

## County wades into school issues

### Plea for construction money unsettled; low black scores blamed on families

It wasn't long into Tuesday's county board debate before commissioners were arguing over the school board's "dual track" school construction efforts. The debate ended with an assertion that it is families who are responsible for black children's academic failures.

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg school board is seeking additional money for new schools in growing suburbs. It wants to use money from earlier bond issues for the renovations of older schools that were promised to voters during earlier bond referendums.

District 3 Commissioner Valerie Woodard said CMS should lower its request by first reassigning

children from overcrowded suburban schools to empty seats in center-city schools.

Besides, she argued, if new schools are built where neighborhoods aren't integrated, "I think you're subjecting yourself to a situation in which the state can't fund you because the state doesn't fund segregated schools."

"And if it's proven that all these schools are segregated now, you know, inner-city, suburban, I think you're going to have difficulty in getting any funding from

the state.... The last thing the school needs is the state to pull out because of segregated schools."

District 1 Commissioner Jim Puckett said a "more reasonable approach" would be for the school board to consolidate central-city attendance areas, sell off underutilized neighborhood schools and use the proceeds to build neighborhood schools in the overcrowded suburbs.

"I'd be willing to build schools in suburbia to end the kind of social experiment that CMS has been doing for 30, 35 years. I don't know that I'm willing to waste \$200, \$250 million just to guarantee that CMS will do the right thing. I think at some point you have to make CMS do what is responsible and reasonable and not just throw money at it."

Puckett's reference to "social experiment" brought a retort from District 2 Commissioner Norman Mitchell, who said the comment brought back "painful memories" of his own school days in legally segregated Charlotte schools.

"This 'social experiment' my colleagues are talking about is desegregation. Now, if you all do not understand the period in the history of this community about desegregation, then I think you



Woodard



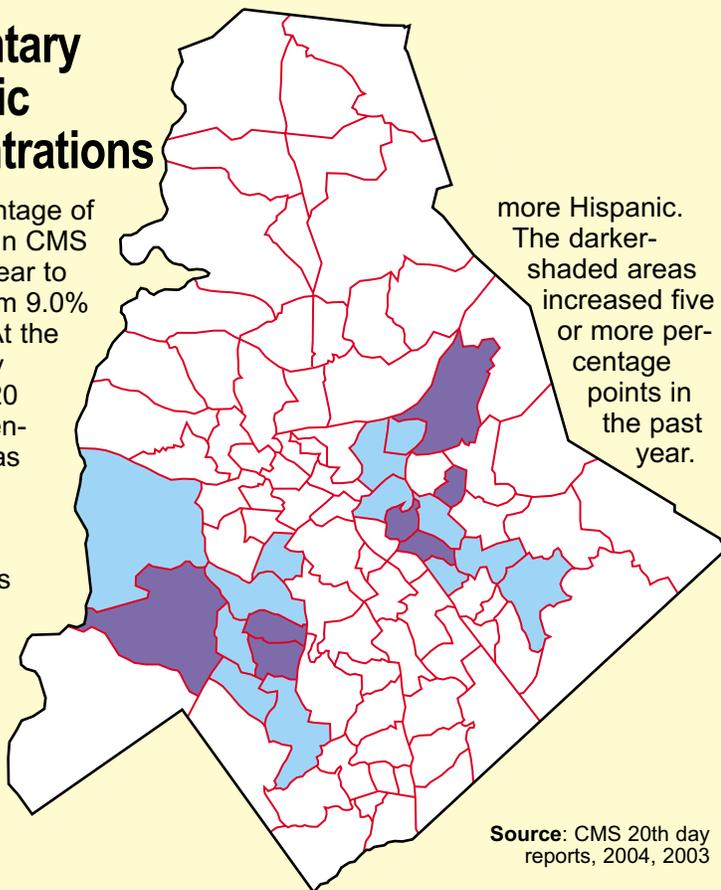
Puckett



Mitchell

### Elementary Hispanic concentrations

The percentage of Hispanics in CMS rose this year to 10.4%, from 9.0% last year. At the elementary level, the 20 school attendance areas shaded on the map have student bodies that are 20% or



more Hispanic. The darker-shaded areas increased five or more percentage points in the past year.

Source: CMS 20th day reports, 2004, 2003

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**CANDIDATE FORUMS**

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need to get some books to read.”

Classroom supplies at his York Road High were the discards from Myers Park High when that white school got new equipment.

“Now that’s painful,” Mitchell said, “and to still hear this type of stuff today about ‘social experiment’... Schools in Charlotte-Mecklenburg were separate and unequal. So I hope you refrain from using ‘social experiment’ because at that time that was law – desegregation. Now if you have some problems with that, I think we need to start dealing with that now.”

Puckett later replied, “This whole notion of busing and what

we can and can’t do, was settled in federal court. The school system is trying through their facilities to un-do that and we have to pay attention to that.”

“Sometimes,” said District 6 Commissioner Bill James, “I think, Commissioner Woodard, that we around this dais ought to really have a debate about CMS.

