

## Election 2004



Mecklenburg voters Tuesday gave the schools' purse strings to a new Democratic majority on the County Commission. Story and how the candidates ran, by precinct, Pages 4-5.

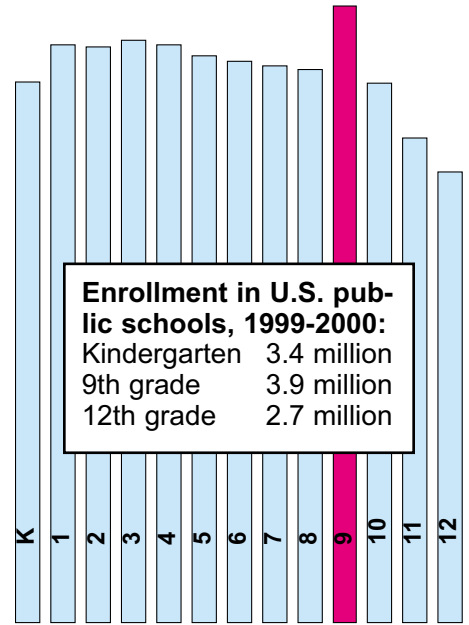
# Dropout rate: Data collection problems shroud a tragedy

Youth who should be walking across the stage toward a diploma are being left behind in startling numbers. Their faces are disproportionately brown.

This national disgrace is being kept out of the public consciousness in part by a staggering inattention to modern data-processing standards. A recent study says schools cannot track students well enough to know how big the problem is.

Additionally, complacency with high dropout rates means there are fewer high schools for taxpayers to finance. In Charlotte-Mecklenburg, the youth falling away after 8th grade could keep two new high schools full.

But experts say taxpayers focused on short-term savings ignore that many dropouts are destined for jail – and high schools are cheaper to maintain than jails.



Wading into this contentious issue is a pair of Boston College educational researchers.

In "High School Graduation Rates: Alternative Methods and Implications," Jing Miao and Walt Haney sort through the methods used by states, researchers and the No Child Left Behind act to calculate the number of dropouts.

In all systems, the goal is to find the number of students not making it to graduation day.

The No Child act mandates a calculation that compares the ninth-grade class to the 12th.

But as high school teachers have known for two or more decades, the ninth grade is full of students retained the previous year. Many of these retained students ultimately drop out. By calculating from ninth grade, the No Child dropout methods arguably overstate the problem.

Ultimately, Maio and Haney choose that method, in part because it will create public pres-

# When silence is not golden

We think of election cycles as times when we set our democratic course. Sometimes we do. Most of the time, maybe we don't.

In a Monday column, the Washington Post's Robert J. Samuelson summed up the sense that this election settled little.

On key national issues, candidates "had positions," Samuelson wrote. "But these consisted mostly of appealing platitudes that said what people wanted to hear.... If the public won't abide honest discussion of clear problems – and our leaders can't lead opinion – then the problems simply fester."

In Mecklenburg, voters have

### Commentary

Steve Johnston



taken a very different tack on local school issues. After listening during a campaign that featured three Democrats promising to, gulp, raise taxes if necessary to properly fund schools, voters fired two Republican county commissioner incumbents, and installed a Democratic majority.

North Mecklenburg FUME activist Rhonda Lennon said she knows voters who were planning

Continued on Page 7

Continued on Page 2

## Grade 9 bulge

Continued from Page 1

sure to end retention.

Graduation rates have improved over time, of course. In 1900, the rate was 6.45%, rising by 1963 to more than 70%, the authors note. Since 1963, however, there has been essentially no progress.

The failure to make progress has been borne by non-graduates who, in 2002, were making 75% of what high school graduates make.

There is no settled way even to calculate the graduation rate, the authors say.

“Depending on the method and the source of data used, published U.S. national high school graduation or completion rates for the Class of 2000 range from 66.6% to 86.0%; the variation between alternative graduation rates at

Continued on Page 3

**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.

**Finances:** *Educate!* is made possible by individual, corporate and foundation donors. To make a tax-deductible donation, send a check to The Swann Fellowship, 1510 E. 7th St., Charlotte, NC 28204; or, at [www.networkforgood.org](http://www.networkforgood.org), use the keyword Swann Fellowship to make a secure donation.

**Publisher** is The Swann Fellowship, 1510 E. 7th St., Charlotte, NC 28204; 704-342-4330; [swannfello@aol.com](mailto:swannfello@aol.com). The Fellowship, named for missionaries Darius and Vera Swann, was formed in 1997 out of several Charlotte congregations to be a witness to the value of diversity in public education and to educate the public on school issues as they relate to this and allied subjects. The Fellowship is a non-profit organization exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code 56-2106776. Financial information about this organization and a copy of its license are available from the State Solicitation Licensing Branch at 1-888-830-4989. The license is not an endorsement by the state.

**Editions:** The Internet edition is free to e-mail recipients, or may be downloaded at [www.educateclt.org](http://www.educateclt.org). To be removed, message [swannfello@aol.com](mailto:swannfello@aol.com). Subscribe at [www.educateclt.org](http://www.educateclt.org). A print edition is available by mail for \$125 a year. First published September 2000; 6-week average circulation through last issue: 3,739.

