

‘Dramatic action is necessary’

Revise plans to boost high-poverty schools, school board advised

The CMS school board Tuesday committed to a broad review of student assignment, a day after business leaders warned that key conditions in high-poverty schools are worsening.

“It’s hard to see how we can get where we want to get,” Wachovia executive Peter Sidebottom told board members at a Monday afternoon work session.

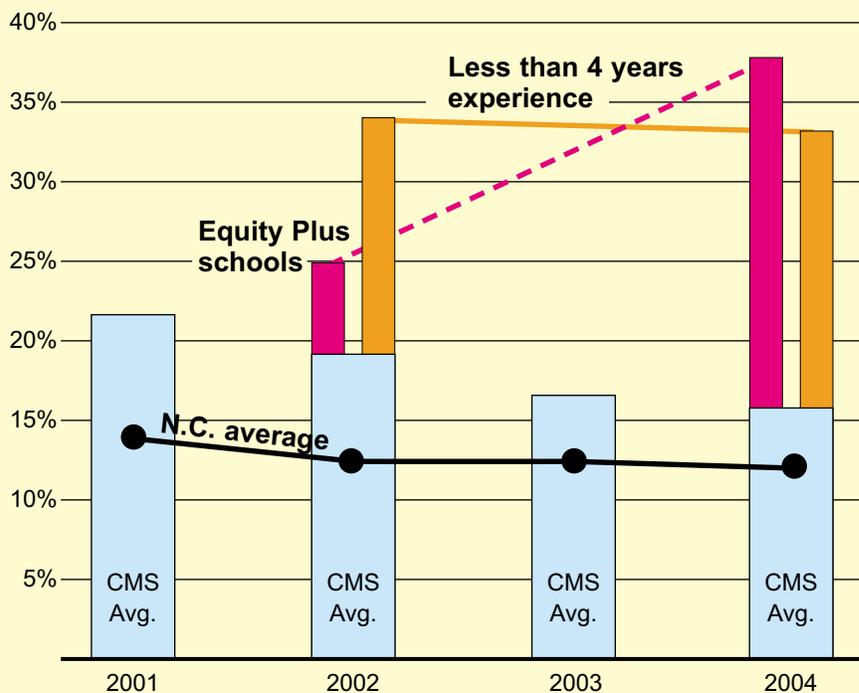
The leaders’ report, co-sponsored by CMS and the Charlotte Chamber and designed to identify potential cost savings, concludes in its summary:

“We are extremely concerned that the progress in teacher retention and student performance has not improved in highest risk schools despite significant programmatic effort. We believe that dramatic action – including increasing funding – is necessary.

“While the dollar needs still must be established, we do not believe the funding will come from savings in the areas we examined, but must come from elsewhere in the budget, private funding, or tax dollars.”

The team proposing an action plan to address high-needs schools suggested, among other things, \$10,000 signing bonuses, 20% performance bonuses escrowed over three years, and more flexibility to allow principals

Annual teacher turnover rates in CMS



Source: CMS/Charlotte Chamber Efficiency and Effectiveness Review

Human resources: key findings

From “Efficiency and Effectiveness Review,” November 2004, co-sponsored by CMS and the Charlotte Chamber, as presented to a school board work session Monday:

- “CMS implemented and is making progress on many of the recommendations made by McKinsey, including targeted recruiting teams, mentoring and licensure assistance for early tenure teachers, and leadership review processes.
- “Overall teacher attrition is now 15.95% compared to the state average of 12.37% – was 22% and 14% respectively when the McKinsey study was done in 2002 [using 2001 data].”
- “Situation in Equity Plus schools is in crisis proportion and shows minimal signs of improving given the current initiatives.
- “Teacher attrition in our most needy schools with the toughest-to-reach students rose from 25% to 38%.”

to remove weak teachers.

Teacher quality lies at the heart of achievement, and turnover among faculties represents another barrier to student achievement.

And while test scores among low-income children at CMS’s high-poverty schools rose some

last year (Page 11), the achievement gaps between low-income and middle-income students, and between high-poverty schools and low-poverty schools, are placing CMS in the vortex of a state debate over how to ensure that

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Letters

United Agenda leadership says what report 'implies' is incorrect

We the members of the leadership team for the United Agenda for Children, respectfully request that you remove any reference to the United Agenda for Children from your report entitled "The Socioeconomic Composition of The Public Schools: A Crucial Consideration in Student Assignment Policy."

The United Agenda for Children has not drawn any conclusions from the town meeting held on Dec. 11, 2004. The preliminary report is currently available at www.unitedagendaforchildren.org for your readers to see firsthand the results that came out of the meeting. No public statements were made that would "caution about the possible social injury that could result if the present educational course is pursued," as your report implies. And it has made no comment on assignment policy. To characterize the results from the town meeting in this way is incorrect.

We appreciate your attention to this matter.

Margaret Carnes, Charlotte Advocates for Education

Frank Crawford, Youth Homes Inc.

Hank Federal, Findley Davies Inc.

The Hon. Shirley Fulton, retired senior resident
Superior Court judge, Tin, Fulton, Greene & Owens

Mike Murdock, Families Leading Advocacy for Mecklenburg Education

Barb Pellin, community volunteer

Blanche Penn, Winners PLUS

Sharon Starks, community volunteer

Claire Tate, Partners in Out-of-School Time

Jan Thompson, Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Office

Editor's response: The report was the work of the UNC Center for Civil Rights. It was reprinted in *Educate!* in its entirety in a special edition Jan. 3. The United Agenda's preliminary report from its Dec. 11 Town Hall Meeting was similarly reprinted in its entirety Dec. 17.

