people shouted "Tastes Great"/"Less Filling" back and forth at each other until an announcer finally said, "Stop, you're both right."

Rather than see the school funding issues debated in this

manner, I think it might be better to start by identifying the needs, make the policy decisions to prioritize them, and then get on with allocating the necessary money.

The school board faces a daunting situation, before you even look at the limited resources. They have to teach every student, and teach poorly prepared kids well enough to meet minimum standards of progress in certain subjects.

They have to try to inspire those kids to do better than the minimum, and they have to avoid appearing to favor wealthy suburbanites.

They have to try to keep the more affluent parents (like me) in the system. If Charlotte's public schools drive out the affluent parents, necessary political support, as well as parent support in the schools themselves, will dissipate.

Continued on Page 4

8th-graders proficient on NAEP

Percent of eighth-graders proficient on the National Assessment of Educational Progress in selected states for years marked:

	Reading		Writing		Math		Science	
	'98	'03	'98	'02	'00	'03	'96	'00
Florida	23	27	19	32	23	21		
Georgia	25	26	23	25	19	22	21	23
Kentucky	30	34	21	25	20	24	23	28
Mississippi	19	21	11	13	9	12	12	15
N.C.	30	29	27	34	27	32	24	25
S.C.	22	24	15	20	17	26	17	20
Tennessee	27	26	24	24	16	21	22	24
Texas	27	26	31	31	24	25	23	23
Virginia	33	36	27	32	25	31	27	29
W. Virginia	28	25	18	21	17	20	21	24
United States	30	30	24	30	26	27	27	30

— Southern Regional Education Board

Micromanaged: Rules are tying teachers' hands

By SANDRA FIELD WAGONER

Our teachers are being micromanaged to death and not given the chance to teach.

Teachers' hands are tied today in several ways.

They must teach a certain text on each day regardless of what is happening in the world – either the world of the classroom or the world beyond the classroom.

At times they must spend hours setting meaningless goals.

My sister, a teacher of profoundly handicapped junior high school students in a nearby county, must set goals for each course her students would take if they were academically on grade level in order to comply with No Child Left

Continued on Page 6

CANDIDATE FORUMS

DETAILS, PAGE 2

Impacts of choice were known at time

Concerning Dr. Kindberg's contribution (*Educate!*, Sept. 3):

Two statements insult her own intelligence. She claims that in 2002 the "Choice Plan" was new and its effects unknown. That is nonsense. The effects were known.

**From
Readers**

Dr. Kindberg admitted at the time that she did not know any suburban parents that were going to voluntarily enroll their child in an inner-city magnet program. Who in the world did she think was going to fill the empty seats in those schools?

She also claims that if all the seats were full we would still have thousands of students in trailers. I agree.

But the answer is to fill the empty seats before asking the taxpayers for more money.

There are enough empty seats right now to eliminate the need for all four elementary schools included in the latest request for bond money.

The answer to the overcrowding problem MUST include changes in pupil assignment by redrawing school boundaries.

Fred Marsh

Renovations needed more frequently

Concerning Lewis Guignard's contribution (*Educate!*, Sept. 3):

It's silly to contend that ANY high-use public building could go 75 years without renovation!....

It's especially true of the 73 facilities built between 1950 and 1970. Since mobiles weren't in use then, dealing with the baby boom required quick construction of lowest-cost buildings, which are now 30-50 years old and clearly show the wear and tear.

We need to be careful now to avoid making expedient choices that may haunt us in the future.

B. Lee Kindberg

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People: Leonard R. (Deacon) Jones, president; Lucy Bush Carter, vice president; Steve Johnston, executive director and *Educate!* editor; Beth Kinny, outreach director. Assisting with this edition: Stephanie Southworth.

Distribution of top teachers re-examined

Everybody agrees that a quality teacher makes all the difference in the classroom.

Now there's increasing talk that the children who need the most help ought to be more likely than they are right now to have a quality teacher.

Easy to say. Harder to accomplish, particularly in systems where seniority allows the most experienced teachers to choose – or avoid – classrooms full of the children needing the most help.

In Philadelphia, a troubled district taken over by Pennsylvania education officials several years ago, the head of the School Reform Commission wants to use incentives to induce teachers to volunteer to be where they're needed most.

"We know 40% of our children in poverty have a teacher with experience of zero to five years," James Nevels told the Philadelphia Inquirer last week. "This is about how are we deploying the most important agent for reform in the schools, the teachers."