**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.

## To all *Educate!* readers:

Last week's edition included the appeal for donations reproduced at the right.

It was somewhat playful ... “when *Educate!* was a baby,” indeed! *Waaaaah!*

We're serious.

We know from you, our readers, that this journal helps you make sense of the issues.

Just this week we received the following comments:

“Have I mentioned how much I appreciate your analysis and research?” wrote one.

“Thanks for everything you've done this fall to get us ready to vote and to know what is ‘out there’ in the education world,” wrote another.

“Thank you for caring about our children and changing this system. Keep up the great work,” wrote a third reader.

Financial support from you, our readers, is essential if we are to continue to grow this journal and make it even more useful to you. The costs of publishing *Educate!* now stand at about \$50 per subscriber per year. As we have more subscribers, the cost per subscriber declines. So you can help us in two ways:

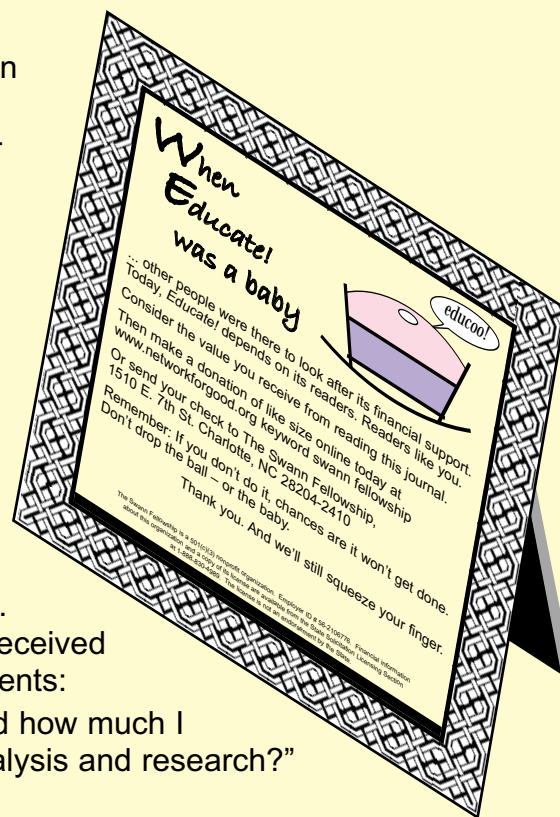
First, support this free journal financially with your donations. And second, suggest new subscribers by sending us their names and e-mail addresses.

As last week's appeal put it, consider the value you receive from reading this journal.

Then make a donation of like size online today at [www.networkforgood.org](http://www.networkforgood.org) keyword swann fellowship

Or send your check to The Swann Fellowship, 1510 E. 7th St. Charlotte, NC 28204-2410

Because if you don't do it, chances are it won't get done.



# Grade 9 bulge

Continued from Page 2

state level is of comparable magnitude.... Even when limiting high school graduates to the NCLB definition, no consensus has been reached....”

In a 70-page study, Miao and Haney explore statistical methods for calculating graduation rates.

Oddly, all of the systems depend on estimates. The state of public school data collection does not yet support the asking of the simplest of questions: What portion of the Class of 2004 entered kindergarten, but wasn't in school for graduation last spring?

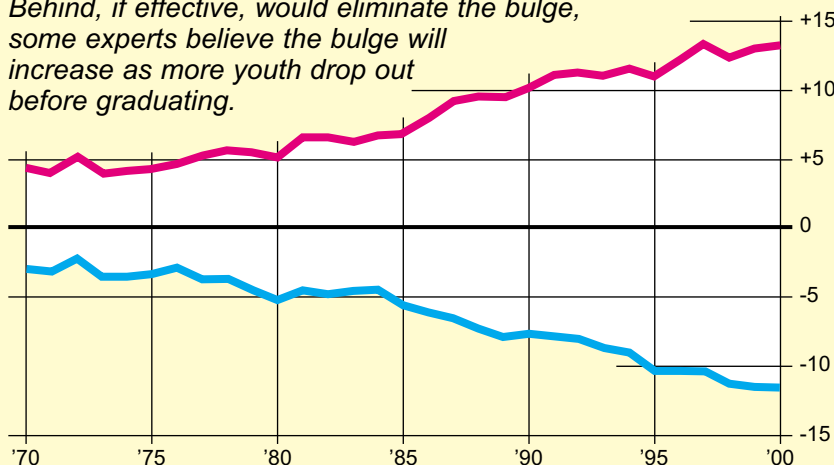
“The major obstacle,” the authors say, is the lack of databases which track individual students.... Without such databases, it is not possible to conduct true cohort analyses by following the same students from school entry to graduation and to compute the true high school graduation rate.

“The alternative methods applied in the current study are quasi-cohort approaches, which are based on group counts on an annual basis. With such data, it is probable that the group we counted in year one is not the exact... group we count again in year two, despite the fact that the vast majority of the students included in both counts are the same.”