'So very much secrecy'

Thank you for continuing to, in a concise fashion, keep me informed of so many issues concerning CMS that I would otherwise not know. There is absolutely so very much secrecy surrounding this school board that it is hard to trust what is in the newspaper because it is probably obtained by "pulling teeth."

Queen G. Whaley

A note to readers

Campaign 2005 report: This journal may shut down

During November and December of 2004, *Educate!* asked its readers for freewill donations to support continued publication of this free journal.

More than 3,000 of those who receive this journal have never financially supported this work by donating to the Swann Fellowship, its publisher.

Through Wednesday, Campaign 2005 had heard from 45 donors, about 20 of whom were first-time givers. Donations total about \$3,600 – roughly a month's operating budget.

This journal will continue if more donors step up. If none do, *Educate!* will wrap up with the Jan. 28 issue.

For as we said during the recent campaign.....



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

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

'Dramatic action'

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every N.C. child receives the sound basic education mandated by the state constitution.

In Raleigh this week, a judge decided he'd take a close look at CMS high schools, in part to see if policies or money or management contribute to the district's failure with so many students.

Meanwhile, legislative leaders attended this week's hearing in the Leandro case. Once back at the General Assembly building, they made clear that the judge has their attention and that they are looking to Gov. Mike Easley and the State Board of Education to define the ways to meet the constitutional mandate.

'Academically dead'

Judge Howard Manning said Tuesday he would set aside a week in March for hearings on high school performance, and would focus the inquiry on CMS. He displayed a sheet of high school test results from the bench and, at one point, said of CMS, "This is a place that is academically dead."

At the end of Tuesday's hearing, it was not clear whether the judge would take his court on the road to Mecklenburg, or have CMS officials travel to Raleigh.

The judge earlier held court in low-wealth counties, and the judge's presence in Mecklenburg's media market might raise public awareness here of the grave issues being litigated.

But Manning has another audience: legislative leaders. CMS Supt. Jim Pughsley has made it clear that substantial additional resources are essential if public schools are going to raise achievement. And in the cat-and-mouse game Manning must play with legislators, Pughsley's message may be most strategically effective if delivered just blocks from the General Assembly.

For, among other things, Mecklenburg is home to House Speaker Jim Black.

Teacher vacancy rates, by N.C. district

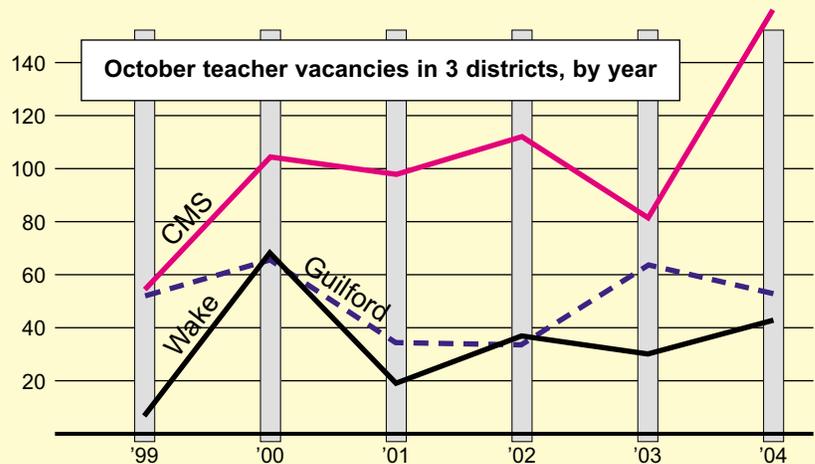
The N.C. Department of Public Instruction annually counts teacher vacancies in N.C. school districts in October. The total number of vacant positions for districts with 20 or more vacancies in 2004:

'04 vacancies by licensure

K-6	20.2%
EC K12	17.4%
Math/science 6-12	12.5%
Student services	11.1%
Administration	7.6%

District	'99	'00	'01	'02	'03	'04
CMS	54.5	104	97.5	111.5	81	156.5
Cumberland	NA	50	44	29	28.5	51
Durham	36.4	29	22	21	31	26
Edgecombe	2	17	9	10	8	29
Forsyth	7	27	13.5	12	18.1	22.7
Guilford	51.1	66	34.5	33.5	63.6	52
Harnett	15	13	17	23	19	24
Robeson	25	37	20	31	21	47
Wake	7.5	68	19.5	37	30	42.5
Wayne	6	25	40	20	16	20.5
NC total vacancies	694.5	935	708.5	737	742.5	934.7

CMS Pct of N.C. teacher vacancies	7.8	11.1	13.8	15.1	10.9	16.7
CMS Pct. of N.C. students	7.9	8.0	8.1	8.2	8.4	8.6



- Full report downloadable from [www.ncpublicschools.org/humanrcs/](http://www.ncpublicschools.org/humansrcs/)

The N.C. Supreme Court has upheld most of Manning's rulings in the Leandro case. But they reversed his order that required the state to spend money on programs for four-year-olds, saying only legislators could make that decision. Ever since, Manning has mostly used cajolery, but his comments from the bench indicate that he is persuaded that additional resources will be required.

Indeed, lawyers at Tuesday's

hearing complained that state officials have a plan, but the legislature hasn't appropriated any money for it.

"Where there's an identified need and a school district doesn't have the resources, that's a constitutional deficiency and something has to be done about it," the Raleigh News & Observer quoted the judge as saying.

As for the academic achieve-

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ment issues, "Your crowd in Mecklenburg better start figuring out some ways to get that thing straight," the Charlotte Observer quoted the judge as saying.