“I don’t think there’s any legal impediment to – what you all use the term resegregation is really not resegregation. I mean, it’s housing patterns. It’s the way people want to live.

“Fifty years ago it was government telling individuals where they had to live, what they could

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## Corrections

An article in early editions of *Educate!* Sept. 17 contained two errors. The revised CMS budget represents a 7% increase, not a 3% increase, over the 2003-2004 budget. And Molly Griffin was one of two, not the only board member to vote against the high school challenge proposal.

## Bravo for ‘Voices’

Kudos to you for your last issue (*Educate!*, Sept. 17). Yours is the most informative and most objective reporting in Charlotte. I especially liked the magnet article and the “Voices from the Boardroom” feature. Please continue your good work.

Pamela Murray

**From Readers**

**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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**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.

THE SWANN FELLOWSHIP CORDIALLY INVITES YOU  
TO A SERIES OF ONE-HOUR

# FORUMS FOR CANDIDATES

IN THE AT-LARGE RACE FOR  
COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

WHERE VOTERS ASK THE QUESTIONS

## ANDY DULIN

MONDAY, SEPT. 27 12:15 P.M. 1510 E. 7TH ST.

## JACK STRATTON

THURSDAY, SEPT. 30 12:15 P.M. 1510 E. 7TH ST.

## RUTH SAMUELSON

MONDAY, OCT. 4 12:15 P.M. 1510 E. 7TH ST.

## DAN RAMIREZ

TUESDAY, OCT. 5 NOON 1510 E. 7TH ST.  
(RESCHEDULED FROM SEPT. 14)

ALREADY HELD: PARKS HELMS, SEPT. 16; WILHELMENIA REMBERT, SEPT. 20; JENNIFER ROBERTS, SEPT. 22.

LIGHT LUNCH OR REFRESHMENTS AVAILABLE BEGINNING 30 MINUTES BEFORE FORUM. DONATION FOR FOOD REQUESTED. UNLESS OTHERWISE LISTED, EVENTS WILL BE AT ST. MARTIN’S CHURCH, 1510 E. 7TH ST., BETWEEN INDEPENDENCE BOULEVARD AND HAWTHORNE LANE.

# 'Crisis' is suburbanites' creation

*The writer served on the school board in 2001 as an appointed member for District 1. He continues to live in that district.*

By **BOB SIMMONS**

Reading Jim Puckett's quote Wednesday about the CMS bond request, I saw again that our community continues to labor under a lack of understanding arising from a glut of inaccurate information. Jim said, "...some-

## A Commentary

how or another [suburban school overcrowding] snuck up on (the school board). I have a difficult time funding the very people who led us to this crisis."

This is an ironic statement from a man who did more to cause suburban school overcrowding than any member of the cur-

rent school board other than Larry Gauvreau, Jim's buddy and political protégé and the surrogate father of suburban school overcrowding.

There are three principal causes of suburban school overcrowding in CMS: (1) the construction of a school system over 30 years in compliance with a desegregation order; (2) the failure of the County Commission to provide adequate operational and capital funding prior to the late 1990s and since 2002; and (3) the lifting of the Swann desegregation order, followed by the legal necessity of adopting a student assignment plan ignoring race and the subsequent affluent and predominantly white flight to the suburban schools – encouraged by Jim, Larry and other opponents of desegregation.

While newcomers to our community like Larry have little knowledge of our history and little interest in acquiring more, Jim is among a group of area natives who nurse opposition against CMS dating back to the consolidation of the city and county school systems in the early 1960s and the desegregation of the consolidated system in the early 1970s.

Prior to the decision of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 4th Circuit in 2001 upholding 6-5 the decision of Judge Potter to lift the desegregation order, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education was bound by law to administer our public school system, including the construction of school buildings and the assignment of students, to remove all vestiges of the prior segregation.

Already straining to meet the mandate in the face of explosive, distant suburban growth that was almost entirely white and middle or upper-middle class, comprised primarily of old foes of desegregation and newcomers who felt no stake in the success of the wider

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do, who they could associate with.

"We don't do that anymore.

People have a right to live wherever they want.

"And it's not illegal. The state's not going to come in and yank CMS's funding. I think everyone understands that. Judge Potter's ruling I think was a fairly smart one. But people can disagree with that."...

"My bottom-line problem with CMS is that when you get right down to it they are failing to educate black children.

"I say black children, not poor children, because it is black children they are failing to educate. They failed to educate them 30 years ago, they failed to educate them 60 years ago and they are failing to educate them today.

"Tell 'em why," commissioner Parks Helms prompted.

"And why? OK," said James.

"You've got illiteracy. You've got a 75%-80% illegitimate birth rate within the black community, 30% promiscuity. You have a lack of interest in education among a lot of inner-city blacks. It's called 'acting white.' It's the antithesis of educational achievement.

"Kids at West Charlotte are more interested in bling-bling than they are in Chaucer or some

other, you know – algebra, to put it more simply.

"We have a problem in this community, and like everything else in Charlotte we suffer from dysfunctional civility. We're so polite and so nice that for 30 years, 60 years, have failed to address the fact that these kids aren't learning.