That's not the only problem. The authors explore the undercounts found when the state of Texas reviewed Houston's rosy dropout rate: Auditors unearthed 3,000 student records that should

## Grade 9 bulge worse over time

Top magenta line — shows, for years 1970 through 2000, the percentage by which the nation's grade 9 was larger than the same year's eighth grade. The lower cyan line — shows the percent by which the 10th grade was smaller than the ninth. The difference, which constitutes the ninth grade bulge, has been consistently growing over time. While No Child Left Behind, if effective, would eliminate the bulge, some experts believe the bulge will increase as more youth drop out before graduating.



Source: “High School Graduation Rates: Alternative Methods and Implications” by Jing Miao and Walt Haney, Education Policy Analysis Archives. Download article at <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v12n55/>

have been counted as dropouts, but were not.

After studying numerous models, Miao and Haney end up backing the 9th-to-graduation method.

“Although a more conservative measure, the simple grade 9 to graduation rate is conceptually the most straightforward and can be used at any administrative level. Moreover, the method also discloses larger gaps between the white and the black/Hispanic subpopulations. Given that one goal of the No Child Left Behind Act is to identify low-performing schools and move every child forward to

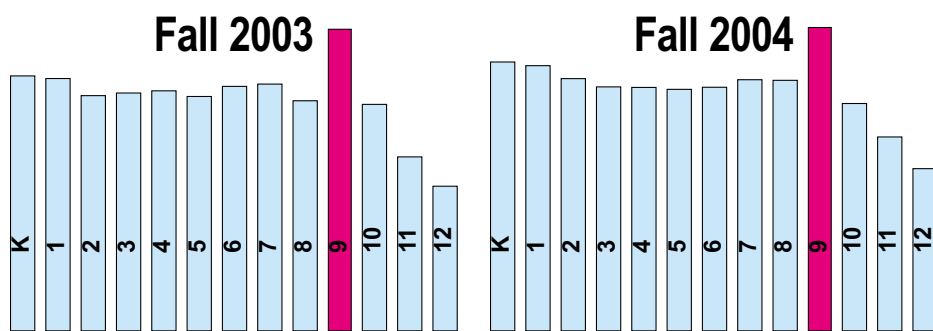
meet the standards, it is justifiable to err on the conservative side by magnifying problem areas than going the other direction.

“The conservative estimates of simple grade 9 to graduation rate bring to light the widespread practice of grade 9 retention, which is of questionable educational value, yet costly to society and to individual students.

“By retaining low-performing students at grade 9, schools may delay these students from taking state mandated tests and artificially inflate school test results. However, research shows that retention does not help low-achieving students to catch up with their peers.... Moreover, retained students are at higher risk of dropping out of high school.... The adoption of the simple grade 9 to graduation method is likely to counterbalance such practice.”

By ethnic group, the study says national graduation rates are about 77% for Asians and 75% for whites, but about 50% for Native Americans, Hispanics and African-Americans.

## CMS enrollment trends: Same bulge at grade 9



Source: CMS Monthly Membership data for end of first month, 2003 and 2004

# Democrats to control schools' purse strings

Mecklenburg County Tuesday put Democrats in control of its Board of County Commissioners by electing three Democrats to at-large seats. With six district seats evenly split, the decision gave Democrats a 6-3 majority, and likely returned Parks Helms to the chair. Provisional ballots won't be added until Tuesday, but unsuccessful Republicans were not looking for a change in outcome.

Under GOP control during the last three budget cycles, commissioners held local school appropriations flat even as the schools saw enrollment rise by 3,000 to 5,000 per year. Two weeks before this election, the Republican majority set course toward

approving new schools in white suburbs in a way that may force the separately elected school board either to curb systemwide operational spending or to delay repairs at older, largely minority schools.

Below are Tuesday's final results in the at-large contest, with candidates ranked in order of finish in each precinct. The total line shows the overall order of finish, with Helms, Wilhelmenia Rembert and Jennifer Roberts elected. Rembert is black; Dan Ramirez is Hispanic; the rest are white. Libertarian Jack Stratton finished seventh overall. Precinct-level data on Hispanic voters was unavailable.

