

Educate!

To *Educate!* readers:

Your donations of \$2,200 to date ensure that this publication will publish two editions in January. How long *Educate!* continues after that will be determined by your collective response to Campaign 2005, our appeal for funds to operate during the coming year.

If you value this journal, please donate before Dec. 31. You'll get a tax-deductible donation. And the community will continue to have a prophetic voice for quality, equitable, integrated education.

The Swann Fellowship is not a foundation. It now has no money for this journal beyond what its readers donate.

All the evidence available suggests that virtually all *Educate!* readers can afford to donate something to defray the costs of this community asset. Some have. Many more must if it is to survive. See Page 2 for details on how you can contribute before Dec. 31.

As for the future of this publication...

It's up to *Y* ou



www.unitedagendaforchildren.org

Defining an agenda to aid children

The United Agenda for Children coalition held its Town Hall Saturday at the Merchandise Mart and issued a preliminary report (complete text, Page 6). Attendance fell short of leaders' hopes, both in size

and demographics. But there was energy in the room, and the \$930,000, three-year project has only begun. Several *Educate!* readers who were at the Town Hall tables write about their experiences and comment on what was "decided" during the meeting. Their comments begin on Page 6.

Equity promise

'Schools are not there yet'

The citizens panel monitoring the '90s deal that low-wealth schools would get adequate resources reported Tuesday that the community has not made good on its promise.

"In case any of y'all had any doubts: As to the issue of equity,



Wright

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools are not there yet," Equity Committee Chairman Julian Wright told the board.

In a letter requested by Supt. Jim Pughsley and board member Louise Woods to help guide upcoming board budget discussions, the committee offered suggestions on where additional resources might improve student achievement.

Text of the letter, Page 11.

Reform at ailing Berry Tech: Blueprint for wider use?

In a ritual mandated by the state, Berry Academy Principal David Baldaia delivered a School Improvement Plan to the CMS school board Tuesday.

The plan's details may warrant public awareness far beyond the doors of the troubled \$51 million technical and trades school off Freedom Drive. The reason:

In a district where nearly every high school is an academic disappointment, the Berry plan has the elements that could improve achievement "in any school in the district," according to board chairman Joe White.

"It has a lot of strong medicine," White said.

"It's easier said than done. It can work. It will work and I believe you're dedicated to make it work," he told Baldaia.



Baldaia

"The good thing about it is, it will work not just at Berry. It will work across this district if we have the leadership to implement it throughout this district."

Berry's problems have been very public. It was one of only two schools in the entire state this year whose performance was so bad and gains so minimal that the state sent an assistance team.

And in recent weeks, Berry has had a series of bomb threats. Parent Denise Summers asked board members Tuesday night if Berry students were less valued than students at other schools because Berry had not been evacuated after bomb threats — as

Final issue for 2004

This is the last edition of *Educate!* for the calendar year. The next issue will be dated Friday, Jan. 14, unless events suggest an earlier edition.

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Will we stop relying on leaders' grand plans?

I listened to Dr. Pughsley speak Tuesday morning. What he spoke of was reported on in this publication (*Educate!*, Dec. 10). I make the following prediction.

Things will change. Things will remain the same. In 10 years the people concerned about education for all children will still be complaining about the things we complain about today.

Dr. Pughsley offers his panacea, much as those before him have. None of the wonderful five-year plans have cured the problem and I predict neither will Dr. Pughsley's. He and the other professional bureaucrats will make predictions, shuffle students, tell us how wonderful what they are doing is going to be, then they will retire. We will have a new superintendent to inspire us, raising our expectations and passing out hope for the future like Halloween candy, and 30% of the children will have passed through our school system uneducated.

School Board Chairman Joe White says he wants every child to get an education, not just most. He too will pass out of the public eye and his wish will remain empty. He says nice things; nothing substantial happens.

It is past time to listen to professional bureaucrats and politi-

From Readers

cians who are primarily interested in protecting their jobs and listen to those who are or have been on the front lines, those who are actually concerned about education.

Will that happen in Mecklenburg County? Probably not.

Lewis Guignard

Small tasks aid schools

Through collecting Campbell Soup product labels and box tops for education a school can reap cost savings. One very small school earned \$17,000. And at www.giftsinkind.org, there are cost savings for every school.

One time I and others did a school craft fair around Christmas, making simple things like potholders, bags of cookies, simple small crafts. We priced them at 25 cents to a dollar. The children could go in during the day to purchase a gift for friends and family. It made the children feel good that they bought the gift themselves.

Another site for savings is the site ebatts.com, batteries at cost savings. Just food for thought. Think of the win-win.

Jo Ann E. Casserly

Leadership No. 1 issue

The writer, a former CMS board member, sits on the State Board of Education.

I noted that you made comments alluding to the Board of Education forcing principal changes (*Educate!*, Dec. 3). I would urge you NOT to encourage board members to get involved on this front. Even as important as principals are, it's the superintendent's job to handle personnel. If the superintendent isn't doing the job, the board needs to fire the superintendent.

At the end of the day, leadership at the top is, head and shoulders, the most important thing that a board or community can do to educate its children. If the leadership is not right at the top, damn near everything else becomes at risk.

John Tate

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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Reform at Berry

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other schools have been.

It was left to board member George Dunlap, a police officer, to say in public that, after the bomb threat investigation was under way, police ordered school officials not to evacuate the building. He did not elaborate, but Baldaia said that a suspect had since been apprehended, and faces a year's exclusion from all CMS schools.

The academic difficulties at Berry are arguably rooted in both CMS policy and school practice.

Some disgruntled former teachers blame Baldaia, a proud, focused visionary who built a successful technical school program in Gaston County, then was brought to CMS in time to build the Berry program from the ground up.

In comments Tuesday, Baldaia issued a number of mea culpas, vowing to spend more time in classrooms and giving teachers more support.

But Baldaia and others have long maintained that CMS erred when it created a tech-heavy program in an asset-packed facility, and then did not create minimum academic entry requirements. The first cohorts attracted under the choice plan were dominated by unprepared students from nearby neighborhoods, rather than countywide as designed. Last month, after Dunlap and Supt. Jim Pughsley met with a parent group, Pughsley recommended and the board approved entrance requirements effective with January's magnet lottery.

Board member Vilma Leake observed Tuesday that CMS should "not allow other principals to transfer problems into that building because they did not want to house them in their facility, and that's been a problem...."

Applicant rising ninth-graders must be on grade level in reading and math by the end of summer school, and have passed both parts of the state's computer competency test. Exceptional children



must have met IEP or individual education program goals.

But it was the board, not Baldaia or Pughsley, who focused on the lack of experienced teachers in the building.

"We have failed you from the beginning," said board member Louise Woods.

Baldaia thanked Pughsley for sending Berry resources "above and beyond what it 'earns' on an (average daily membership) basis."