One milestone was passed in Manning's courtroom this week: Despite objections, the judge approved a formula that will control how additional funds for disadvantaged funds will be allocated.

The so-called DSSF allotment targets 16 pilot districts with \$22 million this year. The State Board of Education is seeking \$25 million for next year. The state's possibly low-balled estimate of the statewide need is \$223 million.

State officials are seeking a multi-year review of experience in the 16 pilots before pursuing solutions statewide. Some groups believe the review represents a state stalling tactic, because most of the DSSF money is going to proven programs, such as training and lowering class size.

Assignment review

Assistant Supt. Susan Agruso ran through the student assignment review process for the board Tuesday.

"You will recall that when the student assignment plan we are currently using was first approved [in 2001] that a plan was put forth to review it at the end of the third year of its operation. We are now in the middle of that third year.

"So we are proposing to you tonight the beginning of the comprehensive review which we, as we go through this, will outline for you a timeline that will take us from now to the middle of October....

"What we are hoping will occur as a result of this is that we will be able to provide you with an in-depth review of all the aspects of the current student assignment plan.

"As we've explained to folks, everything is on the table.

Assignment plan: What issues are on the table

- Magnet programs
- Diversity
- Capacity and facility usage (caps)
- Guaranteed seats
- Limitation on percent of economically disadvantaged students
- School size
- Staff effectiveness (teacher quality, deployment, hiring, retention)
- Boundaries for new schools
- Student achievement
- Impact of No Child Left Behind

- Source: CMS

"We will then offer a set of recommendations based on the conversations that take place around this, and those recommendations would be for modifications or changes that people anticipate should be made, and then finally, we anticipate that by October we would hope to have a set of revised policies and practices as is determined to be necessary and ultimately our goal here is to set the assignment plan that serves our community and maximizes student success.

"As we indicated, everything is on the table, and we've listed out for you many of those areas (box, above) just to get you thinking about where you want to go and what you want to talk about....

"What our plan is is to present to you across the course of the next 10 months information regarding all of these issues....

"What we are outlining for you is a process of review that will enable us to provide information to everyone for a period of time so that everyone in our community has an opportunity to hear it, to respond to it, to raise issues, to raise questions and hopefully create some form of a dialogue so that when we ultimately complete this task, everyone's had an opportunity to really be involved, if they choose, in the decision-making process.

"We are proposing first of all... a

set of presentations at board meetings, hopefully not quite at 9:30 every time....

"We anticipate that there will be work sessions. We will hope to keep those to a minimum, if you have two board meetings [in a month], because we value your time also, but we anticipate there will be a need for those.

"What we are also suggesting is that we would like to conduct a series of community meetings around the county beginning probably in late February.

"You had a parent here this evening who raised some concerns about Community House Road [Middle School, which is to house fifth-graders in its early years].

"And one of the things we learned from the whole student assignment process this school year is that our parents are desperate to have good information from us. They want to have an opportunity to be part of the process. And it is difficult to do that when conversations or information come to them with two or three [days] or even a week's notice.

"So what we're hoping to do with your support is to be able to go out in the public and share with them what the conversations are, so we can relay to them what the topics are, what the information is, what questions have been raised, what issues are being discussed.

"We recognize the dangers in that. We recognize that when we



Agruso

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stand before the public there will be some folks out there who will take it as absolute decision and we will caution as many times as we can that these are not decisions, they are conversations and discussions.

"We understand that we run the risk of seeing ourselves in the newspaper the next day saying, 'The board said.' And I promise you we will be very very careful not to use that phrase.

"But what we do want to do is bring them information, give them opportunity to ask questions – which we will share with you, so you also have an opportunity to ponder and think about what they are concerned about.

"We want to make it as open a process as possible.

"We will also take on responsibility to make sure that staff within the district are informed. We will have regular updates with our principals, with our teachers, and with other staff. There are some formal vehicles for us to do that within the district, and we will also make sure there is lots of other communication to our schools to make sure they are aware of what's going on.

"And finally, we are in the process of identifying consultants who will work with the administration to make sure we paying attention to the best practices that are available to us as a school system.

"We are reviewing some possibilities right now. We are looking for individuals who are really at the top of their field, who really understand large school systems, understand various models, and can provide us with good information that we can then share with you in response to questions and issues that come up.

"Building on the process that we have used for bringing you information about student assignment and leading to board votes, we are proposing a process that is a little bit more drawn out....

Joe White is chairperson of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education.

"Folks, if you look at it, this is going to be a very interesting, a very busy, a very emotional year. You just look at the agendas that we have talked about tonight, and I simply want to remind you we will be doing student assignment. It is probably the most emotional issue that we can do. And we will get tied up in it and all of that.



White

"But I want to remind you that student assignment – and this is Joe White speaking Joe White's beliefs; I am not speaking for this board – student assignment really has to do with egos and prestige and all of that type of thing.

"Let us not forget, those of us at this dais, that what it should be about is pupil achievement, student achievement, and that we need to work and spend as much energy and time and effort on making sure that whatever front door that child walks in each morning, they get a quality education.

"And if we do that, then all of this hullabaloo about student assignment doesn't really matter a whole lot.

"That's Joe White's opinion. I'm sure there will be a lot of people that will disagree with me. But I kind of thrive on that, so bring it on."

*Voices from
the board room*

"What we are proposing is a five-step process. Now, I will stop right there and say, everything doesn't need five steps. So we may skip a step here and there.

"But basically this is what we'd like to do make sure people have time to digest the information.

"We would begin by presenting an issue to you – for example, the magnet programs; we will use that as our example this evening – present that information to you at a meeting or a work session, and give you all the information we have, the data, whatever we have learned about it over the last three years.