Data source: Mecklenburg County Board of Elections

Precinct	Registration		Democrats			Republicans			Precinct	Registration		Democrats			Republicans		
	Pct. white	Pct. black	Helms	Rembert	Roberts	Dulin	Samuelson	Ramirez		Pct. white	Pct. black	Helms	Rembert	Roberts	Dulin	Samuelson	Ramirez
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>68.2</b>	<b>27.5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>68.2</b>	<b>27.5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>
18	99.0	0.1	4	6	5	2	3	1	207	92.0	5.4	4	6	5	3	1	2
32	98.4	0.3	4	6	5	2	3	1	137	91.8	4.6	4	6	5	3	2	1
48	98.0	0.6	4	6	5	2	3	1	91	91.7	4.3	4	6	5	3	2	1
19	97.1	1.0	4	6	5	2	3	1	66	91.3	6.1	3	6	5	4	2	1
75	96.2	1.7	4	6	5	1	3	2	119	91.1	6.1	4	6	5	3	2	1
236	96.2	2.2	4	6	5	2	3	1	73	91.0	5.1	4	6	5	3	2	1
127	96.1	1.6	4	6	5	3	2	1	71	90.5	6.9	4	6	5	2	3	1
8	96.1	1.7	4	6	5	2	3	1	49	90.4	6.3	3	6	5	4	2	1
70	96.0	0.9	4	6	5	3	2	1	57	90.4	6.3	4	6	5	3	2	1
67	95.9	2.5	4	6	5	3	2	1	143	90.3	6.6	4	6	5	3	2	1
20	95.8	1.8	4	6	5	2	3	1	100	90.3	5.0	4	6	5	3	2	1
86	95.7	1.4	4	6	5	3	2	1	219	90.3	7.2	4	6	5	1	3	2
1	95.6	2.6	4	6	5	2	3	1	118	90.2	6.2	4	6	5	3	2	1
76	95.4	2.6	4	6	5	3	2	1	134	90.0	6.5	4	6	5	3	1	2
72	95.3	2.0	4	6	5	3	2	1	93	90.0	4.6	4	6	5	3	2	1
208	95.2	2.4	4	6	5	3	2	1	96	89.9	6.9	4	6	5	3	1	2
106	95.1	3.5	4	6	5	3	2	1	232	89.9	4.8	4	6	5	3	1	2
240	95.0	2.6	4	6	5	3	2	1	225	89.7	6.4	4	6	5	3	2	1
233	94.9	2.3	4	6	5	3	2	1	144	89.3	5.9	4	6	5	3	1	2
242	94.5	3.0	4	6	5	3	2	1	227	89.1	6.3	4	6	5	3	2	1
131	94.4	2.3	4	6	5	2	3	1	133	89.0	7.8	4	6	5	1	3	2
74	94.4	2.8	4	6	5	2	3	1	109	88.9	8.5	2	3	1	6	4	4
36	93.9	3.4	4	6	5	3	2	1	65	88.6	6.4	4	6	5	3	2	1
103	93.9	2.4	4	6	5	3	2	1	140	88.1	6.4	4	6	5	3	2	1
112	93.7	2.6	4	6	5	3	2	1	101	88.1	7.6	4	6	5	3	2	1
110	93.5	3.8	4	6	5	3	2	1	217	87.9	8.0	4	6	5	3	2	1
114	93.4	3.4	4	6	5	3	2	1	215	87.9	8.6	4	6	5	3	2	1
220	93.3	4.1	4	6	5	3	1	2	226	87.4	6.4	4	6	5	3	1	2
218	93.2	4.4	4	6	5	3	2	1	234	87.4	9.6	4	6	5	3	2	1
221	93.2	4.0	4	6	5	3	2	1	51	87.4	9.4	2	6	5	4	3	1
10	93.0	3.3	1	6	3	5	4	2	92	86.7	7.6	4	5	6	3	2	1
136	92.9	3.6	4	6	5	3	2	1	202	86.5	10.8	4	6	5	3	2	1
111	92.8	4.5	4	6	5	3	2	1	216	86.3	9.3	4	6	5	3	2	1
69	92.8	3.1	4	6	5	3	2	1	139	86.2	7.4	4	6	5	2	1	3
47	92.7	4.4	4	6	5	2	3	1	206	85.9	10.6	1	3	2	6	5	4
121	92.7	3.3	4	6	5	3	2	1	88	85.7	8.5	4	6	5	3	1	2
142	92.7	4.3	4	6	5	3	1	2	209	84.7	12.5	4	6	5	3	2	1
90	92.3	4.4	4	6	5	3	2	1	87	84.1	10.8	4	6	5	3	2	1
37	92.2	3.1	4	6	5	3	2	1	229	83.5	12.0	4	6	5	3	2	1
113	92.1	4.1	4	6	5	3	2	1	21	83.0	13.0	1	3	2	6	4	5