But when asked about eight teacher resignations – nearly 10% of the staff – after the state team arrived this year, Baldaia said there were a number of reasons: Spousal transfers. Medical leaves. "Some may have felt the heat coming.... I suspect there will be more."

"When asked what you need, I hear your can-do spirit – we have everything we need," Dunlap commented. "Well, I want to argue with you. I don't think you have everything you need. When 60% of your staff has less than four years experience, you need experienced staff."

Pughsley called Berry's teacher needs a "unique situation, and we will in fact address it by some of the things I will be proposing in January." Pughsley is widely expected to be considering a plan

to involuntarily move experienced teachers where they are most needed. Teachers now can refuse transfers, and most experienced teachers have ended up at schools with the best-prepared students.

White said that a technical school would forever need lateral entry teachers skilled in the trades they would teach. He said he was confident Baldaia and his staff could train such teachers to manage student discipline.

"If we're not providing you the resources to do that, then that's when you need to come back and get on us and be at the superintendent's front door."

The following text in sans serif type represents the outline of the Berry School Improvement Plan as presented to the school board.

Interspersed in the outline are Baldaia's comments to the board Tuesday.

Safe and Orderly Climate

1. School Discipline

- Establish faculty Discipline Committee; Plan/Do/Check/Act Process.
- Revisit, revise and enforce disciplinary rules, policies and procedures.
- Dean of Students added, provides APs more time for in-classroom monitoring.
- Develop effective alternatives to OSS.

"We're fully committed to do that for student infractions other than those that require a mandated out-of-school suspension. We don't need students out of school. We need them in the classrooms learning."

2. School Safety

- Review and practice School Crisis Plan with all staff.
- Revise and monitor visitor policies and procedures.
- All staff recommit to engaging students during class transitions.

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Reform at Berry

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“We all have skin in the game. We need to up that ante.”

High Expectations

1. Instruction

- Establish faculty Curriculum and Instruction Committee; Plan/Do/Check/Act Process.
- Provide, assign and monitor quality professional development to increase teachers' capacity.
- Implement peer coaching/peer observations.

– Teachers recommit to using all available instructional resources.

“We have everything that we need, and more, to get the job done. It's about recommitting to using what we have at hand, and using it more effectively. There are no excuses. We have what we need.”

- Redesign the student course selection process and master schedule process to better meet the needs of students.

“It is critical which courses students take, what input there is into that process, and how the master schedule is built. It is the backbone of the school.”

2. Scheduling

- Redesign the student course selection process and master schedule process to better meet the needs of students.
- Devise specific process and actions for guidance counselors and faculty input in student course selection.

“Something that we haven't had before.”

3. Curriculum

- Increase rigor in all classes.
- “The evidence is that the classes are not rigorous enough across the board.”
- Develop ways and means for teachers to utilize the flexibility within course pacing guides.
- “We need to help teachers become adept at finding flexibility within that pacing guide to go back and reteach and retest and get the job done.”
- Monitor recommended practices are used daily in all classrooms.

“You know that you can expect

what you inspect, so we need to be about that.”

Opportunity to Learn and High Academic Time on Task

1. Instructional Time

- Hold students accountable for their learning: punctuality, attendance, participation.

“Every teacher, every day, every class, every student. Don't let students play you, don't let students slide....”

- Limit loss of instructional time.

“That quite simply is me saying ‘No’ more often to things that will pull us away from instruction time.”

2. Facilitating Instruction

- Develop, use and monitor high-quality lesson plans inclusive of all learning styles.
- Minimize teachers' loss of planning time due to class coverage.

– Establish an instructional EOC bank for Student Intervention Center and hold students accountable for learning.

- Implement and monitor AVID Program according to CMS guidelines.

“AVID is alive and well at Berry Academy. We need to make it better.”

3. Monitoring Instruction

- Administrators will increase classroom visitations and snapshot observations.

“There are five administrators, soon to be six, in the building. We need to be in classrooms. We need to put other things aside that are compelling and be in classrooms.

“And the reason we need to be in classrooms is to see what's going on, and to provide feedback and assistance to teachers.”

“And quite frankly, I'm not there often enough, and I need to be, and I will be, along with my team. It's where the rubber meets the road.”

- Administrators will meet weekly with departments; Plan/Do/Check/Act process.

“Traditionally, assistant principals other than the assistant

Phillip O. Berry Academy of Technology

Data is for 2003-2004 unless otherwise specified.

TEACHERS

	Other CMS		N.C.
	Berry schools		
Pct. fully licensed	56	76	82
Pct. adv. degrees	30	30	26
No. Board-certified	1	9	6
Pct. 0-3 yrs. exper.	41	26	21
Pct. 4-10 yrs. exper.	28	29	25
Pct. 10+ yrs. exper.	31	45	54
Annual turnover	31	24	20

RESOURCES

	Other CMS		
	Berry schools		N.C.
Books per student	56.5	15.1	16.9
Stud. per computer	1.45	4.27	3.78
Avg. age libr. books	1999	1992	1988

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

(Pct. on grade level)	Other CMS		
	Berry schools		N.C.
10th Comp. '04	41.2	55.8	58.7
10th Comp. '03	50.3	57.5	57.0
English I	67.2	76.0	81.5
Algebra I	36.1	67.8	80.0
Algebra II	53.5	69.0	79.5
Geometry	22.2	51.6	67.2
Biology	29.1	51.9	61.4
Chemistry	39.7	55.9	75.3
Physics	45.1	79.0	85.3

Data source: www.ncreportcards.org

principal for instruction generally are not tasked with the core academic functions. Ours will be.”

Clear and Focused Mission

4. Communication and Collaboration

- Display and reemphasize mission statement schoolwide.
- Strengthen relationships among students, parents and staff.

“It's about building our school community and, quite frankly, we have a long way to go in engaging a high percentage of parents.”

- Consistently communicate high expectations for staff and students' performance.

“Quite frankly, I don't think that we've done that at a high

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Reform at Berry

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enough level consistently across the board in all classrooms and in all support operations.”

- Hold all staff members accountable for their performance.

Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress

1. Instruction

- Develop, implement and monitor student Personalized Education Plans (PEPs).

“This is the standard for continuation in a magnet program and magnet school, that students must pass their career and technical education programs at Berry. If they don’t, they’re put on an assistance plan if you will, the PEP, and at Berry, if students do not pass that CTE course, they do not return. So the PEP is a critical component...”

- Share and use EOG/EOC data to re-teach and improve performance.

2. Exceptional Children Program

- Establish EC staff committee to review and revise current practices.
- Continue Inclusion Program and ensure modifications are in effect.

“It’s one thing to have an IEP. It’s another to make sure that all



the modifications are consistently in place in each classroom.”

Home School Relations

1. Parental and Community Involvement

- Establish Parent and Community Involvement Committee; Plan/Do/Check/Act for improvement to:
 - Increase parent participation.
 - Increase number of school volunteers.
 - Improve communication channels.

“We need to establish a mechanism, a means, for building capacity, increasing parent participation at all levels and all venues in the school...”