"And it's not CMS's fault as much as it is family: It's the parents' fault, but we don't want to call it like it is.

"I have to agree with [school board members] Vilma Leake and George Dunlap because they said, when they were talking about this \$6 million [High School challenge], they talked about the fact that it was parents that had to get involved.

"Well, the problem is when you have eight out of 10 black kids being born out of wedlock, without a father, is it any surprise that they're out on the corner jacking cars? It's absolutely a problem and it's epidemic in society and it's the same thing Bill Cosby's talked about and a whole host of other people. But if a white guy talks about it, you're gonna call you a racist or some other kind of name. And until this community is willing to deal with it, we are not going to get anywhere with test scores, and we are not going to get anywhere with CMS. I don't care how much money we dump into it."



James



Helms

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## Simmons commentary

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desegregated system, the Board of Education could not and did not build more schools where the population was growing.

Instead, the board first focused on busing students to desegregate existing schools. Then the board briefly focused on building mid-point schools to which children could be bused both in and out in an attempt to share more equally the burden of busing. To that date that burden had fallen far more heavily on urban, mostly black neighborhoods as a result of the dilapidated condition of their nearby schools, most of which were abandoned.

Over all of this time, operational and capital funding from the County Commission lagged significantly every year behind the needs identified by the school board. Growth was already outstripping funding, but the politics of desegregation took precedence over the educational needs of our children.

Resistance to busing grew on both sides as the rides grew longer for all children, driven by the lack of adequate urban facilities and by the greater number of mostly white children living at greater distances from the city.

Then, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the combination of continued inadequate funding and the expansion of the magnet system to include suburban schools completely undermined the implementation of the desegregation order.

Even the core of more affluent and predominantly white parents who had supported desegregation by keeping their children in their standard assignments, such as the Myers Park parents in West Charlotte High School, or by sending their children to urban magnets like Harding University High School, took the opportunity to transfer instead to the magnets at Myers Park High School, North Mecklenburg High School and Independence High School, driv-

ing the entire system further out of compliance with the desegregation order.

While the expansion of the magnet system may have temporarily retained some students whose parents could have moved them to private school, it certainly hastened the deterioration of conditions and performance at schools such as West Charlotte and Garinger High School, and it contained the seeds of the lawsuit that ultimately led to the lifting of the desegregation order, which was already rapidly failing through lack of funding and lack of support.

To add insult to the ongoing injury, a substantial bond referendum in the fall of 1994 failed, largely because of an effective opposition campaign led by an almost exclusively white, male, suburban anti-tax organization called Citizens for Effective Government, which capitalized on dissatisfaction with desegregation among the old-line county opponents and the burgeoning group



Simmons

of newcomers who cared only to have their own preferences met.

Although a smaller bond referendum was passed the following spring, the damage of the failure of the larger referendum and the delay of the lesser funding to long-term plans has yet to be fully cured.

New schools weren't built and opened in urban neighborhoods until 2001 under the same kind of emergency COPS funding from 1999 that the school board is now seeking for the suburbs.

Money wasn't passed in a bond referendum for the construction and renovation of schools in urban neighborhoods until 2000. But, prior to 2001, over the 30 years of the desegregation order, many new schools were built in the suburbs, and suburban schools did receive expansions and renovations – all needed so those schools could continue to receive both suburban students and urban students who bore the brunt of the burden of busing for compliance with the desegregation order.

Into this mix of the struggle to comply with the desegregation

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## Dealing with enrollment bulge

Wake County's school board is already talking about how to deal with a projected 5,000 new students next August.

Along with the usual mobile classrooms or modular units, the district said it would consider the following options:

- Converting 36 elementaries on traditional calendars to year-round calendars. A year-round school enrolls more students, because the enrollment is split into four groups, with only three in school at any one time.
- Building entire new schools out of modular components.
- Placing middle and high schools on double shifts, with one set of students using each building before roughly noon, and another set using it after noon.
- Leasing space in churches or other locations.
- Cutting kindergarten to a half-day program.
- Converting cafeterias into classrooms.
- Equipping all art and music teachers with carts, and holding those classes in rooms vacant during other teachers' planning periods and the like.

To leave time for implementing the plans by next August, school officials want board members to make their choices in two weeks.

– [www.wcpss.net](http://www.wcpss.net), [www.newsobserver.com](http://www.newsobserver.com)

## Simmons commentary

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order – without adequate funds or support – came the lawsuit to lift the order.

A white parent, disappointed that his daughter didn't receive a kindergarten seat in the magnet school closest his suburban home, sued the system. He claimed that the allocation of seats by race in a magnet program discriminated against his daughter on the basis of her race. But the magnet program was balanced by race to comply with a federal court order requiring the balancing of school populations by race to remedy discrimination by race.

Never mind that she was so far down the waiting list that she wouldn't have received a seat even if the seats allocated by race had been filled by those on the waiting list regardless of race.

Like the parents of children in crowded suburban schools today, he demanded to get what he wanted for himself immediately, regardless of the effect on others.

And never mind that he then moved away before the case could come to trial. There were other white parents ready to take up his case and make claims that the school system's efforts to work against community resistance and remove the vestiges of discrimination against black children as required by the law was discriminating against their white children.