Precinct	Registration		Democrats			Republicans			Precinct	Registration		Democrats			Republicans		
	Pct. white	Pct. black	Helms	Rembert	Roberts	Dulin	Ramirez	Samuelson		Pct. white	Pct. black	Helms	Rembert	Roberts	Dulin	Ramirez	Samuelson
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>68.2</b>	<b>27.5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>68.2</b>	<b>27.5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>
59	82.6	11.9	1	6	3	5	3	2	107	54.8	38.1	1	2	3	6	4	5
9	82.2	15.3	1	4	2	6	5	3	4	53.9	41.4	1	2	3	6	5	4
35	82.2	15.1	2	6	5	4	2	1	120	53.3	37.5	2	1	3	6	4	5
50	81.9	13.0	1	5	3	6	2	4	138	53.1	40.1	1	2	3	6	5	4
241	81.6	15.5	4	6	5	3	1	2	99	53.0	41.2	2	1	3	6	4	5
85	80.3	15.4	4	6	5	3	2	1	125	52.4	41.1	1	3	2	6	4	5
145	80.2	15.5	4	6	5	3	2	1	46	51.6	43.6	1	3	2	6	5	4
243	80.0	15.1	4	6	5	3	1	2	30	51.2	44.1	1	2	3	6	5	4
224	79.6	17.4	4	6	5	1	2	3	146	50.9	41.4	2	1	3	6	4	5
2	79.4	16.9	1	3	2	6	5	4	5	49.8	43.6	1	2	3	6	5	4
15	79.3	17.1	2	3	1	6	5	4	204	49.6	42.6	1	2	3	6	4	5
58	79.2	13.4	3	6	5	4	1	2	123	48.7	46.0	1	2	3	6	4	5
231	78.8	13.7	4	6	5	3	2	1	84	47.9	47.4	1	2	3	6	5	4
38	78.3	15.6	1	3	2	6	5	4	63	47.7	44.5	1	3	2	6	4	5
128	78.1	15.9	4	6	5	3	2	1	95	47.4	46.7	2	1	3	6	5	4
200	78.1	18.0	4	6	5	2	2	1	81	44.8	51.6	1	2	3	6	5	4
205	77.9	18.1	4	5	6	3	2	1	6	43.2	51.5	1	2	3	6	4	5
129	76.7	17.8	1	3	2	5	4	6	78	43.2	51.3	2	1	3	6	4	5
122	76.6	18.0	4	6	5	3	1	2	126	42.5	52.4	1	2	3	6	4	5
44	76.6	20.0	1	3	2	6	5	4	62	40.3	52.9	1	2	3	6	4	5
235	74.1	22.1	4	5	6	3	1	2	213	40.0	55.4	2	1	3	6	5	4
34	72.9	22.4	1	3	2	6	4	5	116	39.5	55.5	1	2	3	6	4	5
68	72.6	22.3	1	4	5	6	3	2	124	34.6	59.9	2	1	3	6	4	5
223	72.2	24.4	4	5	6	3	2	1	40	34.1	62.3	1	2	3	6	4	5
89	72.0	25.7	1	6	5	4	3	2	28	33.1	62.4	1	2	3	6	4	5
7	71.1	25.3	1	3	2	6	5	4	13	32.8	62.7	1	2	3	6	4	5
83	70.4	25.7	1	3	2	6	4	5	43	32.1	62.3	2	1	3	6	4	5
214	70.3	23.3	2	6	4	5	3	1	108	30.7	64.3	1	1	3	6	4	5
64	69.3	25.8	1	2	3	6	5	4	53	29.4	66.5	1	2	3	4	5	6
239	69.0	24.7	3	5	6	4	1	2	98	29.4	62.8	2	1	3	6	5	4
230	68.9	25.1	1	2	2	6	5	4	26	27.8	68.4	2	1	3	6	4	5
238	68.0	26.4	2	4	5	6	1	3	23	23.8	73.5	1	2	3	6	5	4
102	67.1	26.5	1	3	2	6	4	5	210	23.2	74.2	2	1	3	6	4	5
222	66.4	29.9	1	2	3	6	5	4	3	21.0	74.0	2	1	3	6	5	4
79	65.0	30.4	1	2	3	6	4	5	24	20.9	76.9	1	2	3	6	4	5
201	64.2	31.7	1	3	2	5	4	6	17	20.3	76.1	1	1	3	6	5	4
211	63.5	31.5	1	2	3	6	4	5	41	19.9	75.1	2	1	3	6	4	5
11	62.9	32.8	1	2	3	6	5	4	104	19.3	76.1	2	1	3	6	5	4
132	62.8	31.7	1	2	2	6	5	4	22	16.9	80.0	2	1	3	6	4	5
45	62.6	27.6	1	3	2	6	4	5	27	12.2	83.6	2	1	3	6	4	5
29	62.2	33.1	2	3	1	6	5	4	82	11.4	83.6	2	1	3	6	4	5
203	62.0	33.9	1	2	3	6	4	5	60	11.0	86.1	2	1	3	6	4	5
61	61.6	33.9	1	2	3	6	5	4	39	7.0	90.5	2	1	3	5	4	5
94	61.5	32.4	1	2	3	6	5	4	14	5.9	90.2	2	1	3	6	4	5
33	61.2	33.8	1	2	3	6	4	5	77	5.5	91.7	2	1	3	6	4	4
105	61.1	31.6	1	2	3	6	5	4	52	4.4	93.8	2	1	3	4	4	6
135	60.8	33.6	2	1	3	6	4	5	42	3.8	93.9	2	1	3	6	4	5
115	60.6	35.3	1	2	3	6	4	5	31	2.4	95.3	2	1	3	6	5	4
212	60.5	31.0	1	2	3	6	5	4	54	2.1	95.2	2	1	3	5	4	6
228	60.0	32.2	1	2	3	6	4	5	12	1.5	94.0	2	1	3	6	4	5
97	59.7	37.3	1	2	3	6	4	4	56	1.3	96.0	2	1	3	7	4	5
141	58.7	30.8	1	3	2	6	4	5	16	1.3	97.3	2	1	3	6	4	5
117	58.3	35.8	1	2	2	6	4	5	25	0.9	96.9	2	1	3	7	4	5
130	56.4	36.1	1	3	2	6	5	4	55	0.9	96.9	2	1	3	6	5	4
80	56.1	39.7	1	2	3	6	5	4	Curb			2	1	3	6	5	4
237	54.9	38.6	2	1	3	6	5	4	Abs			1	2	3	6	5	4

## Briefly...

**What works:** A Melbourne, Australia study of 600 teachers and 4,000 students found that classrooms with well-behaved students had teachers who rewarded good behavior and involved students in decision-making, the Melbourne Age reported. Teachers with aggressive discipline strategies such as yelling and detention were not as effective in controlling unacceptable behavior in their classrooms.