“It’s building the capacity of the entire school community.”

“That is a snapshot of the work that the staff at the Berry Academy of Technology is engaged with as we speak and will be throughout the school year.”

What helps a child learn to read

From “Put Reading First: Helping Your Child Learn to Read,” published by The Partnership for Reading, a collaboration involving the National Institute for Literacy, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the U.S. Department of Education. Download brochure at www.nationalreadingpanel.org

If your child is just beginning to learn to read:

At school you should see teachers...

- Teaching the sounds of language. The teacher provides opportunities for children to practice with the sounds that make up words. Children learn to put sounds together to make words and to break words into their separate sounds.
- Teaching the letters of the alphabet. Teachers help children learn to recognize letter names and shapes.

- Helping children learn and use new words.
- Reading to children every day. Teachers read with expression and talk with children about what they are reading.

At home you can help by...

- Practicing the sounds of language. Read books with rhymes. Teach your child rhymes, short poems, and songs. Play simple word games: How many words can you make up that sound like the word “bat”?
- Helping your child take spoken words apart and put them together.
- Help your child separate the sounds in words, listen for beginning and ending sounds, and put separate sounds together.
- Practicing the alphabet by pointing out letters wherever you see them and by reading alphabet books.

Talkback from the Town Hall

***Educate!* readers offer reactions to event**

Saturday's United Agenda for Children Town Hall, which produced the report at right, brought together area residents to talk about the support that the community's children need.

Sunday, we invited all *Educate!* readers who were present to comment on their experience, on the process or on the recommendations of the Town Hall. The responses:

We want your feedback

The writer is a co-chair of the United Agenda for Children.

Thanks for giving folks this opportunity. We'd love to have feedback!

Barb Pellin

Dialogue not captured

The writer is a longtime volunteer in the Washington Heights neighborhood.

The Town Hall Meeting format was very creative and provided immediate feedback. However, in capturing the critical dialogue of participants, it was not effective.

There were rich and critical conversations going on at these tables but they were not captured.

Instead, an attempt was made to fit this rich dialogue into a certain predetermined category.

In addressing, where do we go from here, it was stated, "in early 2005, these recommendations will be presented to city, county and school officials as part of their budgeting process" and members of the community will be invited to participate in action groups to



Preliminary Report United Agenda for Children Town Hall Meeting December 11, 2004 Charlotte Merchandise Mart

More than 1,000 residents of Mecklenburg County gathered on December 11 at the Charlotte Merchandise Mart to begin to create an agenda to ensure that our children are healthy, safe, and well-educated. Over the course of the day-long forum, participants in the United Agenda for Children Town Hall Meeting discussed obstacles facing children and youth aged 0 to 21, and prioritized actions to improve their lives.

The Town Hall Meeting was convened by the United Agenda for Children, an unprecedented coalition of citizens, civic leaders, public entities, and corporate agencies who have united to ensure a positive future for all the children of Mecklenburg County. A broad array of policy makers and elected officials attended the Town Hall Meeting, including State Representatives, County Commissioners, County School Board Members, and Charlotte City Councilmembers, in addition to Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Superintendent James Pughsley, County Manager Harry Jones, Charlotte City Manager Pam Syfert, and Police Chief Daryl Stephens.

After the meeting, members of the community will be invited to participate in action groups to implement recommendations throughout every sector. In early 2005, these recommendations will be presented to city, county and school officials as part of their budgeting process.

A proud tradition

At the beginning of the day, participants took a few minutes to think about the variety of ways this community has worked to support children.

People were proud of the county's profound history of desegregation and support for public schools. They acknowledged the resources and infrastructure that support the county's parks, playgrounds, and children's programs. The community has a progressive character which embraces a range of early childhood and magnet programs, as well

implement recommendations throughout every sector."

We have done this before, implementing recommendations that are not inclusive. Who is speaking to the underrepresented population whose income is below \$25,000?

Again, we are in a hurry to do something without listening to the people. Again, we the people must

run and beg government to put a Band-Aid on these deep societal ills and wounds.

While excited about the large, diverse attendance, I left feeling we are attempting to use the same old, tired vehicles to get results.

The only thing we are seeking is funding for the same type of programs that for generations have

Talkback

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not been effective or culturally sensitive to the needs of our children.

When will we truthfully and honestly address racial issues that are critically damaging our society? When will we truthfully address poverty issues and solutions? We seek funding on the back of the poor with no results. We must stop these “feel-good” approaches and dig deep into our souls for real solutions.

The real solutions lie in shifting our thinking from “they” the people to “we” the people. A lot of the conversation did not focus on individuals’ deep inner uncertainty but an attempt to seize upon the poor as the cause of societal ills....

It appears... we have a mandate to say that these predetermined agenda items will address and ensure that our all children are healthy, safe, and well-educated.

Before we run to our local government with these recommendations, we should take the town meetings into the districts to hear from the people that we are talking about and not listening to.

We are on a common road of hope and will achieve results when we are truly honest with each other. How long can we ignore the fact that we have re-segregated schools with limited resources, i.e. no books in certain schools? And we want to do better.

Every one of those pre-determined agenda items were poverty issues. When we want to achieve results, let’s get to the root or the heart of the matter.

If the root of the tree is not nurtured, fed, and cared for, do you think the tree will survive? In other words, let’s look at the root causes of the situation before we attempt to put a Band-Aid on it and expect to heal these deep, deep century-old wounds.

Mattie Marshall

Where do I begin?

The writer chairs “2.8 Miles,” an assignment boundary advocacy

Preliminary report, continued

as strong involvement of private industry in children’s initiatives. People also noted the willingness of different ethnic communities to work together for the well-being of all its children. In short, the participants lauded the community’s willingness to “be the village it takes to raise its children.”

Setting the stage

The primary focus of the day was discussing three issues that support children’s well-being – health, safety and education.

Participants gathered at small tables led by trained facilitators to discuss these issues with their fellow citizens. Ideas generated in these discussions were collected through networked computers stationed at each table and periodic polls were conducted through keypads assigned to each participant. Results were reported back to the entire gathering via large screens around the room.

In order to prepare for the work of developing action steps, participants were asked to look ahead 10 years and imagine what a day in the life of a healthy, safe, well-educated child might look like. Participants then discussed the elements that must be part of a common vision for the future of our children, across all age groups.

Key elements of that vision included:

- Parental involvement, supported by employment policies and adult education.
- Children enter school ready to learn and graduate with life skills
- School is a “worry-free” environment and it’s “cool to be in school.”
- Children feel safe in schools, in neighborhoods & on transportation.
- Children never go to school hungry.
- Quality healthcare is accessible to all children.
- Children have hope, live their dreams, and never experience racism.

After the visioning period, participants discussed in turn children’s health, safety and education. At the start of each topic’s discussion, participants rated how they perceived Mecklenburg County is currently doing, and reviewed relevant data. Then they identified specific obstacles related to that topic, and articulated actions that must be undertaken to ensure our children’s well-being.