Nevels

Nevels cajoles from a position of strength: The reform commission can, if it chooses, legally ignore seniority clauses in teacher union contracts and assign teachers to equalize experience levels at all Philadelphia schools.

In North Carolina, there are no union contracts, but the state has allowed school boards to let experienced teachers opt out of low-performing schools where they are needed most.

On Sunday, The News & Observer reported that state officials are, as in Philly, looking for incentives to lure teachers to work with low-performing children.

"Discussions about how best to deploy high-quality teachers are still evolving among the state's school leaders," the N&O report-

ed. "But the conversation was bolstered in July when the state Supreme Court ruled that schools must do a better job of educating the state's neediest students."

Mike Ward, who retired Aug. 31 as state superintendent and has since left the state, told the paper that getting teachers in front of low-performing students "won't be easy, and it might even be painful for some communities, but ... we won't get started if we don't require it."

A study published Wednesday touting the superior performances of students taught by National Board Certified teachers prompted the Chapel Hill-based Southeast Center for Teaching

Quality to push for fairer distribution of quality teachers.

"This study (and others)," the center said, "should make it clear that federal, state and local policymakers must take actions to better utilize NBCTs and other accomplished teachers so that ever student has a quality teacher in every class and quality teaching every day."

"National Board Certified Teachers and Their Students' Achievement," by Leslie Vandevort, Audrey Amrein-Beardsley and David Berliner, is available from the Education Policy Analysis Archives at <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v12n46/>

Closing the achievement gap

The 36th annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools offers a range of illuminating and occasionally contradictory opinions. But one issue is clear: Members of the public don't believe schools cause the achievement gap, but they do expect schools to close the gap. Questions and answers:

"Do black children and other minority children in your community have the same educational opportunities as white children?"
Yes: 78%

What is achievement gap tied to: Mostly related to quality of schooling received: 19%; mostly related to other factors: 74%.

"Who is most important" in determining student achievement:
Students themselves: 22%; teachers 30%; students' parents: 45%.

Is it schools' responsibility to close the achievement gap? Yes, 56%; no, 40%.

Level of support for various strategies to close achievement gap:
Encourage more parent involvement: 97%
Provide more instructional time for low-performing students: 94%
Strengthen remedial programs for low-performing students: 92%
Provide free breakfast and lunch programs as needed: 84%
Provide state-funded preschool programs: 80%
Provide in-school health clinics: 76%

Aberman

Continued from Page 1

The school system needs parents with economic power and political influence to care about public schools.

The board also cannot do much about what is already built or renovated, and the school system cannot seem to alter the pattern of residential settlement that the school board has to react to. It is unfortunate in this community that we treat development in areas that are not adequately served by schools as acts of God; however, they might as well be.

Accordingly, we have to decide if we want these suburban children to

- (A) Go far away to school;
- (B) Be crowded;
- (C) Choose between traveling or being crowded; or
- (D) Go to neighborhood schools that are not crowded, but which cost a lot of money to build.

The (a) and (c) scenarios are affected by the fact that the choices don't look very good to suburban parents.

Other than magnets, schools in poor neighborhoods are perceived, somewhat correctly, as weighted down with kids who are ill-prepared, with discipline problems, and with poorly-supportive parents.

Addressing this seems good for everybody and therefore a high priority. However, the solutions to these problems lie in operating expenditures for more teachers, expenditures for retaining good teachers, and money for enrichment to compensate for the kids' poor preparation for academic learning.

Bonds too easy

The system is spending money unnecessarily on bricks and mortar at inner-ring schools. I have seen it firsthand. Look at Billingsville, which had pretty-good, serviceable classrooms and buildings, that has been renovated, and which has almost nobody wanting to attend. It is a misguided

Mickey Aberman grew up in Rock Hill, and practices business law with James, McElroy and Diehl. "I pretty much exist below the radar," he says.



Aberman

attempt to make the facilities more "equitable."

Part of the problem is that capital expenditures have been easy to make in large increments using bond money, but bonds cannot finance more teachers and smaller class-sizes.

They can't finance teacher bonuses for staying at an Equity-Plus school for several years.

They can't finance reading specialists for more one-on-one attention of elementary students. They can't finance better training and mentors to help new teachers get their feet under them (and thereby build a more experienced cadre and reduce recruiting costs attributable to the fast-revolving door).

Reset our priorities

The highest priority needs to be expenditures that directly improve the learning experience at schools that are deficient in educational results. Kids who start out further behind need more resources to educate them.