"We would then, at some later point, bring back to you, based on the conversations, the input, your recommendations, your suggestions and everything we're hearing, a set of recommendations for changes. They will be made by the administration to the board, again presented at a meeting or a work session.

"We would provide time within this sequence to respond to all of your questions, which means there may be another board meeting or work session in there

where all we do is just make sure we can answer any of the questions or issues that you have.

"We would then move into the public hearing phase, and then finally into the board vote on those recommendations.

"So it's a process that stretches it out a little bit for each of these issues. We think that way, you will have more time to digest the information. You will also have time to think about those issues as they relate to others, because there will be other things going on at the same time.

"We think this will help our public have more time to get the information and to provide us with their feedback to make sure we are paying attention to it.

"Again using magnets, one of the things we have talked about is to bring a report to you on the magnet programs at the first board meeting in February.

"You've already had one report, about the roundtables. We've been meeting with all our magnet principals, getting information from them, so we'd like to bring back to you a report on magnet programs:

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where they're successful, if there are any issues we've identified, what their test scores look like....

"And if we did that in February, based on some other things that will be happening, we may not come back to you until April with actual sets of recommendations because there would be so much conversation going on about magnet programs during that time.

"Then later on, we would respond to your questions at the second meeting in April, which means the public hearing wouldn't occur until May, and then recommendations at the second board meeting in May.

"One of the things we are hoping to do is you can make decisions along the way, so that everything doesn't wait until October when you're dealing with policy, but rather make the decisions along the way....

"We think that might make it easier. It'll do things in chunks. It will give you a chance to review something in terms of something else that it affects, but you won't have those incredibly long meetings that some of you have sat through three, four, five times in a month trying to really iron out all the policies, because we've done all the hard work already.

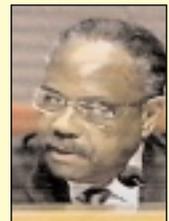
"The end result of all this, what we are hoping to get ourselves to, first of all, is to ask you to set up a vision for student assignment.

Jim Pughsley is superintendent of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools.

Voices from the board room

"Just one closing comment if I may, and it's more a caution than anything else, and it is that as we start this journey, that we be very careful to maintain the focus specifically on the student assignment plan. Now, there are a number of things that relate to that that we certainly want to deal with. But we need to be careful not to start a piling on kind of action, if you will, because if that becomes the situation it will implode of its own weight and we will not accomplish what we set out to do."

Asked after the meeting for an example of "piling on" if every issue is on the table, Pughsley offered: "Teacher quality is important to student assignment and we will address that. But textbooks are not."



Pughsley

"We'd like to be able to be very public and right upfront with our folks saying this is what we envision this to be.

"And based on that vision, then to establish a set of guiding principles that you and the public and the school system can use all through this process of looking at these issues, developing recommendations and coming to final agreement on what the student assignment plan should have....

"We will be able to go out to the public and say, 'This is what they are basing their decisions on.'

"It will help us also to be sure that we end up with an articulated program because it always goes back to those same principles.

"We are looking of course to have a revised plan that we hope will address the long-term needs for the district. We don't want our

school system to have to go through a major upheaval every three years.

"We recognize and we understand the major change that took place here two and a half years ago, but we would like to be able to present to our public something that is more stable – that is a word I hear from you all the time – something they can latch on to and know will be the the way things will be done for the long term.

"And finally, we would like to have a plan that I refer to as predictable.

"In my ideal world, because we will be opening so many schools over the next decade to meet our growth needs, I would like our parents who join our parent task force to know almost immediately, when they look at a map, 'Oh,

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Not at one gulp: Sample timeline for review of student assignment issues

	Jan.	Feb.	March	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.
Vision, guiding principles	█									
Magnet programs		█								
Staff effectiveness		█								
Boundaries, feeder patterns			█							
Priorities				█						
Achievement, accountability						█				
Policies								█		

– Source: CMS

'Dramatic action'

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that's where the lines need to be drawn' – because the plan we have presented to them makes sense, it is intuitively obvious to folks as they look at it and they are able to deal with it with much less angst than we've had over the last few years.

"If we bring you back again to a general timeline, we are beginning this evening, as we present to you our proposal. We would like to begin our discussions on the vision and guiding principles, like now – not this evening, it's a little late – but start thinking about it. We'd really like to get those done, because everything we do hinges on those pieces.

"We're hoping this board can have those conversations and be able to move through this so that by the end of February you've really put on paper what those guiding principles are.

"As some of the major steps along the way, we are looking to see the draft of the policies with the Policy Committee at the very beginning of August – again, if we're successful with that idea of voting on recommendations all the way through, you'll know what they are pretty much before August rolls around. That's when they really need to be set on paper, and we are hoping to have them all adopted by the first board meeting in October.

"One of the things we would like you to think about is this doesn't have to necessarily be, we turn the switch and in 2006 everything changes.

"But whatever changes are deemed necessary and must take place quickly, they would begin to be phased in in the 2006-2007 school year. And I want to repeat that especially for the public:

"Everything for next school year has been decided, and we are moving forward with our current plan. The changes we are talking about here will not go into effect until the year after, so we are looking at the fall of 2006...."

Parents, set high expectations for your children

Excerpts from "The Expectations Gap: A 50-state review of high school graduation requirements" from Achieve, Inc.:

"Although students and their parents believe that a high school diploma reflects adequate preparation for the intellectual demands of adult life, the reality is that across the United States, students can earn one without mastering the knowledge and skills they need to succeed after graduation. As a result, too many American youth leave high school with a diploma in hand but largely unprepared for the opportunities and challenges that await them in college and the workplace.