Healthy children

At the start of the discussion on children’s health, only 7% of participants responded that the county is currently doing well or very well in ensuring children are healthy, while 55% responded that it is doing poorly or very poorly.

In their discussions, participants identified several key obstacles to

group in the GlenFinnan and Strathmoor neighborhoods off Providence Road West.

As an attendee of Saturday’s meeting, I walked away inspired to do more! I am grateful to our community leaders for supporting this Town Meeting. I believe that it brought together a stronger sense of community and allowed us to see a broader perspective of the issues. Now my personal challenge is where to apply my

passion.

My only disappointment is that “education” was the last issue that was discussed. And honestly, by the latter part of the day my entire table was beginning to fade.

However, my table was very well spoken and offered a tremendous balance on the community perspective on education and the other issues at hand. It was a very unique experience to be able

Talkback

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to speak with people with totally different backgrounds and views than my own.

What a privilege it was to be able to participate in such a wonderful and unique, grass roots event. I know that the issues and solutions that were focused on during the meeting are only the beginning of the journey, but I am honored and excited to have been involved in the process.

I look forward to working with you and my 1,200 “new” peers in the near future as we work towards the “first steps” to reaching these goals.

Lorrie VanBuskirk

Resegregation: No problem

The writer is a CMS graduate and executive director of Mecklenburg Ministries.

I attended the United Agenda for Children and came away with these thoughts:

– I was amazed at the diversity of ethnicity, age and ideology of the 10 people at my table. We had Christian evangelicals and people to the left of left.

– I was impressed by the civility of our discourse given this diversity. We had strong views, and I sensed a real desire to understand the other.

– I was astounded at how much the people at my table knew about the issues. They must be reading *Educate!*.

– I was disappointed at the education proposals that were endorsed as priorities by the meeting. They felt a bit flaccid to me.

– I felt no traction at my table around the issue of the resegregation of schools. This seems to mirror the tables as a whole, given the recommendations that were brought forward.

– People at my table did not accept that high concentrations of poverty somehow doom a school to under-performing. They believed that with enough resources in the schools, high poverty schools could

Preliminary report, continued

the goal of ensuring the health of our children. These included lack of financial resources, unfair distribution of medical treatment, too much red tape, lack of nutritional awareness, the influence of pop culture images, and the social stigma of accessing public health and mental services.

With these obstacles in mind, participants identified the following five key action steps to improve children’s health (listed in priority order):

1. Provide healthcare services where the children are: home, school, daycare.
2. Increase school resources for healthcare services, especially school nurses.
3. Implement universal healthcare.
4. Coordinate services among providers, nonprofit organizations and faith-based organizations.
5. Increase healthy programs in schools.

Safe children

Only 8% of participants said they believed the county is doing well or very well at ensuring children’s safety, while 58% believe it is doing poorly or very poorly. Participants then reviewed data on various aspects of children’s safety, including neighborhood safety, domestic violence, child abuse, and the juvenile justice system.

Participants identified several significant obstacles to ensuring safety for our children. These included easy access to weapons, peer pressure to be “bad,” lack of accountability in the juvenile justice system, inconsistent school standards, inadequate childcare, lack of parental supervision, and ill-equipped families due to poverty, illiteracy and substance abuse.

Considering these obstacles, participants indicated that the following actions are most important to ensure that all children are safe (listed in priority order):

1. Prepare parents for parenting and hold them accountable for child safety.
2. Increase after school and out-of-school activities.
3. Improve the quality, quantity and accessibility of childcare and daycare options.
4. Employer support for childcare options, school visits and mentoring.

Well-educated children

After discussing health and safety issues, participants spent the afternoon in their original table assignments to focus on education. When polled about how the county is currently doing to ensure all children are well-educated, 10% of participants believed the county is doing well or very well, while 59% believed it is doing poorly or very

function at high levels. Several, including the African-Americans at my table, pointed to their perception of the success of schools like Second Ward High School [a segregated black school downtown, closed in 1965] as evidence that high-poverty schools can do well.

– There was much more interest in talking about the need for par-

ents to do a better job raising their children. This interest manifested across all of the demographic lines.

– No one likes busing.

– In terms of a whole process, I do think it’s not quite correct to say that the priorities advanced at the end of the day reflect a “consensus.”

For sure, the voting process we followed delivered priorities that

Talkback

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substantial numbers of people endorsed, sometimes majorities; however, I do not think it represented anywhere near a consensus in the sense of their being unanimous or near-unanimous support.

Andy Baxter

Unity amid turbulence

The writer represents District 4 on the Charlotte City Council.

Saturday with the United Agenda for Children reminded me of a river with a waterfall:

Many streams converged and tumbled over the rocks, with many voices, and some turbulence (accepted with honesty).

All this created bubbling circles, issues pooling together with new perspectives, growing to a wide and deep body of water – in other words, a true community-family.

All of that was nourished by the greater unity of a great river, a true addressing of issues for the children, for our future.

Nancy Carter

Effort was too broad

The writer is a former CMS teacher.

It was fantastic to be with a bunch of terrific, civic-minded, diverse folks and make new friends.

But the effort was far too broad and general. Its structure failed to spark significant debate or come closer to consensus on the most critical, nitty-gritty issues.

I learn more about the key issues involving local public education and CMS by reading each edition of *Educate!* than I did from spending eight hours at Saturday's event.

Dr. Pughsley's comment in Sunday's Observer that the education recommendations were "soft" was diplomatic and too generous.

The well-meaning organizers would be well-served to use their funds to support a civic gathering in which the Swann Fellowship, FUME, the Chamber, Charlotte Advocates for Education, the CMS

Preliminary report, continued

poorly. Participants then reviewed numerous aspects of good education, including early childhood programs, appropriate classroom experiences, quality teachers, adequate facilities and equipment, and special needs.

A number of important obstacles emerged in providing a good education for our county's children. These obstacles include the bureaucracy of the educational system, parental apathy and intimidation, too much emphasis placed on testing, lack of resources, low teacher wages, lack of childcare, and the low value placed on education by many students.

After reviewing these obstacles, the participants suggested that the following actions are most important to undertake in support of educating the county's children (listed in priority order):

1. Require higher standards and provide better pay for teachers and assistants, including mentoring programs.
2. Expand and improve facilities – smaller classrooms and better student-teacher ratio.
3. Improve communication between parents and teachers.
4. (tie) Expand Bright Beginnings – take it into community sites.
4. (tie) Add more mentoring programs for students.

Who's responsible?

Recognizing that it will take the support of the entire community to enact the priorities identified by participants, the program turned to identifying what actions the various sectors of Mecklenburg County can undertake.

Examples of actions suggested for each sector included:

Businesses: Employers can provide on-site childcare programs and health screenings

Colleges & universities: Promote higher standards; better training/internships; better research & evaluation of best practices.

Foundations: Expand Bright Beginnings – coordinate services among providers, nonprofits and faith-based organizations.