One of those parents was current school board member Larry Gauvreau, and one of the most vocal supporters of those parents was Jim Puckett, then a school board member.

Larry and Jim wanted to end the desegregation order and replace the existing student assignment plan with what they call "neighborhood schools" – a plan that disregarded the current state of the system even more completely than their discrimination claims ignored the historical facts and the applicable law.

The existing system was built,

and the planned construction was designed and contracted for, in pursuit of the desegregation mission of 30 years.

A change to neighborhood schools is not physically possible without abandoning or underpopulating existing facilities, and even then there will be far too few seats available for the children in the far-suburban neighborhoods.

Why? It was illegal for the school board to build schools it knew could not be in compliance with the desegregation order or to plan their construction until the end of 2001. That was when the Supreme Court denied certiorari, ending the renewed Swann case with the 4th Circuit's affirmation of Judge Potter's unitary status ruling.

Fortunately, the school board was able to anticipate the court and craft a race-neutral plan for student assignment that didn't plunge the community immediately into the hell of overcrowding that would have been produced by the immediate adoption of the neighborhood schools plan of Puckett and Gauvreau.

Can you imagine what the overcrowding would be like if every suburban parent could demand placement in the school closest to

their home without restriction?

So we tried to preserve both at least some order and at least some of the gains made toward equal educational opportunity during the brief period of nearly adequate funding that the County Commission and the voters provided from the late 1990s through 2001.

Tracking the increased commitment of the community through increased funding in those years of former Supt. Eric Smith's tenure and the academic performance of all students and within subgroups shows that every measure improved and the gaps decreased at an accelerated rate. The correlation at least strongly implies, if not proves, a direct causation between increased funding and increased performance.

But, since the implementation of the choice plan and its home school guarantees, the County Commission has refused to increase operational funding even to meet rapid growth, much less demonstrated needs.

It has refused to add new bonds.

And it has resisted the funding of bonds previously passed, rely-

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## The case that led to *Brown v. Board*

*Hartford (Conn.) Courant columnist Helen Ubiñas on a little-known court case:*

*"... finally, it had happened: Mendez vs. Westminster, the desegregation case that set the stage for Brown vs. Board of Education eight years later, had gone national.... The president would honor them in his national Hispanic Heritage Celebration address.*

*"Getting the Mendez story outside of California has been (Sandra) Robbie's obsession.... She created an award-winning documentary in 2002 for the Orange County public broadcast station where she is a producer.*

*Robbie's documentary tells the story of Felicitas and Gonzalo Mendez. In 1945, their children Sylvia, Geronimo and Gonzalo Jr. were turned away from the closest school to their home in Westminster, Calif., because they were Mexican. They hired a lawyer and rallied other Mexican families to join a lawsuit. The case caught the attention of those who would go on to desegregate schools across the nation, including future Supreme Court Justices Thurgood Marshall and Earl Warren."*

– [www.ctnow.com/news/local/hc-ubinas0916.artsep16,0,7578120.column](http://www.ctnow.com/news/local/hc-ubinas0916.artsep16,0,7578120.column)

## Simmons commentary

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ing at least in part on the arguments made by Jim Puckett this week – that they won't put more money in the hands of a school board that caused the suburban school overcrowding problem.

Everybody knows that the immediate solution to the suburban school overcrowding problem is simple: Limit enrollment in existing schools to their reasonable capacity regardless of home school boundaries, and shift portions of the students in those schools' zones to other schools with room.

We'll still have a shortage of permanent seats because we have yet to catch up with the needs not met in the past – such as when the bond referendum was defeated in 1994, then was reduced in 1995; and when the County Commission has delayed the issuance of bonds and delayed putting more recent referenda on the ballot.

But at least the burden will be better spread among the existing schools until the new schools can be built. This is the only way to effect an immediate solution to the overcrowding problem. Funding, designing and building schools takes years even under the best circumstances.

But, instead of taking responsibility for the suburban school overcrowding that has resulted from the efforts of Jim, Larry and their suburban supporters to end the desegregation order, followed by the choices of those suburban parents to send their children to the nearest available school regardless of their less-crowded alternatives, Jim, Larry and their suburban supporters blame the school board for trying to comply with the law as it was applied before the 2002-2003 school year despite the active opposition of the very people who now complain the loudest, for trying to comply with the expressed will of the voters who approved bonds for equal facilities in 2001, and for asking

for more money to meet the needs of a school population that continues to grow in ways that require both more and better suburban seats and more and better urban seats.

The population of suburban neighborhoods is growing faster, but the population of urban neighborhoods is growing in ways that present needs for more qualified teachers and smaller classes.

Between Jim and the current school board, with the exception of Larry, it's Jim who has led his fellow CMS detractors, desegregation opponents and anti-tax activists in the creation of this crisis.

And this crisis didn't sneak up on anybody. It came crashing down on all of us with the Supreme Court's gavel in the case pursued by Larry and supported by Jim Puckett and their fellow white, suburban parents.