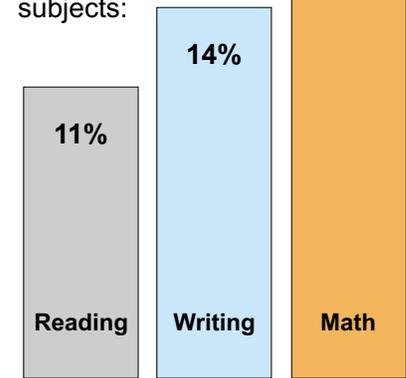
"The statistics are alarming. One study estimates that, nationwide, only 32% of students who enter ninth grade and graduate four years later have mastered basic literacy skills and have completed the coursework necessary to succeed in a four-year college. For African Americans, this figure is 20%, and for Latinos it is just 16%....

"What courses they take matters for all students, but it is particularly important for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Taking a rigorous high school curriculum that includes math at least through Algebra II cuts the gap in college completion rates between white students and African American and Latino students in half.

"Unfortunately, minority youngsters are significantly less likely to take rigorous, college- and work-preparatory curricula than are Asian and white students. Of the graduating class of 2000, fewer than one-third of American Indian (29%), Latino (31%) and African American (32 per-cent) students took a math course beyond Algebra II, compared with nearly half of white students (47%) and more than two-thirds of Asian students (69%) who did."

– Download full report from www.achieve.org

Percentage of first-year U.S. college students in two- and four-year institutions requiring remediation in listed subjects:



Like some fruit with that?

The school board ran out of time Monday afternoon and did not delve into the details of the Efficiency and Effectiveness Review's human resources recommendations. It may return to the subject at another work session.

But board members thoroughly discussed food service recommendations, and some members were surprised by the advice.

Wachovia's Sidebottom told them that outsourcing the work

was no panacea.

"Outsourcing arrangements in other places in the state have gone OK, but not great," he said. There is more variability in efficiency issues among CMS kitchens than there is between CMS and other systems.

CMS has learned economizing tricks from the vendors. "They are not going to do something substantively different," Sidebottom said. One reason is that state law

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would not allow outsourcing firms to staff the kitchens with lower-cost employees.

The committee also advised that CMS would not sell more food by removing vending machines, which the review said generate \$40,000 a day in sales. Instead, they recommended piloting kiosks, creating more space to shorten wait times, and marketing.

Board vice chair Kit Cramer said she was pleased to hear that food service "is not a broken system," but wondered if kiosks and marketing were "outside our skill set."

An earlier McKinsey study said the district could save \$4.5 million by outsourcing. Sidebottom said the review team believed no such savings were now possible, for two reasons: CMS has been economizing, and an outsourcer would charge for customization that CMS would demand, raising the outsourcing cost.

Said board member Louise Woods, "If the children on free or reduced lunch attended school as they should, our program would be in the black." CMS is subsidized by the federal lunch program only for the meals it serves.

R.T. Dooley Construction's David Dooley said "breakfast is the big loser" because just 18.5% of students participate. Actual use drops each time a bus is late to school.

Greg Clemmer, CMS deputy superintendent for operational services, said the district was piloting in a number of schools a "grab and go" breakfast bag for children overdue to class. "The principals are excited about it," Clemmer told the board. The idea was picked up from talking to outsourcers, Clemmer said.

Board member Kaye McGarry suggested looking further into outsourcing. "I hear what you're saying, but do we want to concentrate all our efforts on our core business, or do we want to divvy

Free markets 'do not serve poor children well'

Three national reports last year have cast doubts on the overall academic success of the charter movement. Teachers College professor Amy Stuart Wells offered this analysis in the Washington Post:

"Now the national test scores support what state-level studies of charter schools have suggested for years – that free-market principles are not what is needed to improve public schools.

"Carrying out market-based school reform on the cheap requires people with the experience to educate children, the business acumen to run an autonomous institution, the political connections to raise the private funds needed to keep the school afloat, and the ability to forsake their personal life to work six or seven days a week, 12 to 14 hours a day. It turns out that there are a limited number of people who can or will do charter school reform well. Thus, most charters hire younger, less experienced teachers and have high rates of teacher and administrator burnout and turnover.

"In this decade of growing free-market disillusionment, policymakers should amend state laws to better support the high-achieving charter schools and close the rest. And I hope they will also remember the hard lesson learned from this reform: that free markets in education, like free markets generally, do not serve poor children well."

– www.washingtonpost.com

it out among all these business activities?"

"The good news," board chair Joe White said later, "is that what we do we do fairly well.... Marketing institutional food? I don't know how you do it."

About 80% of students eat food from CMS cafeterias, but only 60% of high school students. The rest brown-bag, vend or don't eat.

About 42% of students are eligible for subsidized lunch, and 72% of those participate in the program.

Where's my child?

The reviewers recommended installation of global positioning systems on buses, and Supt. Pughsley said the first unit or units would be in place before the end of the year. The panel argues that GPS would both ensure that drivers aren't taking side trips, and allow buses to be easily located in event of emergency.

Transportation chief Carol Stamper said Wake County now has some GPS in use, that the units to be installed here would be corporately sponsored and free

to the district, and that the sponsors would not have any advertising rights in exchange.

CMS's Rick Rozelle said outfitting the 1,100-bus fleet with GPS would be "very expensive," but gave no figures.

But CMS is considering high-tech systems both for safety reasons and to keep track of children. Stamper said CMS was exploring use of card readers or fingerprint scanners on buses.

Joe White suggested a marketing program to increase ridership. "I'm tired of pulling up to a school and seeing two miles of cars polluting our air, when parents could put that child on the school bus."