Government: Shift priorities to address all action items; Provide universal healthcare coverage.

Faith-based organizations: Provide space and transportation for healthcare services.

Schools: Prepare to serve more diverse students with bilingual staff, diversity training.

Children & youth organizations: Advocate for standards and actions identified here; coordinate service delivery; increase communication between parents and teachers.

Children & youth themselves: Let people know when you have a problem.

Families & parents: Partner in children's education and communicate regularly with teachers.

Other: Leaders need to step up to support these goals.

EBAC and Equity committees and various other groups heavily invested in local public education would structure the debate. My sense was that this effort was largely fueled by professional facilitators working at a 35,000-foot level.

David Mildenberg

How about real actions?

I found the gathering to be heavily weighted on the "liberal" side: More money, government money in particular, will fix most of the problems.

So I was not pleased with the

final lists of (Recommended Plans of) Actions. If lack of money were the real problem, then this richest country on earth would not have so many problems with the health, safety, and education of its children.

The real problems with the health, safety, and education of children in Mecklenburg County – indeed, the United States as a whole – stem from the love of money (1 Timothy 6:10) and the greed that comes from it.

Mecklenburg County has sufficient revenues for additional nurses in the school system, expanded and more convenient hours at medical facilities, particularly those facilities that profit from the government-funded medical care that its patients receive, and other changes that were suggested at the town meeting....

The session on education ended with weak, nebulous (Recommended Plans of) Actions like “Improve communication between parents and teachers,” that were actually goals.

I would like to have seen some of the REAL (Recommended Plans of) Actions that my group, and possibly others, had, such as:

- Separate facilities for BED (behaviorally emotionally disabled) students who rob other students of a chance to learn.

- The return of truancy officers.
- Penalties for parents who fail to discipline their children, feed them properly, make them go to bed on time, and make them do their homework.

- Removal of marketing by/of students (no more Scholastic book fairs, candy sales, “gift” sales, United Way campaigns, or any other non-education related activities that take more time and resources out of the school day than they give in cash back to the schools).

I have confidence that the suggestions made for improving the health and safety of children

Preliminary report, continued

Demographics of those who attended

United Agenda for Children sought to represent the county’s diversity. Participants’ demographics are compared below to the county’s make-up.

	Dec. 11 County		Dec. 11 County	
Gender			Residence in Mecklenburg	
Female	66%	51%	Less than 1 year	3% 7%
Male	34%	49%	1-5 years	16% 21%
			6-10 years	14% 18%
Age			11-20 years	30% 19%
15 to 21	11%	12%	More than 20 yrs	35% 35%
22-34	16%	28%	Outside Meck.	2% NA
35-44	29%	22%		
45-59	35%	23%	Race	
60 and better	9%	15%	African-American	44% 28%
			Asian	1% 5%
Household Income			Caucasian	44% 58%
Less than \$25,000	8%	21%	Hispanic or Latino	6% 9%
\$25,000 - \$49,999	19%	29%	Native American	<1% <1%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	17%	21%	Multi-Racial	3% 3%
\$75,000 - \$99,999	17%	12%	Other	2% <1%
\$100,000 - \$149,999	19%	10%		
Over \$150,000	15%	7%	Geography	
Not Sure	6%	NA	District 1	18% 17%
			District 2	12% 17%
			District 3	15% 17%
			District 4	15% 17%
			District 5	23% 17%
			District 6	14% 17%
			Outside Meck.	3% NA

would be effective if implemented. Unfortunately, as usual, I have little confidence in the suggestions made for improving the education of children.

Sylvia Nance

Will actions follow?

The writer is chairman of the CMS Equity Committee.

I don’t know if I’ll have time to respond further, but I thought it was a Saturday very well spent. I hope folks’ eventual actions will match the words that got put up on the screens.

Julian Wright

Themes have no edge

The writer, a Mecklenburg resident, is a Winthrop University political scientist.

The process by which “main themes” were compiled was terribly flawed. Moreover, the flaws could have facilitated rigging of the main themes if the “theme team” were so inclined.

With one exception, none of the main themes had any edge or whiff of controversy about them, and the process was conducive to the emergence of lowest common denominator recommendations.

Steve Smith

Budget holds key to equity

‘Equitable resources do not exist throughout the system,’ panel says

Text of Monday’s letter from the CMS Equity Committee to school board members titled, “Budget Areas for 2005-2006 in Which Specific Spending Can Enhance Equity.”

As you and CMS staff begin to wrestle with budget issues for next year, your Equity Committee wants to remind you of areas in which we believe additional funds can help our school system achieve equity. For over two years now, your Equity Committee has grappled with equity issues in our school system. Early next year, we will provide you with our third annual report to help you in your analysis of how CMS is doing in providing equity.

To foreshadow that report, your Equity Committee does not believe that CMS is equitable as a system. The quality of educational opportunities students receive within CMS is still determined too much by the make-up of a school’s student population, and the quality of educational opportunities differs too much from school to school throughout the system.

CMS’s testing system glaringly demonstrates that students in EquityPlus II schools do not achieve as well as their peers at non-EquityPlus II schools. For example, in 2003-2004, third-grade students in EquityPlus II schools for the full academic year read at or above grade level at a 70.9% rate and performed math at or above grade level at a 79.8% rate. In 2003-2004, third-graders in non-EquityPlus II schools for the full academic year read at or above grade level at an 88.2% rate and performed math at or above grade level at a 92.3% rate. Those differences are reduced (in terms of percentages) as students progress through the eighth grade, particularly in reading, but substantial differences remain, and those differences are too pronounced for us to be satisfied that equity has been achieved.

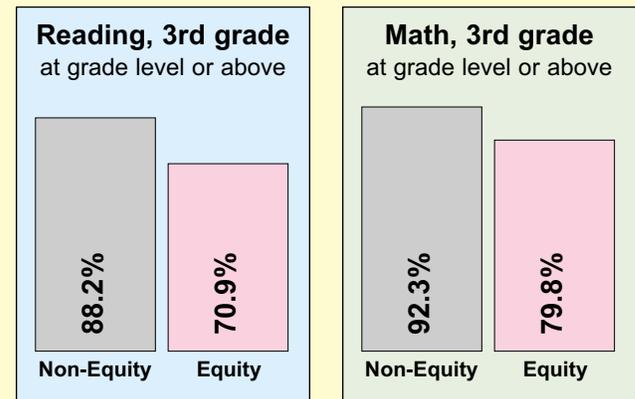
A host of reasons may exist to explain the discrepancies in test scores between populations, but to have equitable opportunities to achieve, all CMS students must have sufficient resources to meet their particular needs.

Our review persuades us that too many students are simply getting the short end of the educational stick in terms of facilities, teachers, instructional materials, and other resources. The reality in CMS remains that equitable resources do not exist throughout the system to allow all students at each different school to achieve each student’s full academic potential.

We have not, however, given up on achieving equity, and we hope that you and the larger Charlotte-Mecklenburg community have not given up either.