[www.theage.com.au](http://www.theage.com.au)

**Besieged:** Baltimore school principals and teachers believe they are being discouraged from suspending children in their schools, the Baltimore Sun reported. Fifteen of the district's schools are near being labeled "persistently dangerous" under the federal No Child Left Behind law and are on probation. Reducing suspensions will keep the schools from receiving the "dangerous" label. The result, according to labor unions, is an environment where students know they can get away with unacceptable behavior. They blame this climate on the rash of school fires set by students in the district recently.

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

**Thinking smaller:** Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley has a plan which will close about 60 schools and reopen them within 6 years as 100 smaller schools, two thirds of which will be operated by outside groups, Education Week reported. With the plan, called Renaissance 2010, the district hopes to improve schools by offering them more freedom than regular schools on issues such as budget, curriculum and staffing while giving greater choices in education to parents and their children.

[www.edweek.org](http://www.edweek.org)

**High school failings:** Education Trust leader Kati Haycock says that although educational reforms have been suc-

## School board meets 3 times next week

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg school board has a busy schedule next week. On Tuesday, at its regularly scheduled meeting at 6 p.m. in the Government Center Meeting Chamber, there will be a public hearing on parent proposals for new student assignment boundaries for five new schools opening over the next two years.

On Wednesday at 4 p.m., the board holds a workshop on those boundaries at the Ed Center.

Then board members leave town for a retreat Thursday and Friday at the Grandover Resort in south Greensboro. Grandover is the tall facility off to the left as you drive north on I-85. Going? Rooms go for, oh, \$189 per night.



[www.clickgreensborohotels.com](http://www.clickgreensborohotels.com)  
Grandover

cessful at the elementary and middle school levels, high schools are moving backwards in terms of the achievement gap and keeping pace with technology, the Contra Costa Times reported. Haycock said that schools and districts need to stop blaming families and take responsibility. This would include not assigning teachers to subjects they have not studied and not underestimating students' abilities by assigning them to lower-level classes so as not to "bore them out the school door."

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

**Educator training fund:** The Nashville Public Education Foundation announced the creation of a \$1 million fund to establish collaboration between Nashville schools and Peabody College of Vanderbilt University to enhance teachers' and principals' professional development. The foundation has raised over \$4 million in grants and initiatives benefiting students, teachers and families over the past 17 years.

[www.nashvillepef.org](http://www.nashvillepef.org)

## Calendar

**8** School board work session on proposed home-school boundaries, 4 p.m., Board Room, Education Center.

**9** Regular school board meeting, p.m., Government Center Meeting Room.

**10** School board workshop on

attendance boundaries for new schools, 4 p.m., Board Room, Government Center.

**11** School board retreat, Grandover Resort, Greensboro.

**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** School board retreat continues, Grandover Resort, Greensboro.

**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-American towns to disenfranchise African-American homeowners, deny them city services and even leave them little alternative but to sell their ancestral lands.

Information: (919) 962-5106.

**17** Cheryl Brown Henderson and Linda Brown Thompson to discuss *Brown v. Board*, 7 p.m., Dana Auditorium, Guilford College, Greensboro. The Brown sisters are daughters of the lead plaintiff in the landmark *Brown v. Board*.

# Silence not golden

Continued from Page 1

to overlook party labels to support people who would strengthen school funding.

From here, voters' decisions look more like the impact of straight-ticket voting fueled by strong support for John Kerry. District 2 Commissioner Norman Mitchell agreed, but added that divisive talk from local Republicans had lately angered "a lot of Democrats

that normally vote Republican."

The voters' decision may ease some of the financial pressure the school board has been under.

Perhaps there will be less talk about keeping local funding flat and forcing the schools to choose between construction and spending on operations – that is, between classrooms for a growing enrollment, and the staff needed to teach the same children.

But Robert Samuelson's point should not be forgotten:

During the local campaign, can-

didates tended to talk about issues that might be under their control if elected. That's understandable. The issues mentioned at meet-the-candidate forums I sat in on ranged from student assignment to budgeting to the superintendent to principal training to commissioner-school board relations to tax rates.

But what is the key issue confronting us locally? Is it really crowded buildings?

Or is it something we don't

Continued on Page 8

## N.C. counts all of its exceptional children

Two counts are taken each year of children enrolled in all exceptional children programs. These numbers are from the just-released April 1 count, which is used for state funding purposes.