The second highest priority for expenditure needs to be any critical deferred maintenance that is necessary to correct safety or severe discomfort problems or to avoid further deterioration.

The third priority needs to be building seats for kids close to where their parents want them to go to school.

Unfortunately, this does mean there is no money left for non-critical capital improvements to existing schools. But some improvements don't cost money.

Meanwhile, the school system can do a lot of things that entail little expenditure. It needs an attitude change.

Cut the plethora of policies that

restrict principals and experienced teachers to the bare minimum to ensure compliance with the law; if you will judge them by results, let them find new ways that work.

To make every school attractive, try to give every school a magnet-like identity. This could come from letting principals be creative. Encourage them to develop something special.

Listen to the business leaders who want to help, and accept that financial support may have strings.

Infuse the system with a customer service orientation, so that every parent who has a concern gets the best solution that can be had, without added expenditure or compromise to the quality of education.

An example of this last point is the bus stop my children use.

Our bus stops just down the street, out of sight. No other families ride the bus. The bus goes past our house. If it stopped two seconds later, it would be in front of the house. The street is slightly wider and more clear of trees in front of the house.

Nevertheless, after filling out forms twice last year, I was told by the driver's supervisor that a change that is more convenient would not be allowed, because then other people would want convenience.

I suggested that if there is no cost and no impairment of safety they should get it.

My letter to his supervisor was unanswered; eventually, after I contacted our school board representative, it got corrected for last school year.

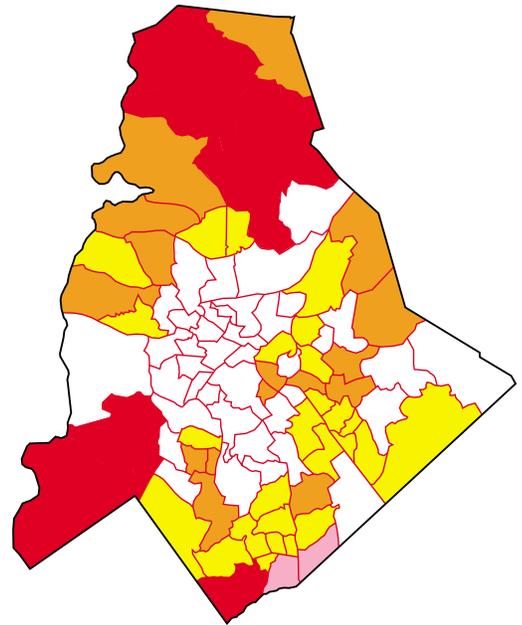
Now I get to do it again this year.

The bottom line is that the system needs (1) tiered priorities based on the ultimate mission; and (2) a conscious effort (which frequently costs nothing) to keep people (principals, teachers, potential donors and parents) as happy as they can be, rather than alienating them for the sake of bureaucratic consistency and control.

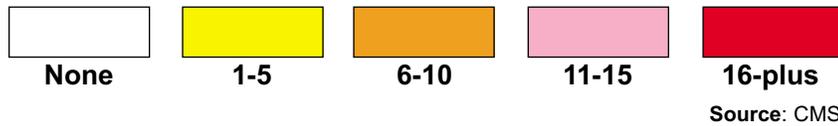
Where the mobiles are: A guide to overcrowding

Elementary schools

Albemarle Road	10	Hawk Ridge	22	Nations Ford	0
Allenbrook	0	Hickory Grove	7	Newell	4
Ashley Park	0	Hidden Valley	0	Oakdale at Old Druid	10
Bain	4	Highland Mill	0	Oakhurst	0
Barringer	0	Highland Renais.	0	Oaklawn	0
Berryhill	0	Hornets Nest	4	Olde Providence	4
Beverly Woods	0	Huntersville	16	Park Road	0
Blythe	17	Huntingtowne Farms	9	Paw Creek	3
Briarwood	2	Idlewild	4	Pawtucket	6
Bruns	0	Irwin Ave.	0	Pineville	2
Chantilly/Billingsville	6	J. H. Gunn	0	Pinewood	0
Clear Creek	0	Joseph W. Grier	0	Piney Grove	1
Collinswood	6	Lake Wylie	21	Providence Spring	2
Cornelius	18	Lansdowne	0	Rama Road	1
Cotswold	0	Lebanon Road	0	Reedy Creek	6
Crown Point	2	Lincoln Heights	0	Reid Park	0
David Cox	16	Long Creek	9	Sedgefield	0
Davidson	8	Mallard Creek	0	Selwyn	0
Devonshire	0	Matthews	0	Shamrock Gardens	4
Dilworth	0	McAlpine	4	Sharon	0
Druid Hills	0	McKee Road	15	Smithfield	9
Eastover	0	Merry Oaks	0	Statesville Road	0
Elizabeth Lane	7	Montclair	4	Steele Creek	16
Elizabeth Traditional	0	Morehead	0	Sterling	0
Endhaven	5	Mountain Island	10	Thomasboro	0
First Ward	0	Myers Park Traditional	0	Tuckaseegee	1
Greenway Park	3	Nathaniel Alexander	0	University Meadows	7
				University Park	0
				Villa Heights	3
				Walter G. Byers	0
				Westerly Hills	0
				Winding Springs	0
				Windsor Park	1
				Winterfield	5