Equity of outcomes?

Arguing that CMS has not delivered equity in its schools, the school board’s Equity Committee noted that test scores lag at EquityPlus II schools with high concentrations of low-income students, as compared with non-EquityPlus II schools.



– Source: CMS Equity Committee report, Dec. 14, 2004

We hope that your next budget will make specific provisions in various areas to promote equity, and with this letter (and accompanying presentation at your Dec. 14 meeting), we want to identify some of those specific provisions.

We hope that the discussions you will have with the current County Commission will both (i) demonstrate the financial accountability we believe essential for attaining equity in the long term and (ii) achieve the immediate result of having more funding to achieve equity in at least the areas we identify below.

As you begin to contemplate CMS’s next budget, we want to remind you of some of what we have been telling you the past two years. In fact, if you have not recently reviewed our February 2003 and February 2004 Reports, we encourage you to do so as quickly as possible and at least before you begin your budget plans and deliberations. We want to avoid redundancy, but much of what we have recommended about how to spend scarce education resources to achieve the most equity possible remains just as timely now as it was 22 and 10 months ago.

In our initial February 2003 report, we suggested spending money in the following areas:

- Baseline Instructional Supplies;
- Teacher Compensation;

- Teacher Development Dollars;
- Parental Involvement;
- Full Utilization of Existing Resources;
- Talent Development Programs; and
- Programs for At-Risk Children That Do Not Fall Into a Neat Category.

Our February 2004 report echoed some increasingly familiar themes about how to spend money most effectively and efficiently to achieve equity. That report recommended spending money on:

- Leadership Training/Development for School Administrators;
- Attracting and Retaining Quality Faculty;
- Bricks and Mortar Spending;
- Instructional Supplies;
- The Need for More “International” Outreach;
- Parental Leadership Development; and
- The Need to Develop Community Trust.

Our work and study over the past ten months suggests to us that most of the recommendations we made in these areas remain good ones.

Specifically, in the past ten months, we have visited additional schools; heard reports from various CMS staff; talked with students, parents, and teachers; and analyzed in considerable detail various achievement scores as well as data compiled by CMS in resources like Achieving the CMS Vision: Equity and Student Success. We will tell you more about our work in next year’s report, but this work and study over the past ten months indicates that funding in the following areas should assist significantly in achieving equity within CMS.

CMS should increase spending in the area of **Instructional Supplies** because too many gaps continue to exist with too many schools not having the supplies they need to educate all children.

– For example, at Bain Elementary, the school’s ratio of eight students per computer is inadequate for the school’s needs. To perform needed activities with students, Bain also needs a laser color printer and an upgrade in the quality of its existing computers. Achieving the Vision mandates a 5:1 ratio for students to computers at elementary schools. Why not at Bain?

– Also at Bain Elementary, kindergarten students do not have sufficient instructional art supplies. In many instances, a committed and active PTA can help bridge these types of gaps, but such gaps

“Is there anybody within your committee who believes that, whatever we think this equity mantra is, can be achieved by restraint in government, narrowing it, defunding the bureaucracy, focusing on programmatic change, as opposed to just ‘need more money, spend more money, enhance equity, spending spending....’”



CMS-TV3
Gauvreau

– Larry Gauvreau, District 1

should not exist in the first place at Bain or elsewhere.

– For example, instructional supply problems abound at overcrowded Hopewell High. As with other schools, basic instructional supplies like textbooks are allocated based on student counts at the 20th day of the school year. As student numbers increase during the year, they outpace the number of textbooks.

A large number of “floating” teachers without assigned classrooms also means that faculty has inadequate access to computers for preparing to teach. The 28 mobile units in use at Hopewell also are not provided the same needed instructional supplies as other classrooms.

As a further example of the breakdown in effective communication about needs in instructional supplies, Hopewell gets about ten times the number of globes that it needs for classroom instruction, but it lacks the supplies it needs to take advantage even of the too few jewelry-making kits that it does have.

In prioritizing spending for supplies, we urge you to find the most money for textbooks and computer upgrades, but we urge CMS to spend that money wisely and provide the supplies the schools actually need.

More money should be spent on specific areas to improve **Student Achievement** on an equitable basis.

– Data reviewed by members of our Committee indicates that Bright Beginnings works in enabling at-risk children to read earlier and do better in all aspects of education. Find more money and more locations for Bright Beginnings to enroll more children in the program.

– As efforts continue to bring all children up to grade level, find more money for CMS’s Talent Development programs. Use some of those funds: (i) to improve testing for identifying students in the program; (ii) to improve curriculum provided in the program; (iii) to hire more Talent Development teachers in order to have an adequate number of teachers to teach all children who can benefit; and (iv) to improve the overall leadership of the program itself. For your Equity Committee, equity means enabling all children to achieve at their highest lev-

“I hope this board has the political will to at least challenge the county commission to look for ways to help us to achieve equity for all children.”

– George Dunlap, District 3



CMS-TV3
Dunlap

els. All children include those who qualify for and can benefit from what should be the advanced, challenging opportunities of a strong TD program systemwide.

- Find money to address, diagnose, and solve the pronounced “dip” in CMS achievement across the board in sixth grade and ninth grade. The “dip” affects everybody, but it is even more pronounced at EquityPlus II schools, where the student populations can least afford losing any ground.

- Find money to broaden and expand the EquityPlus II template. To be clear, your Equity Committee does not think that designating a school as EquityPlus II and providing the additional resources that designation results in “equity.” In too many instances, the resources currently provided are simply not enough, but in a lot of schools (particularly those that do not also get Title I funding), the EquityPlus II resources help a lot.

We see EquityPlus II resources making a tremendous difference in schools like First Ward Elementary and Olympic High, but EquityPlus II needs to encompass more and enable schools like Cochrane Middle to do even more with their student populations.

We also urge you to find money so that you can provide more resources to schools “trending” toward EquityPlus II status. We also urge you to find money that would enable you to “phase” schools out of EquityPlus II status so that they do not immediately lose many of the resources that have enabled them to improve student achievement.

CMS has an ever-increasing number of new students and a whole lot of old buildings. Physical conditions impact student achievement in a host of ways, including the decision-making process of parents sending children to schools; having safe, sanitary facilities in which to teach; and having satisfactory facilities for the teaching the needs to go on. We suggest finding more money for **Bricks and Mortar** and building more classrooms.

- Find money immediately to improve the facilities at Cochrane Middle. We are appalled – as our entire community should be – that students are educated in a facility that ever has raw sewage leaking in its halls and flooding in the band and other classrooms in its basement.