## Statewide count by demographic groups

Exceptionality	Nat. Am.	Asian	Black	Hispanic	White	Tot.
AG Academically/intellectually gifted	1163	4627	15285	2668	122598	146341
AU Autistic	21	90	1685	128	3082	5006
DB Deaf-Blind	0	1	0	5	16	22
DD Developmentally Delayed*	181	127	5738	1021	6383	13450
EH Behaviorally/Emotionally Disabled	108	16	5463	134	4298	10019
EM Educable Mentally Disabled	845	160	16558	987	9520	28070
HI Hearing Impaired**	33	50	631	184	1257	2155
LD Specific Learning Disabled	1175	561	21786	4085	42794	70401
MU Multi-Handicapped	29	27	573	78	1076	1783
OH Other Health Impaired	276	107	6865	403	15213	22864
OI Orthopedically Impaired	15	18	288	52	806	1179
SI Speech-Language Impaired	1146	467	11049	1822	27204	41688
TB Traumatic Brain Injured	6	6	194	24	311	541
VI Visually Impaired***	5	5	196	29	421	656

**Notes:** \*Ages 3-7 only (This category takes the place of PD/A). \*\*Includes Deaf and Hard of Hearing \*\*\*Includes Blind and Partially Sighted

## Charlotte-Mecklenburg count by demographic groups

	Asian			Black		Hispanic		Nat. Am.		Multi		White		Tot.
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M		
AG Academically/intellectually gifted	382	351	1218	940	152	160	13	18	105	77	5468	5186	14070	
AU Autistic	4	10	27	117	2	20	0	2	0	1	32	124	339	
DB Deaf-Blind	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	
DD Developmentally Delayed*	5	8	112	301	32	36	0	3	6	19	70	160	752	
EH Behaviorally/Emotionally Disabled	0	2	166	676	3	15	1	6	6	13	39	163	1090	
EM Educable Mentally Disabled	7	11	526	796	24	34	1	3	4	3	93	101	1603	
HI Hearing Impaired**	5	1	43	50	13	11	0	1	1	2	39	34	200	
LD Specific Learning Disabled	20	74	944	2093	130	307	13	20	15	50	576	1376	5618	
MU Multi-Handicapped	2	2	27	44	8	3	1	1	0	0	30	34	152	
OH Other Health Impaired	0	4	110	340	5	11	1	4	2	9	113	302	901	
OI Orthopedically Impaired	2	4	25	29	4	7	1	3	2	0	28	55	160	
SI Speech-Language Impaired	34	53	394	912	62	135	6	9	22	35	513	1038	3213	
SP Severely/Profoundly Mentally Disab.	3	2	27	20	1	4	0	0	0	0	26	23	106	
TB Traumatic Brain Injured	0	1	6	19	2	0	0	0	0	0	5	10	43	
TM Trainable Mentally Disabled	3	1	64	82	12	6	0	1	0	3	37	48	257	
VI Visually Impaired***	1	0	8	14	1	2	0	0	0	0	5	14	45	

**Notes:** \*Ages 3-7 only (Category replaces PD/A). \*\*Includes Deaf and Hard of Hearing \*\*\*Includes Blind and Partially Sighted

**Source:** N.C. Dept. of Public Instruction. Full details at [www.ncpublicschools.org/ec/specialprograms/data/childcount/](http://www.ncpublicschools.org/ec/specialprograms/data/childcount/)

## Silence not golden

Continued from Page 7

want to talk about – that too many children are leaving school unprepared for the 21st century.

That really is the key community problem. It's a national problem, as the story on Page 1 about the ninth-grade bulge indicates.

If that's the key problem, then the recent campaign was little more than a long silence.

And we have spent no time as a community developing an answer to what University of Arizona educator Stanley Pogrow calls "the blank stare."

Teachers know the stare. It appears on too many young faces when an adult's question requires an act of mental processing.

"The core of the problem" behind the blank stare, Pogrow writes in *Teachers College Record*, "is that these wonderful students are not prepared to answer reflective questions. Staff development to train teachers to ask reflective questions is of little value if students are not prepared to respond.

"The lack of student responsiveness is not because of ability. Rather, it results from the gap in disadvantaged students' access to the types of cultural interactions that do prepare an individual to engage in reflective and abstract thought. The key needed interactions are discussions with adults about ideas, a process that traditionally took place around the greatest educational institution of all – the dinner table.

"Unfortunately, disadvantaged students generally come to school without having had the opportunity to talk with adults about ideas.

"In addition, such a lack is not racial but economic. As you move down the economic ladder, talk in the home diminishes dramatically..."

What's to be done? Pogrow has a decades-old program focused on fostering Socratic discussion at the schoolhouse – during the school day or after school.

## What it takes for CMS to tell the story

"Public schools don't thrive without public information," says former CMS PR czar Nora Carr. And the department she headed for former Supt. Eric Smith "needs more people," Carr said Monday.

A period of flat school funding, she acknowledged, "is a very difficult time" to make the case for more information officers. But CMS's small staff "just get beat up" trying to pursue two tasks – creating the good news, and dealing with the bad.

In *"Telling Your Story: A toolkit for marketing urban education"* published by the National School Boards Association's Council of Urban Boards of Education, Carr has advice for school board members trying to low-ball their marketing budget:

"Your competition recognizes the value of marketing. That's why many of the more prestigious private schools have a larger public relations staff for one school than many urban school systems have for an entire district. (Of course they call them something different – development officers, student recruiters, community relations directors, alumnae specialists – but the roles are similar)..."

"Hire strategic public relations counselors for your top communications positions and place those individuals high enough in the organization so they have access to the information and people they need to do their jobs effectively. Get trained professionals who know what they're doing and who are strong enough to push through the bureaucracy that often gets in the way of open communications. You need someone who is willing to stick his or her neck out on a regular basis, someone who steps up when every human instinct says, 'Run for your lives!'..."