Perhaps they should have heeded the ancient advice to be careful

what they wished for. And now they should have the decency to stop their dishonest whining and start working constructively toward fixing the fine mess they've gotten us all into – the mess we tried to tell them they were making.

The first step is to stop trying to force the square peg of neighborhood schools into the round hole of CMS.

And the second step is to provide the school board with the money it needs to act both more quickly and effectively.

But we shouldn't hold our breath. The agenda of the "neighborhood schools" advocates has never been an education agenda; it's all about getting what they want for themselves and keeping what they get from others – and they don't care who gets hurt in the process, even if it's their own children crammed into the school down the street.

### *DidYaHear?*

A number of the members of Mecklenburg's legislative delegation gathered at the Tuesday Morning Breakfast Forum this week, and complaints and comments on matters legislative were flying fast:

✓ "Education is going to be a high priority for the next session," Rep. Becky Carney said. The legislature left town without even appropriating money for court-ordered school reforms in Hoke County.

✓ If residents don't know what their own legislators are doing, blame the newspaper, Carney said. It prints more legislative news out of South Carolina than North Carolina, she claimed. "We are lucky to get a blurb.... You've got to let the paper know that you want to know about state government."

✓ Former Gov. Jim Hunt and State School Board Chairman Howard Lee reportedly will host a forum for legislators in December to help them define new standards to meet the N.C. Supreme Court's ruling that every child have access to a "sound basic education."

✓ It will become more important that everyone pay attention to the impact of No Child Left Behind, legislators said. Each succeeding year will likely see more schools fail to meet rising expectations.

✓ Pay attention to the race for Superintendent of Public Instruction, Sen. Dan Clodfelter said. The candidates are very different, and will push the state in very different directions. "My personal view is that's the most important race on the ballot."

– Send intelligence to [swannfello@aol.com](mailto:swannfello@aol.com)

***Meet the candidates:*****Parks Helms**

*From a series of conversations with candidates for Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners at-large. This Q&A is extracted from comments about public schools and the candidate's plans made during forums sponsored by The Swann Fellowship, the publisher of this journal. Helms, a Democrat, met voters Thursday, Sept. 16.*

**Q: What will you do to end poverty?**

A: The only hope of ending poverty is to begin with the next generation that you can prepare for living in this new world that we live. You must start there.

We are seeing an increasing number of seniors needing services. And we've got to focus more of our resources on doing that. We cannot ignore it.

Ending poverty is in large measure related to the availability of good jobs and affordable housing. We must have a program... that focuses on creating some affordable housing opportunities....

Good jobs we ought to be attracting into the community through the policies and procedures we adopt, the kinds of businesses that give people good-paying jobs.... What we must do is create that climate that allows that happen.

There is really something to what we hear coming from the national candidates. We are becoming two nations. There really are the haves and the have-nots. And that gap is becoming wider and more pronounced. We've got to find a way to encourage business and industry to recognize that sooner or later it's going to be so prevalent that they will not be able to continue.

**Q: Would you support taxing authority for the school board?**

A: I am opposed to it because I don't think we need any other institution or level of government levying a tax....

But there ought to be a better understanding across the community that the county is a major funding source for the schools.

And it does give a check and balance, if you will, Sometimes it's too restrained and it doesn't happen. It is a good thing for a board of county commissioners to be able to stand back from the actual educational policy issues and look at it from the fiscal implications. What is a fair tax rate? What can we bear?

**Q: What's your view of the school budget?**

A: We failed for the third budget cycle in a row to increase the schools' operating budget. I think that's unconscionable.

**Q: What about the assignment plan?**

A. One of the things that I see with respect to the current choice plan is that it is having a very detrimental effect on neighborhoods. It's not just an educational issue, it is a neighborhood issue, where people are moving from stable neighborhoods that have been stable for generations, out of that neighborhood because they are in a school zone where it is perceived that the quality of education is not good. They can't get out, so they either go to a private school or they move out of the neighborhood..... So it's not just an educational problem, it is the actual livability, quality of life in the neighborhood.

There are no easy answers to it. But the bottom line is we are in the process resegregating our school system, and perhaps our community and our neighborhoods, but we're creating some social dynamics that are going to be very difficult for us to contend with in the future.

**Q: Is the business community aware of the damage that the assignment plan is doing to the residential neighborhoods they helped create?**

A: I don't think they are as aware of it as they should be. And by the time they are it may be so prevalent it may be too late.... (Big area companies) are not nearly as interested in addressing

some of these problems that are local in nature. And yet, I think the success or failure of our public education system will ultimately determine the success or failure of this community in terms of its business community, and whether we continue to be attractive to business and industry....

They have an almost impossible job, the board of education, and our board has made it more difficult, by... failing to provide the funding.

**Q: If the schools are resegregating, what is Charlotte going to look like in 20 years?**

A: I do think this is a crossroads election for us. What we do in the next several years will determine that.

We can either go down this road that lets neighborhoods continue to deteriorate, or we can insist through the policies that we adopt at the local level that people stay the course, that they don't cut and run, and leave neighborhoods to fail....