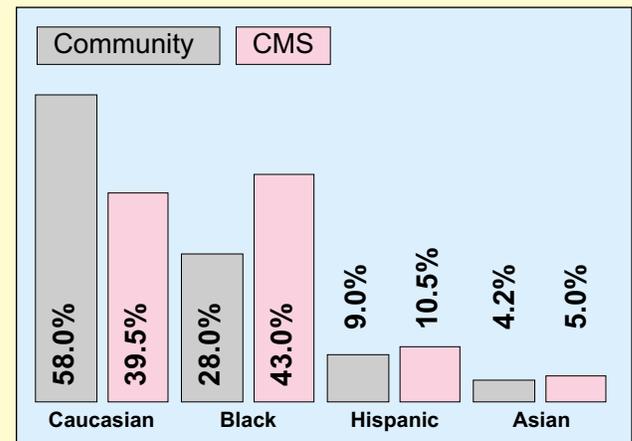
While those problems grab your attention, also find more money for Cochrane to bring its lab facilities up to a satisfactory level for the magnet science curriculum Cochrane is supposed to teach.

- Moreover, Cochrane is only one example of the seven schools this Board identified in 2002 as having “critical needs” in terms of physical facilities. It is long since time that those issues were addressed so that students at these schools have equitable opportunities to learn. We urge you either to get the schools in at least adequate repair or stop using them. Another glaring example among this list of

CMS doesn't look like community

“You lead a school system that increasingly does not look like the Mecklenburg County population base from which you must seek much of the equity funding we recommend,” the Equity Committee wrote the school board. “You must persuade taxpayers, County Commissioners, and parents that the spending needed for equity is worth the investment in our community's children.

“We suggest in the strongest terms possible that the best means of such persuasion lies in linking that investment to increased achievement for all students and the advantages of a better-educated citizenry in every part of Mecklenburg County.”



– Data source: CMS Equity Committee letter, Dec. 13, 2004

seven schools is Garinger High, and its long overdue need for an adequate science wing.

- One of the buildings currently used at Bain Elementary is an older building, the majority of which is condemned and off limits for students. Find the money to fix the building.

- Many of the bathroom facilities at Bain Elementary are outdated and need urgent upgrades.

- At Montclair Elementary, children regularly are taught in the hallways because that is the only space available for the “breakout” small groups that are a key reason that school is able successfully to educate so many ESL students. Find money to figure how to match up a school's physical facilities with the student populations they are supposed to teach.

- Hopewell High uses 28 mobile units to enable a school for a substantially smaller student population to attempt to educate a student body of over 2,200. With those additional students and that mobile space, however, have come no additional resources for security to enhance the safety of the students, faculty, and equipment in these mobile units.

If we had a “silver bullet” in this next area, we would give it to you – or at least melt it down and let the money be used as a teacher bonus – but

we implore you to find as much money as you can for any programs that CMS's own teachers tell you are effective in improving the **Retention of Quality Teachers**.

– As a start, we strongly recommend paying higher local supplements for all teachers, but particularly those in EquityPlus II schools or schools trending toward EquityPlus II status. We also urge you to avoid overloading EquityPlus II schools with CMS's most inexperienced teachers. Youthful energy and new ideas have to be balanced with experience for teachers – and schools – to be effective.

– Just as importantly, figure out ways to spend money that improve the working environment for teachers by improving the discipline of the students whom they are charged to teach. Continue to experiment with Positive Behavior Intervention Systems. Investigate the Titan Care Unit at Hopewell High and find money to fund it. Twenty-nine instances of teachers and staff being assaulted by students is twenty-nine too many.

– Find more money for training of teachers before you put them in the classrooms as well as ongoing training for teachers already in the classroom. In terms of preparation, we especially urge you to provide more funding for diversity-based programs that help educate teachers about the realities of the student populations they are called upon to teach.

– Diversity is CMS's blessing and bane. Used wisely to demonstrate and bridge differences, diversity is a profound asset. Plunging inexperienced teachers into student populations with which they have little or no familiarity is a recipe for disaster, increased mistrust, and a growing divide. The latter happens too frequently within CMS.

– Spend more money on the types of “support” positions at the schools that will help teachers in their day-to-day work in the classrooms. For example, Bain Elementary does not have a full-time nurse available. This reality creates problems in a school of over 800 students as teachers wind up having to deal with a myriad of student health issues. Find the money for a full-time nurse and eliminate tasks for teachers that they must perform in addition to teaching.

– At crowded schools like Hopewell High, be sure to find the money to recruit and put an actual teacher in every classroom.

We find it problematic in the extreme that it can be nearly Christmas and some classrooms do not have full-time teachers, but it works against retain-



“We talked at our planning retreat about many of the things that were reflected in the items you just gave us. We've got to make a connection for the community between those strategies and the investment that needs to be made.”

– Kit Cramer, at-large

ing the teachers you do have at Hopewell as more burdens flow to the teachers already there and overall morale is threatened.

As we described above, an important part of improving equity within CMS is improving an **Appreciation for Diversity** at a variety of levels.

– Find more money to employ bilingual teachers and support staff.

– Find more money or figure out other incentives to attract persons of color into CMS classrooms in schools and keep them there as examples and role models for students.

We continue to believe that schools are strong when they are supported by parents and the surrounding community. We encourage increased funding for **Parent and Community Involvement**, particularly in EquityPlus II schools.

– Provide full funding for as many parent advocate slots as possible in EquityPlus II schools and schools trending toward EquityPlus II status. Please also provide adequate funding to train persons in these jobs and effectively follow the examples of good work being done in these positions at various schools. It is a waste of funding to pay a person to be a parent advocate, but then to have no one (including parents and faculty at the school) realize the school had a parent advocate!

– At Cochrane Middle, for example, we observed the positive difference that trained and effective parent advocates and related support to staff can make at a school. To be clear, not all schools need this resource, and providing parent advocate positions at every school need not be necessary to achieve “equity.” Beware a “cookie cutter” sameness as a disguise and hindrance to real equity.

Cochrane Middle contrasts sharply with another school we visited, South Charlotte Middle, with an active and energized parent support base, but still with other needs to be able to educate its students equitably.

– Montclair Elementary takes extremely good advantage of having parent advocates and social worker positions that assist the families of its students. Particularly at Montclair, the presence of a substantial Spanish-speaking population makes it essential to have these types of positions in order for teachers and parents to come together and communicate in the best interests of all of the students.



“Certainly we have to provide the resources and the facilities and all these these other things. But it is the teachers that make the difference.”

– Lee Kindberg, District 6

Finally, we recognize the common denominator of strong school leadership – particularly principals and assistant principals – at all strong, equity-achieving schools that we have seen. Accordingly, we urge you to find additional funds for the **Development of School Leadership.**

- Increase funding for the training and personal development of principals. Develop and expand peer coaching and other mechanisms for developing the talents of principals and others within CMS to lead our schools. Be wary of putting inexperienced principals in EquityPlus II schools, and spend money to study the best ways to match principals' skill sets and experiences with the student populations at the schools they are asked to lead.

- Increase the amount of discretionary funds available to principals in their schools, but link the availability of such discretionary funds to improvements in student achievement. Your Equity Committee does not think that “carrots” should be linked merely to hitting certain achievement levels. Rather, the “carrots” should be rewards for improvements at whatever level as long as the increase is tangible and shows an increase in student achievement.