"Staff public information appropriately. Each urban public information office should have enough staff to divide into at least two teams for media relations: the good news squad that daily seeks out and places positive news stories about the schools; and the media response team that deals with incoming media queries and the daily negative issues and mini-crises that pop up in every city school system.

"It is simply too hard for the same staff to perform both functions well, and given the tyranny of the urgent, it's the proactive side that usually suffers...."

"If the same person or small group of people is trying to handle all of these functions, you've set them up for failure. It's the school board's job to help the community understand why these positions are needed, and it's the superintendent's job to make sure the communication function is well-managed and effective."

– Download "Telling Your Story" from [www.nsba.org/cube](http://www.nsba.org/cube)



Carr

Pogrow claims great success with at-risk kids. Many such kids, here and nationally, make good progress in elementary school, only to fall behind as the middle and high school curriculum become more abstract. The ninth-grade bulge dissipates and enrollments, nationally and in CMS, start declining in 10th grade when these youth turn 16 and can

legally drop out of school.

(Why legislators insist on the agrarian-era relic of ending compulsory education at age 16 is beyond me, but that's a subject for another day.)

Back to Pogrow. Youth need to learn how to deal with ideas, and abstractions. But can schools do the necessary work alone? What

Continued on Page 9



# Silence not golden

Continued from Page 8

about the dinner table? Do families even *own* dinner tables anymore?

I very distinctly remember when our household permanently turned off the TV during meals. It was 1981, the kids were 7 and 4, there was a fascinating dinner-table conversation going on involving all four of us – and a then-newly installed CBS anchor

named Dan Rather kept interrupting. Click!

Professor Pogrow believes that the key to solving the blank stare is to have children engaged with adults in discussion about ideas. He points to the dinner table as “the greatest educational institution of all.” What he really is talking about is children growing up talking *with* adults, not just being talked *to* by adults.

I know how to make that happen with at-risk kids when they show up at my door, as dozens of

them did on Halloween.

But we as families and we as a community need to be talking about how to make that happen every day, in every home.

Oddly, this issue may cross the economic spectrum. Are children left unnurtured when parents must struggle to put food on the table? Are children left unnurtured when parents overwork to pay for baubles and save for top college educations?

Can we break the silence about all this?

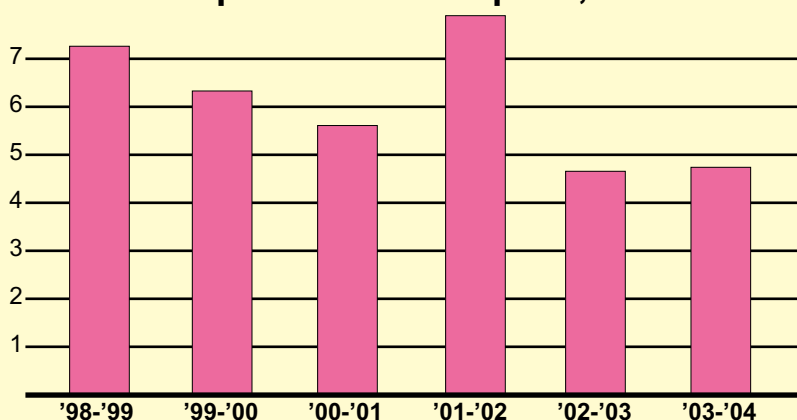
## Crime and violence at CMS schools

Statewide last year, the rate of reportable acts of crime and violence was 7.371 per 1,000 students. That was up from the year-earlier rate of 6.581. Similarly, CMS reported an increase in its rate, and increases in weapons, drug possession and bomb threats.

State officials said 40% of the state’s districts showed a decline in reportable offenses, three showed no change, and 57% showed some increase.

The chart below lists total number of CMS acts committed for each of the 17 offenses for which North Carolina requires reporting, and the rate of total occurrences per 1,000 CMS students.

CMS rate of reportable crimes per 1,000 students



Code	Description	'98-'99	'99-'00	'00-'01	'01-'02	'02-'03	'03-'04
PW	Possession of a weapon	256	198	211	283	218	283
PS	Possession of controlled substance	178	170	151	116	116	160
PA	Possession of alcoholic beverage				201	17	24
AP	Assault on school personnel	140	146	104	93	82	29
AR	Assault resulting in serious injury	47	22	29	4	11	2
SA	Sexual Assault	16	10	37	50	11	1
AW	Assault involving use of a weapon	18	19	11	10	4	1
SO	Sexual Offense	13	34	10	16	18	0
PF	Possession of firearm	14	4	6	21	12	21
RO	Robbery without a dangerous weapon	16	22	8	10	9	5
RW	Robbery with a dangerous weapon	1	0	0	0	0	0
IM	Taking indecent liberties with a minor	0	0	1	0	0	0
R	Rape	0	1	0	0	0	0
D	Death by other than natural causes	1	1	0	1	0	0
K	Kidnapping	1	1	0	0	0	0
BT	Bomb Threat				21	6	9
BS	Burning of school building				4	2	2
	<b>Total acts committed</b>	701	628	568	830	506	537
	<b>Acts per 1,000 students</b>	7.269	6.337	5.617	7.906	4.664	4.747

Data source: N.C. Department of Public Instruction