**Q: Where will the money come from for what you want to do?**

A: This is a prosperous community. We are well able to provide the funds that are needed. Over the last decade... the property tax rate has increased only 3 cents. What has happened is the value of property in this county has increased dramatically.... About 40% of the value of the tax base is commercial property; 60% is residential.

As long as you keep that proportion right, I think there is room to provide it through the property taxes that are available.

*Meet the candidates:***Wilhelmenia Rembert**

*From a series of conversations with candidates for Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners at-large. This Q&A is extracted from comments about public schools and the candidate's plans made during forums sponsored by The Swann Fellowship, the publisher of this journal. Rembert, a Democrat, met voters Thursday, Sept. 20.*

**Q: Why is a former school board chairperson running for county commission?**

A: I know how important the county commission is, in terms of helping the district meet its goals. Where the district is is so important right now.

I got a lot of encouragement to stay out there rather than not be involved, not be engaged.

I could support the schools from the county commission. If it is the pleasure of the community for me to do so, I know I am uniquely prepared to do so and I am willing to do so....

As it stands now, with the majority if the county commission being Republican, with a major emphasis on low taxes or cutting taxes, you can't support a growing urban school district with reducing the revenue stream to the school district.

Particularly when that growth is in a lot of high-need areas. A lot of the students who are coming into the district are students who speak English as a second language or students who may not be adequately prepared... or they may have one or more disabilities. There are a number of factors that impact why it is that that growth is very costly.

**Q: Would you support taxing authority for the school board?**

A: Absolutely.... The vast majority of urban districts in this country, if I'm not mistaken, are led by school boards with taxing authority. I think it would take a lot of the politics out of school funding.... It would centralize the tax-

ing authority with the policy-making authority.... It would really simplify the relationship between the school board and the Board of County Commissioners.

**Q: Isn't the onus on the CMS administration to create the public awareness that the district needs more money? It has refused to address critics who challenge how it is spending the money it has.**

A: I don't believe that the district has had its spending out of control. We have had a consistently, rapidly growing public school district, growing at a rate of 3,000 to 4,000 students a year. The nature of the issues students have been dealing with are more complex. We've had a real problem in recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers.... That has been very expensive.

There have been reports of perhaps rampant spending.... I believe spending has been justified. It's just been very expensive. And that is something that a lot of people in our community have not been willing to accept.

When we were dealing with ... what it would cost to change the way we assign students to schools, those of us on the board at the time made statements repeatedly about how costly it would be to change to a new student assignment plan.

We're not talking very much about how costly that is. But we knew that would be expensive. Now do you call that out of control? Well, we can't have it both ways. We can't say that we want schools in neighborhoods and build new schools because schools

are overcrowded, and not spend money. We have very expensive needs in our community with regard to schools.

If you're saying, should the superintendent and/or board do something else to create the sense of urgency? I'm not sure what else they can do. There was a citizens committee, the Education Budget Advisory Committee, appointed by the Board of County Commissioners -- business leaders, many of them didn't have children in the public schools, now or ever -- they looked at the budget. They came back and confirmed these needs are real.... At one point they even suggested that the superintendent wasn't asking for enough.

**Q: Isn't the problem that people of privilege are willing to spend \$15,000 on their own children in private school, but don't want to spend \$7,000 on the general populace?**

A: ... I don't begrudge parents who make a decision to send their children to other schools if they have the capacity to do so. What I think is important is that, to the fullest extent feasible, the public school system should provide the high quality education for every child and parent who can't exercise that option.

**Q: How do you frame the debate so it isn't about lousy test scores at West Charlotte but how we need more money to provide a better education for all?**

A: And we need it for all -- the children who are in the overcrowded schools and for the ones that are in schools that need to be repaired because they hadn't been in 50-plus years. We need both.

When I served on the school board I argued that we needed to ask the county commission to support both and not have to sacrifice one for the other. The children who are in grossly overcrowded schools, there are risk factors

## Rembert

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associated with that, and I'm cognizant of that.

But there are also children who are in other schools, they don't have highly competent, effective teachers who care about educating them, because it would be easier to go to another school where those stresses aren't quite as acute, and they've been in the system a long time and they're experienced and a part of the reward for having done that for so many years is that they get to go to a different school.

That's a part of our challenge: How do we attract and keep all these qualified competent teachers in the schools where we need them the most?

**Q: Supt. Jim Pughsley's personality is really different from [former Supt.] Eric Smith. Pughsley is not one to yell and scream about the district's needs. Is that a problem for the school system at this point?**

A: Any superintendent will have his or her advocates and those who don't support them. Any superintendent will have people who have one style over another. There were people who really loved Eric Smith's style. He had a very political style and he told a lot of people that he would do certain things and that felt good at the time. Some of those things he was able to deliver on, some he was not able to deliver on and that probably could have happened to any superintendent.

And then we have Dr. Pughsley, on the other hand, who is not as political in his style. He's been criticized for that. I certainly have come to understand how political superintendencies perhaps need to be in these environments, but I also think that there ways to be effective without being like somebody else.