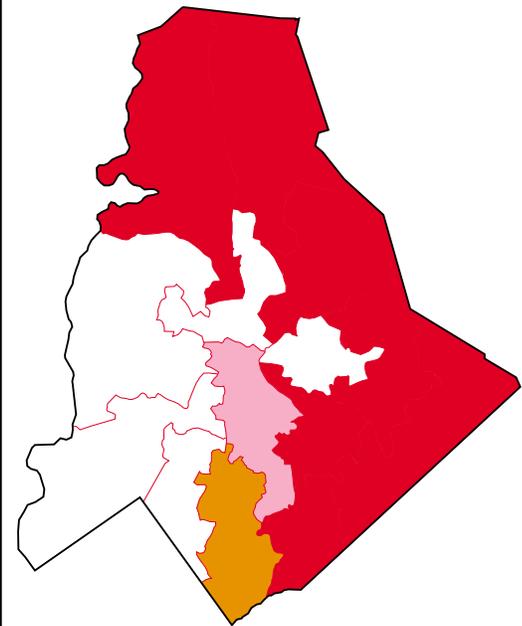
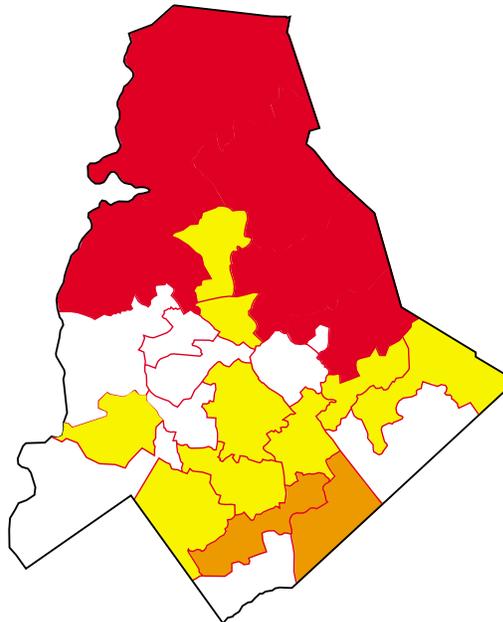


Color Key



Middle schools

Albemarle Rd.	2	Smith	6	Spaugh	0
Alexander	20	South Charlotte	7	Wilson	0
Alexander Graham	5	Southwest	0		
Bradley	28				
Carmel	3				
Cochrane	0				
Coulwood	23				
Crestdale	6				
Davidson IB	0				
Eastway	0				
J. T. Williams	5				
Kennedy	5				
Marie G. Davis	0				
Martin	35				
McClintock	4				
Mint Hill	0				
Northeast	0				
Northridge	24				
Piedmont	0				
Quail Hollow	5				
Randolph	2				
Ranson	2				
Robinson	0				
Sedgefield	0				



High schools

Berry Academy	0	North Meck	30
Butler	19	Northwest	5
E. E. Waddell	0	Olympic	0
East Meck	21	Providence	22
Garinger	0	South Meck	9
Harding	12	Vance	39
Hopewell	25	West Charlotte	0
Independence	27	West Mecklenburg	0
Myers Park	12		

Congress honors 4 civil rights heroes

Congressional Gold Medals were awarded posthumously Wednesday to four South Carolinians who played key roles in the fight for desegregated schools.

The four led the Clarendon County, S.C., legal battle that created the first case that grew into *Brown v. Board* in 1954.

Families accepted the medals honoring Rev. J.A. DeLaine, Levi Pearson, and Harry and Eliza Briggs. Explaining the authorization bill to his U.S. House colleagues last year, James Clyburn, D-S.C., said:

"This bill reminds us that it was the actions of a preacher and educator, a farmer, a gas station attendant and motel maid that initiated the efforts that changed American society forever.