White also said CMS should be more customer-friendly when parents ask for route changes or other changes. "If it's safe, if it's legal and it doesn't cost us money or time, then, confound it, do it," he said.

And in a telling remark about parent priorities, White told the board, "I get more calls about transportation than I do anything else."

Continued on Page 9

'Dramatic action'

Continued from Page 8

The review team's report says 85% of buses arrive within a 15-30 minute "on time" window. The average number of students per bus districtwide is 59. The state, which creates transportation efficiency ratings for all N.C. school districts rates CMS at 94.5%. The state average rating is 93%.

Warehousing

CMS is considering consolidating three warehouses into two. It is also looking at combining warehouse and maintenance and bus staging operations in several locations to cut time mechanics spend on the road making repairs.

Purchasing cards have recently been instituted, allowing dropshipments to schools rather than bulk buying and costly warehousing. Amid all of this reform, the board's discussion of warehousing focused on food.

CMS now warehouses food and distributes it to 157 sites. No vendor is geared up to handle 157 sites, Clemmer said. CMS is continuing to weigh whether an outsourcer's fees would be cheaper than having CMS warehouse and distribute the food.

Sidebottom agreed, saying, "It may be less expensive to dropship, but all the other costs of managing could raise your total cost of ownership."

Equity matters

The fifth annual CMS report rating its performance against equity standards is due out Jan. 25. The data should provide some benchmarks for creation of next year's school budget, which is already under preparation (budget calendar, above).

The school board's Equity Committee responded in December when asked what

Draft budget calendar

JANUARY

10-14 CMS executive staff budget work sessions to discuss priority recommendations.

24 Budget message and superintendent's recommendations due in Budget Department to allow time to compile the budget document.

FEBRUARY

22 Board to approve budget calendar, 6 p.m.

MARCH

7 Presentation of superintendent's budget recommendations to senior staff.

8 Formal budget presentation to school board, 6 p.m.

10 School board workshop on budget, 12-2 p.m.

14 School board workshop on budget, 5-7 p.m.

15 Presentation of superintendent's budget recommendations to Education Budget Advisory Committee, 7:30 a.m., Government Center 11th floor conference room.

22 Public hearing on operating budget, 6 p.m.

TBD Superintendent, county manager discuss budget.

24 School board budget work session, 5-7 p.m.

APRIL

12 School board to approve budget request

MAY

1 Budget to be delivered to county manager.

TBD Board of education and county commissioners to meet on CMS budget request.

17 County manager's recommended operating and capital budget (including CMS line items) to be presented to county commissioners.

TBD Commissioners to hold public hearing on their budget.

JUNE

21 (Tentative) Commissioners to approve their budget, 3-year Capital Improvement Plan.

needs to be addressed (*Educate!*, Dec. 17). Its annual report may be put off until March.

But last week, committee members were restless on one key count:

The panel has been giving the board detailed analyses of individual schools for three years, and it wonders how much action has been taken on the issues it has raised.

"I'm ready to see something being done," said Rev. George Cook, a committee member. "We need to nail these down and then see whether they've followed through."

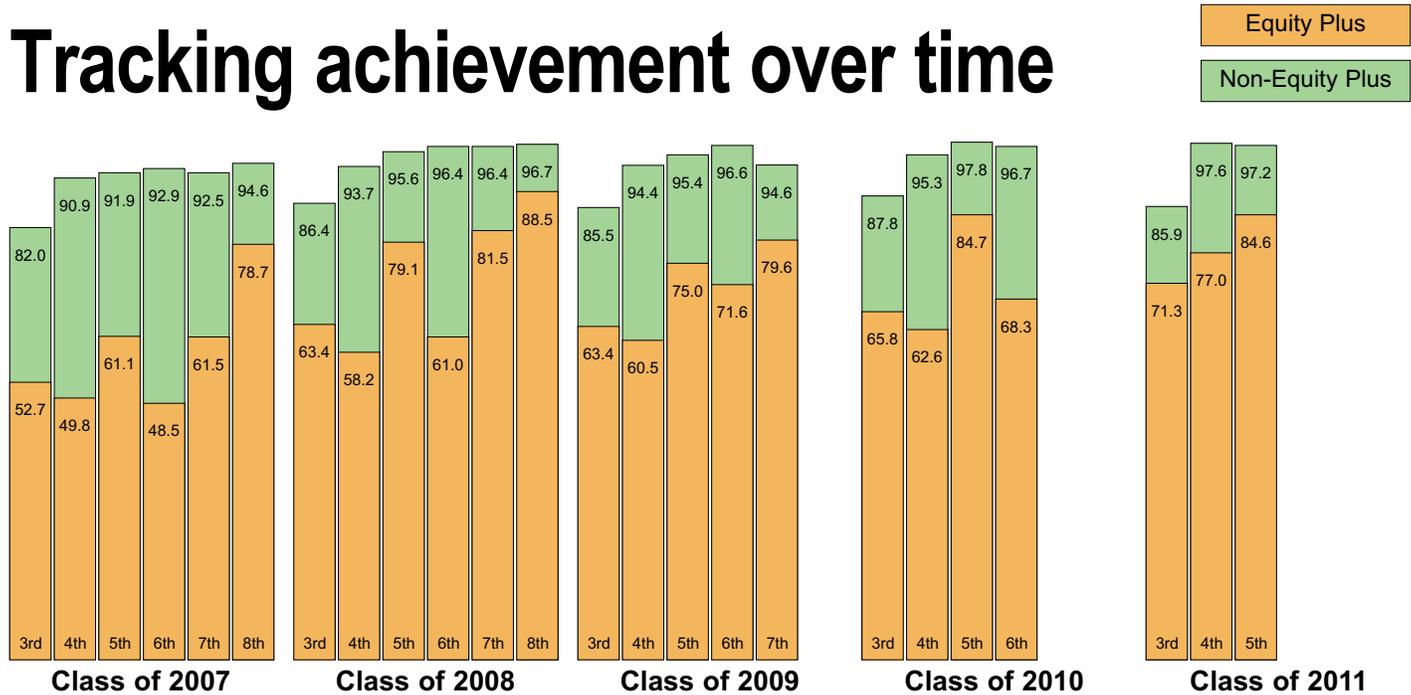
"None of us wants to waste our time," agreed member Greg Metcalf.