The key is finding his own rhythm in this community. Some

## Projection low; Wake to pay

Wake County's school system has been growing fast, just as Mecklenburg's has. Enrollment was up 5,100 this fall, up 4,500 last year. One difference: CMS has its own planning department, and creates its own enrollment projections. The Wake board depends on the county's planning department. In both counties, planners were off by about 1,000 students. CMS has had to cut programs to cover the local share of additional teacher salaries and other costs. But in Wake, The News & Observer reported last week, the county commissioners plans to add \$2 million to the school budget because of their mistake.

– www.newsobserver.com

superintendents have more time than others. I don't know how much time Dr. Pughsley has....

The job of actually getting the funds, quite frankly, is the job of the school board. The superintendent's job is to run the day-to-day operations of the district....

**Q: As you travel the community, where is fear the dominant motivating element?**

A: There is fear among some of our underserved communities that they may get left farther behind if the funding's not there for schools. That's a very legitimate kind of fear....

If the bonds are found for the suburbs to relieve overcrowdedness, then where will the funds come from to make sure the schools that are underserved will get their support?...

We need a lot more people who understand that if they don't get out to talk about how important it is for us to make sure the resources are throughout this community, all the places where the children are, especially the children who are most vulnerable and the fragile, that it really hurts all of us in the long run....

I have this theory that every parent, no matter what their socioeconomic status, wants the best for their children. Their children – they're all they have – typically they want their children to have a better quality of life than they had themselves.

I know that, because that certainly was the case with my par-

ents – a father with a third-grade education, a mother with a seventh-grade education – they wanted the best for my late sister and me.

Now, they knew that their life chances were limited, because of their limited education. But it didn't change their dreams and aspirations for my late sister and me.

They knew that if we got a good education, then we could live a quality of life that was much better than theirs, and that their future generations, their grandchildren, would have a better quality of life. And I believe that parents, no matter what their socioeconomic status, have those hopes, and those dreams, those aspirations for their children.

And they know, particularly if they're from a low socioeconomic background, that the best opportunity for their children to get that is to have a good education.

**Q: Are white suburbanites fearful that assignment will change and the poor and black children will be sent back to their neighborhood schools?**

A: That has't been the sense in the homes and environments, contexts I've been invited to.

I intend to respond to people's questions and their fears. I don't know how I fix that for people who are uncomfortable with me. I think the burden is really partly at least on them, once I make myself available....

## Briefly...

**ESL barrier:** The recent surge in students speaking English as a second language is making living up to the expectations of No Child Left behind increasingly difficult for some districts, the St. Louis Dispatch reported. Although students who enter a U.S. school may take some tests in their native languages for up to three years, the law requires that English as a second language students take state math tests their first year and reading and writing tests the following year.

[www.stltoday.com](http://www.stltoday.com)

**Web courses:** High school students are increasingly taking courses required for graduation online, the Boston Globe reported. And educational reporting firm, the Peak Group, estimates that as many as 1 million high school students are taking at least one course on the Internet.

[www.boston.com](http://www.boston.com)

**High-tech cheats:** Las Vegas lawmakers approved \$44,000 to hire someone to find ways to stop students from cheating on tests after they discovered that students were using camera cell phones and calculator watches when taking high school proficiency exams, the Las Vegas Review-Journal reported. Although only 24 out of 3,000 students taking the proficiency exams were caught cheating last year, the elimination of cheating is the state superintendent's top priority.

[www.reviewjournal.com](http://www.reviewjournal.com)

**Calling parents:** Hoping to increase parental involvement in the school, volunteers will be calling parents of all of Des Moines's 32,000 students, the Des Moines Register reported. The volunteers will use a script and have a list of activities that parents could sign up to participate in.

[www.desmoinesregister.com](http://www.desmoinesregister.com)

**State funding:** The funding

## Calendar

**23** School board's Personnel Committee, 3 p.m., Room 414, Education Center.

**23** Finance, Capital & Facilities Committee, 4 p.m., Board Conference Room.

**27** One in a Series of One-Hour Forums for At-Large County Commissioner Candidates, Andy Dulin, 12:15 p.m., St. Martin's Church, 1510 E. 7th St. Sponsor: The Swann Fellowship. Light lunch available from 11:45 p.m. Donation requested to cover lunch costs.

**28** School board's Curriculum Committee, 3 p.m., Room 414, Education Center.

**28** School board meets, 6 p.m., Board Room.

**29** CMS Magnet Advisory Roundtable, 9 a.m. Carole Hoeffner Center .

**29** "What is Islam?" last of four lectures by Ernest Lee Stoffel, emeritus Presbyterian pastor and emeritus professor of religion at Queens University, 7:30 p.m., Caldwell Memorial Presbyterian Church, 1609 E. 5th St., across Park Drive from Elizabeth Traditional Elementary.

**30** One in a Series of One-Hour Forums for At-Large County Commissioner Candidates, Jack Stratton, 12:15 p.m., St. Martin's Church, 1510 E. 7th St. Sponsor: The Swann Fellowship. Light lunch available from 11:45 p.m. Donation requested to cover lunch costs.