"And I hope that our actions here tonight reminds all Americans that it is not our stations in life that makes us worthy of honor and recognition, but our commitment to the principles and pursuit of the promise 'that all men are created equal....'"

The four, who filed *Briggs v. Elliott* and a predecessor suit, variously were denied farm credit, fired from jobs, and attacked by mobs. DeLaine's home and church were burned by arsonists.

The Clarendon County search for a bus to transport pupils and the legal battles that followed was the subject of an exhibit this spring and summer at Charlotte's Museum of the New South.



DeLaine



Pearson



Harry Briggs



Eliza Briggs

DidYaHear?

✓ Charlotte Housing Authority President Charles Woodyard is landlord for thousands of the poorest children in this community. His message this week to a community group: A key economic underpinning of these children's lives will disappear.

About 4,600 families in the county receive federal Section 8 housing assistance. And Washington is considering morphing Section 8 from vouchers that cover the rent necessary to shelter a family, to a lump-sum block-grant payment that won't house as many people. Says Woodyard, "We will not be serving as many families in the future as we are serving now."

In fact, Section 8, Woodyard predicts, "will eventually cease to exist. Hope 6? The same thing."

Hope 6 is the program through which Charlotte has rebuilt huge low-income housing projects into mixed-income developments.

— Send intelligence to swannfello@aol.com

Wagoner

Continued from Page 1

Behind.

She must set algebra goals for a child who cannot count to 5. She had to attend two out-of-town conferences to learn how to write such goals to comply with these requirements. Who loses out when this warm, caring teacher must waste so much time and energy, not to mention the school system's money?

Teachers must do so much paperwork and documentation, testing and reporting to administrators and parents that it consumes much of their time and energy. They begin to work toward number-crunching to be loyal to their school and colleagues.

They must explain, document and defend themselves to parents, principals and administration. They have very little support and are not infrequently held account-

able for children who refuse to try.

They must work under poor conditions. Think lines at the copier, crowded schools, rows of trailers, classrooms meeting in spaces not even meant to be schoolrooms.

They must work with insufficient resources. Think limits on the number of pages of copier paper per teacher, etc.

They must work with near constant interruptions, little support, long hours.

Despite the belt-tightening in the economy, some who have left teaching and gone to the business world say that it is a whole new world, dripping in honey relative to the schools they left.

They must try to teach children, many of whom come to school with so many problems in their own environment that they are not ready to learn. Think of the 5-year-olds without readiness skills. Or the many kids who, by junior high age, are so angry

and/or depressed today.

And we haven't even discussed the discipline problems and lack of support from parents and principals relative to those. That's another whole subject.

I do think about a school on an island of another state where the autonomy of the school and the teachers is great and creativity abounds.

I believe the optional schools here were really options in the '70s and that the enthusiasm of the various staffs was educationally very stimulating.

Now everything is so standardized there are few real differences between schools.

Briefly...

Taking note: Wake County schools are now teaching their middle school students to take notes, and parents will get feedback on their child's note-taking skills along with their report card, the News & Observer reported. A Pilot Pen Corp. survey found that 74% of the 12- to 17-year-olds who were taught to take notes said their grades were A's and B's, compared with 64% who were not taught to take notes.

www.newsobserver.com

Leveling the field: Three converted public schools in the Bayview area of San Francisco are designed to give children the life experiences others take for granted, the San Francisco Chronicle reported. Despite the 30% unemployment rate and high levels of poverty and crime in the neighborhood, the "dream schools" promise not only to show the children the Golden Gate Bridge, but to provide the students rigorous academics, foreign languages, comprehensive music and arts programs, organized sports, college and career planning, intensive tutoring and extracurricular activities.

www.sfgate.com

Inflation: Steel prices, which have risen more than 30% in the past year and are continuing to rise, may impact new school construction, Education Week reported. Some school construction companies are being forced to choose between factoring in cost increases for materials, which would raise the cost of construction, or make lower bids and hope prices do not continue to increase.

www.edweek.com

What's the equation?: The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) found that students taking algebra courses with the same title are being taught very different things, Education Week reported. The NCES is questioning why students in dif-

ferent Algebra I classes are performing much differently on end-of-grade tests. A study of high school achievement and teacher quality is expected to begin this spring.