- Develop a process for recognition of school principals that have taken creative approaches to address student achievement issues by maximizing current resources. For example, the principal and faculty at Montclair Elementary have creatively used inventive scheduling and existing EquityPlus II and Title I funds to provide tutoring to students during school hours instead of after school. This approach has eliminated some transportation costs and more effectively engages students during regular school hours.

Your Equity Committee appreciates your consideration of these points as you undertake the budgeting process. In many ways, we do not envy you your task. You lead a school system that increasingly does not look like the Mecklenburg County population base from which you must seek



“We must have a discretionary fund or some ability to be able to put additional staffing, additional resources in those schools who get additional students after the 20th-day count.”

– Louise Woods, District 4

much of the equity funding we recommend.

For example, students in CMS are 43% African-American, 39.5% Caucasian, 10.5% Hispanic/Latino, and 4.2% Asian. Mecklenburg County's population, however, is 58% Caucasian, 28% African-American, 9% Hispanic/Latino, and 5% Asian.

You must persuade taxpayers, County Commissioners, and parents that the spending needed for equity is worth the investment in our community's children.

We suggest in the strongest terms possible that the best means of such persuasion lies in linking that investment to increased achievement for all students and the advantages of a better-educated citizenry in every part of Mecklenburg County.

In 2005, we understand you will undertake work on both (i) teacher recruitment and retention issues and (ii) student assignment. We look forward to providing you with further comments about how these issues affect equity. If you want to hear more from us, ask. If you want to hear less from us, perhaps then we will be fulfilling our function as effectively as we would like. We also continue to look forward to working with you, both in the delivery of our third report early next year and beyond, in trying to enhance and achieve equity for all CMS students.

The CMS Equity Committee: Dwayne Collins, Rev. George Cook, Jr., Kay Cunningham, Richard Helms, Rev. Paulette Higgins, Ellen C. Martin, Greg Metcalf, José Hernandez Paris, Amy Shetler, Rev. Dr. John H. Walker, Julian H. Wright Jr.

Summary

Instructional supplies

- More computers and art supplies at Bain Elementary.
- More textbooks and computers at Hopewell High.

Student achievement

- Increase funding for Bright Beginnings.
- Overhaul testing for Talent Development.
- Address the “Dip” (drop in achievement at 6th and 9th grades).

- Expand EquityPlus II program.

Bricks and mortar

- Cochrane Middle: Fix sewer leaks.
- Fund renovations identified in 2002 in “Critical Needs” schools.
- Facilities at Bain Elementary.
- Facilities at Montclair Elementary.
- Facilities at Hopewell High.

Retention of quality teachers

- Improve pay supplements,

- particularly at properly staffed EquityPlus II schools.
- Improve discipline.
- Improve teacher training and preparation for the classroom.
- Find more school nurses and other support positions.
- Put a teacher in every classroom at Hopewell High.

Appreciation for diversity

- More bilingual teachers and staff at more schools.
- Incentives to attract the right teacher demographics.

Parent and community

development

- Funding and training for parent advocate positions.
- Flexibility in efficient use of funding (Cochrane Middle and Montclair Elementary).

Development of school leadership

- Funding and personal development for principals.
- Increase principals' discretionary spending amounts.
- Recognition for exceptional approaches to achieving equity by principals.

Briefly...

Suspension gap: The gap in suspension rates between black and white students has increased over the past five years in Guilford County, the Greensboro News-Record reported. While district officials are trying to combat the disparity by increasing teacher workshops, some say that is not enough. School board member Deena Hayes believes the problem is one of institutional racism and cannot be combatted through workshops. "It's just like asking you to get algebra over the weekend," she said.

www.news-record.com

Class size: Florida amended its constitutional to limit the students in all classes by 2010. The Miami Herald reported, however, that Governor Jeb Bush is seeking to repeal the amendment, believing it too costly and not beneficial to students.

www.miamiherald.com

Learning time: At the West Parish School in Gloucester, Mass., students can play and learn at the same time thanks to a new science playground, the Boston Globe reported. The playground, which includes a 70-foot-long gravity boat, interactive science gadgets and a 40-foot-long swordfish, is helping teachers incorporate fun and learning. The playground is also available to other area elementary school students in the form of field trips.

www.boston.com

Court order: Chicago school

officials faced a Dec. 17th deadline by a federal judge to find seats in segregated white schools for black and Latino students seeking to transfer. The Chicago Tribune reported that the district was also ordered to move money from current desegregation strategies to help students in racially isolated schools. U.S. Department of Justice attorneys argued that the district had not offered any racial transfers this year to promote desegregation. School officials countered that there was no room to accommodate minority students in the white schools. The judge ordered the district to "find" the necessary seats.

www.chicagotribune.com

PISA exam: The United States scored below the international average in mathematics literacy and problem solving on the latest international comparison of academic skills of 15-year-olds in industrialized nations, Education Week reported. Finland, South Korea, and Japan were the top scorers in both areas.

www.edweek.org

Adequacy suits: Advocates of increased school funding are winning more court cases than ever before, Education Week reported. States are now required to collect more achievement data than ever before and this data is supplying the proof needed to win the so-called "adequacy" lawsuits. In addition, there is more research on successful ways to increase student achievement, all of which costs money.

www.edweek.org

Happy 2005!

Thomas Moore's 25th Annual New Year's Eve Celebration for Children and Families

Friday, Dec. 31

First show: 11 a.m.

Second show: 1 p.m.

Third show: 3 p.m.

Children's Theatre
of Charlotte
1017 E. Morehead St.

Professional and amateur musicians and dancers of all ages will perform in this hour-long variety show. Special guests will include the Polka Dots (line dancers from Cypress of Charlotte) and students from Fran Sullivan School of Dance and Clara Jones Piano Studio.

Tickets: \$8 and \$10. Advance sales: Black Forest Books and Toys, 115 Cherokee Road

Parking available behind Theatre. Overflow parking across Morehead Street at Covenant Presbyterian Church.

Moore began his annual New Year's Eve Show for children and families in 1979. "New Year's can be a lonely holiday for children. Parents tend to go out, and the kids go to bed. I wanted to provide a way for families to ring in the new year together, with emphasis on the children."

Calendar

DECEMBER

31 Bojangles' High School Basketball Shootout, through Jan. 1, Charlotte Latin School, 9502 Providence Rd.

JANUARY

6 Education Budget Advisory Committee, 7:30 a.m., 11th floor, Government Center.
14 "And Justice for All": the 2005 Civil Rights Youth Conference, Four Points Sheraton, for youth grades 9-12. For reservations, call 704-334-0053.

FEBRUARY

26 Let's Talk R.A.C.E. Conference focusing on "Language, Culture and Education," 9 a.m.-4 p.m., UNC Chapel Hill. Speakers: Lisa Delpit, Enrique Murillo. For information and for online registration, see www.unc.edu/sites/ltr