**30** "Stories of Hope: Racial Reconciliation," noon, Covenant Presbyterian, 1000 E. Morehead St. \$6 includes lunch, no reservation needed.

### OCTOBER

**1** School board hosts Broad Foundation visitors, 9 a.m.-5 p.m., Board Room.

**2** International Festival, UNCC Barnhardt Student Activity Center, 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Booths representing the cultures of about 50 nations will be staffed by UNCC students and members of the community. Some will have native foods for sale.

**3** International Peace Day at Myers Park Methodist Church, 1501 Queens Road, 4 p.m.-6 p.m. Guest speakers: Dr. James Howell and others; music directed by Dr. Thomas Moore, and a presentation by the combined youth choirs. Sponsors include

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system of Texas schools was declared unconstitutional by a state district judge, the Houston Chronicle reported. The judge said the reliance of school districts on property taxes for funding creates a system that is neither equitable nor sufficient for many students. The judge gave the state until October 2005 to change the system.

[www.chron.com](http://www.chron.com)

**Funding suit:** A group of Georgia parents filed a lawsuit claiming that the state's funding methods were barring children in rural school districts from receiving an adequate education, the Atlanta Journal-Constitution reported. About 40% of districts' funding comes from property taxes. Plaintiffs claim that low

property values in rural schools do not create enough tax revenue to support the schools.

[www.ajc.com](http://www.ajc.com)

**Back to K-8:** Backed by studies that show higher achievement when elementary and middle schools are combined, more districts are choosing to eliminate middle schools and not separate children until they reach high school, the New York Times reported. Proponents believe that K-8 schools are more nurturing and have more of a community feel. A Philadelphia Education Fund study found that low-income students outperform their peers when they are in a K-8 schools.

[www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com)

# Calendar

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United Religions Initiative, Mecklenburg Ministries, NCCJ.

**4** One in a Series of One-Hour Forums for At-Large County Commissioner Candidates, Ruth Samuelson, 12:15 p.m., St. Martin's Church, 1510 E. 7th St. Sponsor: The Swann Fellowship. Light lunch available from 11:45 p.m. Donation requested to cover lunch costs.

**5** One in a Series of One-Hour Forums for At-Large County Commissioner Candidates, Dan Ramirez, Noon, St. Martin's Church, 1510 E. 7th St. Sponsor: The Swann Fellowship. Light lunch available from 11:45 p.m. Donation requested to cover lunch costs.

**7** Education Budget Advisory Committee, 7:30 a.m., 11th floor conference room, Government Center.

**9** Parent education event, UNCC Fretwell Building, 10-2. Youth aged 12-18 and their parents welcome. Sponsor: Parents On The Move/Parents In Action. Free. Info: Blanche Penn, 704-890-4101.

**13** "Lights on Afterschool! Community Breakfast," 7:30 a.m.-9 a.m., Westin Hotel Charlotte, 601 S. College St.. Speaker: Deborah Prothrow-Stith on "Risk and Opportunity: Community Strategies for Decreasing Youth Violence." Sponsor: Partners in Out-of-School Time. Cost \$15 for youth and youth program providers; \$25 for individuals, \$100 for table of 10. Register by Sept. 29 at POST, 217 S. Tryon St., Suite 312, Charlotte 28202. Info: 704-376-1845 or info@post-carolinas.org

**21** "Choosing on Faith: A Look at School Choice," noon, Covenant Presbyterian, 1000 E. Morehead St. \$6 includes lunch, no reservation needed.

**28** "Your Child or Our Child: Moral Responsibility and Care of 'the Other'," noon, Covenant Presbyterian, 1000 E. Morehead St. \$6 includes lunch, no reservation needed.

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#### NOVEMBER

**11** Education Budget Advisory Committee, 7:30 a.m., 11th floor conference room, Government Center.

**11** "Intro to the Continuum of Care for the Homeless in Charlotte," noon, Covenant Presbyterian, 1000 E. Morehead St. \$6 includes lunch, no reservation needed.

**12** "Invisible Fences: Municipal Underbounding and Minority Exclusion," the third annual conference of the UNC Center for Civil Rights, Friday Center, Chapel Hill, 8 a.m.-5 p.m. An exploration of how annexation, zoning and sewer extensions, and environmental regulations are being used in small Southern towns to disenfranchise African-American homeowners, deny them city services and even leave them little alternative but to sell their ancestral lands. Information: UNC School of Law, Van Hecke-Wettach Hall, 100 Ridge Road CB #3380, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3380 (919) 962-5106.

**17** Cheryl Brown Henderson and Linda Brown Thompson to discuss Brown v. Board, 7 p.m., Dana Auditorium, Guilford College, Greensboro.



**Brown sisters**

The Brown sisters are daughters of the lead plaintiff in the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* case of 1954.

#### DECEMBER

**9** "Going Hungry in a City of Plenty," noon, Covenant Presbyterian, 1000 E. Morehead St. \$6 includes lunch, no reservation.

**16** "Breaking Bread Together: The Religious and Economic Meaning of Sharing a Meal," noon, Covenant Presbyterian, 1000 E. Morehead St. \$6 includes lunch, no reservation needed.