www.edweek.org

AYP pattern: In the 2003-2004 school year, 25% of the nation's schools failed to make "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) under No Child Left Behind, the Washington Times reported. The failing schools predominantly served minority and economically disadvantaged students.

www.washingtontimes.com

Locating bullies: The Lewiston-Porter school district has developed a program to stop bullies in each of their four schools, the Buffalo News reported. The district is installing "bully boxes" analogous to suggestion boxes, at a cost of \$56 each. The boxes will allow children to confidentially report instances of abuse by other children.

www.buffalonews.com

Fewer male teachers: The number of male teachers has declined from two decades ago, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported. Data from the National Education Association and the federal government show that 9% of elementary school teachers are men. Reasons for the low number may include low teaching salaries, stereotypes that men are not nurturing, and a feeling that men do not have professional respect in the classroom.

www.stltoday.com

Single-sex: About 140 U.S. schools are now offering single-sex classes for children, CNN told its readers. Proponents believe that separating students by gender reduces peer pressure and allows teachers to focus on the different ways that boys and girls learn. But National Organization for Women vice president Terry O'Neill was quoted as saying, "We think segregation has historically always resulted in second-class citizens."

www.cnn.com

Calendar

- 9 Education Budget Advisory Committee, 7:30 a.m., 11th floor conference room, Government Center.
- 9 "A Class Divided: The Power of Racial Stereotypes," noon, Covenant Presbyterian, 1000 E. Morehead St. \$6 includes lunch, no reservation needed.
- 9 Right Moves for Youth volunteer kick-off, 6 p.m., West Service Center, 4150 Wilkinson Blvd. The mission of Right Moves For Youth (RMFY) is to provide the motivation for its club members in grades 4-12 to succeed in school, improve the quality of their life, become responsible members of society and reduce the number of Charlotte-Mecklenburg students who drop out of school. Information: Keith Way at 704-377-4425 ext 105 or email at kway@rightmovesforyouth.org.
- 10 Equity Committee, 8 a.m., Board Room.
- 11 District 6 Parent Leaders Meeting, 9 a.m., Presbyterian Hospital Matthews community room.
- 11 Candidate forum for statewide offices, at-large county commissioners race, 3 p.m., Citiside Club House, 4500 Eaves Lane. Information: Doris Nurllah 704-537-4297.
- 14 Candidate forum: Dan Ramirez, candidate for County Commissioners, 12:15 p.m., 1510 E. 7th St. Sponsor: Swann Fellowship.
- 16 Candidate forum: Parks Helms, candidate for County Commissioners, 12:15 p.m., 1510 E. 7th St. Sponsor: Swann Fellowship.
- 16 "What Does it Mean to be White in Charlotte?: Exploring the Dynamics of Racial Privilege," noon, Covenant Presbyterian, 1000 E. Morehead St. \$6 includes lunch, no reservation needed.

Educate!

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Tests yielding labels: Where's remediation?

In an article in Educational Leadership published by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, pediatrician Mel Levine says some children's minds are wired differently. And schools tend to focus on what they don't do well, rather than build on their strengths.

"To stem the tide of needless and wasteful failure facing thousands of kids," Levine writes, "we need to take robust action on three fronts: broadened student assessment, curriculum reexamination, and professional development for educators...."

"The methods that schools typically deploy to assess students with learning problems are not up to the task. The discrepancy formulas used to determine eligibility for specialized assistance have been shown repeatedly to have serious flaws....

"Moreover, testing that merely

To teach children, teach parents

From "Meeting NCLB Requirements for Family Involvement" by Joyce L. Epstein in Middle Ground magazine. Here is one example of how schools are responding to No Child Left Behind requirements that schools bolster parent involvement in meeting the act's achievement goals:

"Byrd Middle School in Sun Valley, California, found that students' math scores were not improving as fast as reading scores. The school conducted math sessions for parents that focused on the math skills taught at each grade level, teachers' approach to new concepts and skills in algebra and problem solving, parents' questions about math, and samples of children's math skills and problems. The sessions helped many parents understand the demands that are made on students in math and how they can support students' math work at home."

– www.nmsa.org/services/middle_ground/mg_august04.htm#a

generates a label, such as LD or ADD, accomplishes little. These vague labels do not suggest specific approaches to remediation; instead, they pessimistically imply a relatively permanent pathological condition. What a

colossal self-fulfilling prophecy!

"In addition to rethinking the assessments used to diagnose learning problems, schools need to design regular tests and quizzes so that different kinds of minds can show what they know in dif-