The committee agreed to create a master list of the schools it has visited and the recommendations it has made, then seek information on what recommendations haven't been addressed.

Not all critical-needs renovation projects identified in 1997 have yet been completed. And the district's annual budget has fallen nearly \$20 million short of full funding for the equity initiatives already identified.

— Steve Johnston

Tracking achievement over time



Equity panel helps CMS provide reading data in way that tells a story

The green and salmon bars above move CMS closer to the gold standard in data reporting.

But there's still a ways to go.

CMS offered the data in response to a request from its Equity Committee.

The data allows a peek at how a given group of students fares over time. For the most part, the data shows two things:

- Over time, on average, either the tests are getting easier to pass at each succeeding grade level or more children are at grade level with each year they are in school. That would be great news.

- On average, either the tests are getting easier to pass each year or CMS is sending more children into the third-grade test-entry year better prepared to do well on those tests.

The data overcomes one criticism long aimed at those who publish data: By comparing this year's third-graders to last year's, for example, you're comparing different children, apples and oranges.

To create these cohorts by class, CMS sorted students out by those who had been and stayed at Equity Plus schools, and those

who had been and stayed at non-Equity Plus schools. Those who moved from one kind of school to the other were dropped. Students who left the district were dropped as well.

The number of children in each cohort varies. In the Class of 2007, for example, only 239 students stayed all six years in an Equity Plus school. The Class of 2007 Non-Equity Plus cohort was 1,899. The largest cohort in the data above, numbering 4,093 students, is the non-Equity Plus students in the Class of 2011.

The data above represents the classes for which CMS had three years or more of test data, and covers reading. The committee also received math data.

Members of the Equity Committee are not satisfied, however, and have asked for further breakdown of the data.

Panel members want to verify that low-income children are being served. This is the same issue raised by N.C. Superior Court Judge Howard Manning, who is presiding over the Leandro case in a Raleigh courtroom.

An example of the committee's questions: At non-Equity Plus schools, are low-income children

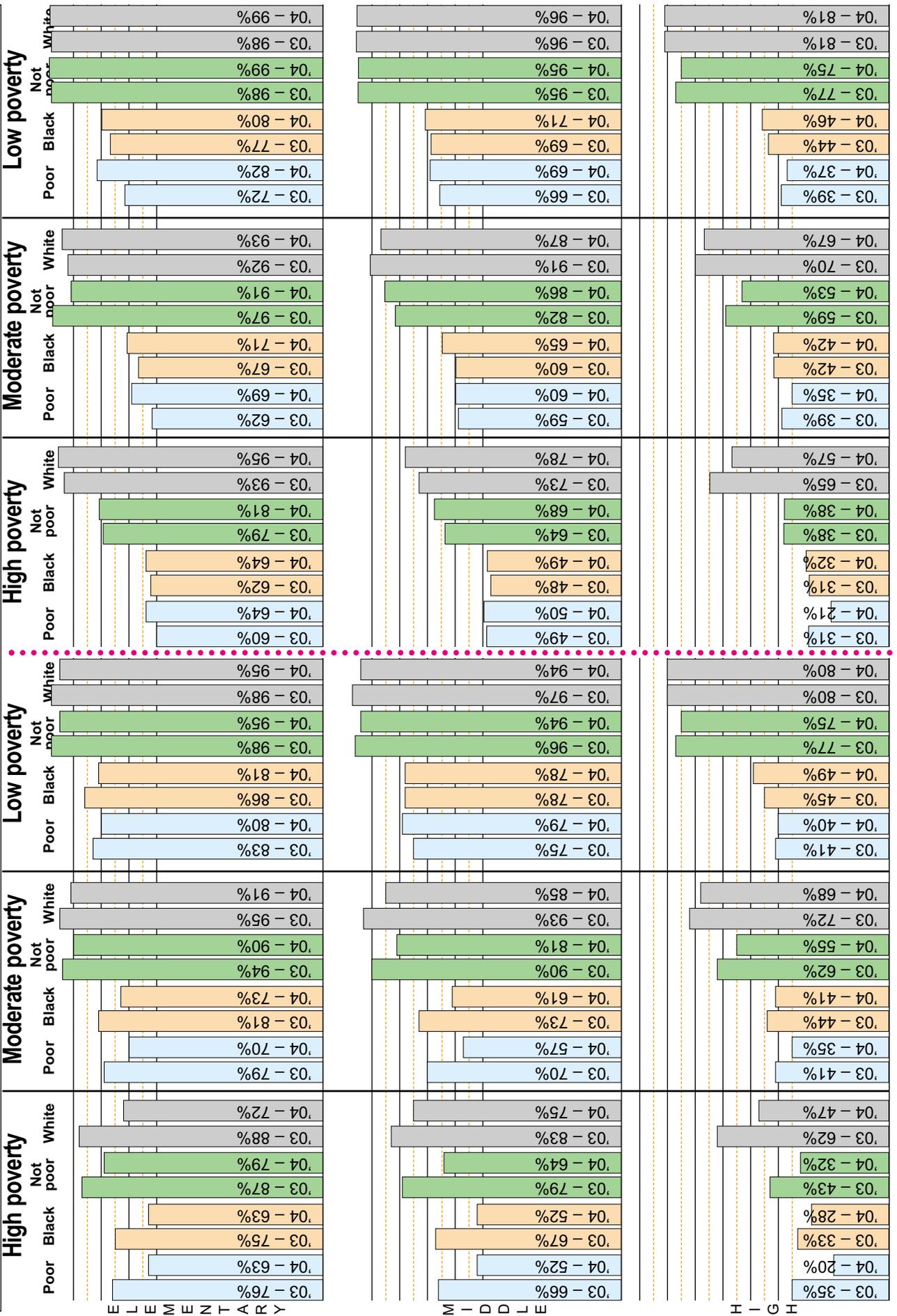
(the peers of most of the children at Equity Plus schools) performing as well as their non-poor peers? Possibly not, but there's no way to tell from the data released in these cohorts. Their results, if lagging, would be hidden by the reality that an overwhelming portion of the well-prepared students in low-poverty schools are performing far above the levels captured by the state's end-of-grade tests.

DidYaHear?

✓ Lobbyists will push to rescind the tourism promotion bill that forced schools to rework calendars for next year, the Durham Herald told its readers. Will they succeed? Don't hold your breath: Most school boards that could seek exemptions did not do so.

– Send intelligence to swannfello@aol.com

Correction
 UNCC researcher Roslyn Mickelson provided data Jan. 3, 2005 that corrected errors in material on which the chart, below left, was based in the Nov. 12, 2004 edition of Educate! The corrections changed 67 of 72 bars in the chart. Corrections have been made in the chart to the right of the dotted vertical line. The four colors in the chart are: poor students (blue); blacks (brown); those not poor (green); and whites (gray).



Briefly...

Teacher equity: Teachers at Title I schools in Florida are 44% more likely than those at schools where 15% or less of the body are on free or reduced lunch to fail certification tests, the Herald Tribune reported. The certification tests are meant to ensure that teachers have the basic knowledge they need to be effective. In addition, the average score on all portions of exam are lower for teachers at the poor schools than the wealthy schools. www.heraldtribune.com

Top performer: The Met, a Rhode Island alternative school with 80% of its children on subsidized lunch, has the highest retention and college placement rates in the state, the Los Angeles Times reported. The school does not have letter grades or required classes but focuses instead on individual real-world experiences, extensive writing and internships. And 100% of students are accepted to college. Each year and after five years of the program, 75% of school graduates either graduated from or are still attending college. www.latimes.com

Language training: The Chilean government is calling for all elementary and high school students to learn English, the New York Times reported. The government asserts that learning English is a measure of equality and it will allow even working-class children the chance to compete in an international marketplace. The government is also encouraging businesses to provide English classes for employees. The long-term goal is to have a bilingual Chile within a generation. www.nytimes.com

Walk-through: Grab and Go carts are becoming popular alternatives to breakfast in the school cafeteria, the Philadelphia Inquirer told its readers. Students commonly perceive school break-

Calendar

JANUARY

- 13** School board's Personnel Committee, 12:30 p.m., Board Room.
- 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.
- 17** "Poverty, Equity and Education: A Critical Look at CMS Student Assignment, 2-4 p.m., Afro-American Cultural Center, 401 N. Myers St. Presenters: Rev. Tonyia Rawls of Unity Fellowship Church and Jack Boger, deputy director of the UNC Center for Civil Rights in Chapel Hill; breakout sessions; concluding panel. Sponsors are People United for Education and the Afro-American Cultural Center's Village Square Forum. More info: NCCJ, 704-334-0053 or the Afro-American Cultural Center, 704-374-1565.
- 18** Bond Oversight Committee, 11:30 a.m., Building Services, 3301 Stafford Dr.
- 19** School board's Safety

- Committee, 3:30 p.m., Room 414, Education Center.
- 20** School board's Finance, Capital & Facilities Committee, Room 414, Education Center.
- 23** Installation of new NAACP officers and executive committee members, 3 p.m., Greater Providence Baptist Church, 2000 Milton Road.
- 23** Oath of office ceremony for N.C. Senator-elect Malcolm Graham, 4 p.m., Johnson C. Smith University, 1000 Beatties Ford Road. RSVP to Ervin Gourdine at 704-566-9469.
- 25** School board's Curriculum Committee, Room 414, Education Center.
- 25** School board meets, Government Center Meeting Chamber, 6 p.m.

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

fast as for the poor and needy. A study by Pennsylvania State University found that in one middle school replacing the standard cafeteria line with a cart increased student breakfast consumption by 9%. www.philly.com

Four-day week: New legislation signed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger authorizes some small California school districts to move from five- to four-day school weeks, the Sacramento Bee reported. The reaction is mixed, however. Those for the legislation believe that it will decrease costs and increases student and teacher morale and attendance. Those who do not support the concept believe that students need five days to reinforce the concepts they are learning. www.sacbee.com

Impact of AP courses: Researchers at the University of California at Berkeley found that taking college-level courses in high school does not in itself improve college achievement, the Washington Post reported. Students taking Advanced Placement courses (AP) are given an extra point on their average, thereby increasing their chances of being accepted at colleges. The study of 81,455 California college students found that the scores on the optional AP tests were a better predictor of college achievement and that students who took AP classes but did not take the AP exams were given the extra grade point, but were not better prepared than students who did not take the AP courses. www.washingtonpost.com