

Nashville panel offers advice on closing gap

Nashville's Citizens Panel for a Community Report Card is best-known for its letter grades given to the district each year since 1993. The Chamber-driven group this year gave the schools a "C" for student achievement and a "B" for implementation of strategic planning.

But in an era of more detailed and test-driven assessments, the panel made a pitch for its continued usefulness. And that usefulness may lie in its ability to focus on narrower issues each year. This year's "report card" also dealt with policy governance, social and emotional learning, middle schools, English language programs – and the achievement gap.

Among the panel's "challenges and recommendations" on closing the achievement gap:

– It is important that the community and the District engage in an open, honest, and respectful discussion about issues surrounding education, poverty, and race. It is our hope that the Board will take the lead in facilitating, the purpose being to develop a cohesive plan to identify, implement, and measure initiatives that address the institutional, socio-economic, and cultural barriers contributing to the achievement gap.

– The Panel remains deeply concerned that a disproportionately high number of African-American males are placed in spe-

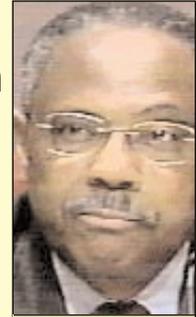
Continued on Page 2

No issue next week

The next edition of *Educate!* will be dated April 8. No fooling.

Q: Do these guiding principles "give you the discretion that would help us in relation ... to student achievement?"

Supt. Jim Pughsley: "It will help to some degree. I wish I had had more running room. I don't. And I'll certainly do the best that I possibly can with it."



Pughsley

SES assignment off table

Shunning entreaties of its critics, a divided Charlotte-Mecklenburg school board Tuesday rejected all fundamental review of student assignment for the year and set sail for a district permanently divided, again, by race and class.

By a 5-4 vote, the board established in its guiding principles (text, Page 3) a directive to Supt. Jim Pughsley to maintain the home-school guarantees that have resegregated many schools in the last three years. The board said it seeks to boost strong magnet programs, but rejected a call for balancing student populations by socioeconomic – even at the magnet programs that the board said "should offer diverse learning environments."

It reaffirmed, also 5-4, a principle for all schools that "diversity should be fostered, although it should not be forced."

As expected, the principles as approved curtail parent choice or, in most cases, merely codify the lack of choice created by overcrowding at sought-after high-achieving schools. The board majority shunted aside suggestions that seats at popular suburban locations be added for those seeking transfers from low-performing schools, or for low-performing children from any school.

The votes came on the heels of a weekend meeting of the N.C. School Boards Association attended by Superior Court Judge Howard Manning Jr. Two CMS board members got to squabbling over district issues in front of a statewide audience, and Manning's reaction was reportedly along the line of "what more can I say?" In his Wake County courtroom, Manning earlier questioned whether CMS's student achievement problems are not so much ones of resources as they are of "management."

Manning oversees the current statewide school finance lawsuit called Leandro. A lawyer involved in the case speculated before the school board's meeting Tuesday that Manning is watching carefully to see if CMS will tackle its severe shortfalls in student achievement, particularly at the high school level. The lawyer said Manning hears frequently from Mecklenburg residents telling him to keep his nose out of Mecklenburg affairs – a message that could have just the opposite effect on a judge deter-

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Nashville panel

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cial education MIP Conduct classes. In fact, African-Americans make up 77% of MIP enrollment, a situation of which the District is aware. The majority of these students have the cognitive ability to be successful in a general education classroom....

“– It is a challenge for teachers to work with children whose life experiences are distinctly different from their own. This challenge was reinforced during conversations we had with administrators and teachers. There is a need for required cross-cultural training for all staff that will help them better understand, and be more responsive to, the socioeconomic environmental conditions in which their students live. Commendably, the District has moved in this direction....

“– There is an identified need for a more diverse teaching staff. There are too few minority counselors and social workers employed by the District, and there is a need for more minority teachers, particularly African-American males. We understand that the District is working to address this issue and that there are positions that are particularly difficult to fill, given that the pool of available teachers in several critical areas is small. Consideration may need to be given to adopting more aggressive strategies, such as offering incentives for difficult-to-fill assignments.”

– Download the report card at www.nashvillechamber.com/education/reportcard.html

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WHITHER CMS?

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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.

Text of principles to guide student assignment plan review

Following is the approved text of Board of Education Guiding Principles adopted by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education Tuesday night.

Our focus must always be improving student achievement for every student in every school. We will provide the leadership, resources, staffing, safe environment and innovative programming necessary for all schools to succeed. We do not believe that the problems faced by low-performing schools can or should be solved through student assignment alone.

For the review of the student assignment plan, we establish the following guiding principles:

1. The student assignment plan must provide our students and families with stability and predictability to the extent possible. This will require careful consideration of both expected growth patterns and additional schools planned for the area

Guiding principles

Continued from Page 1

mined to protect children whom he believes are not receiving the "sound basic education" required by the N.C. Constitution.

As amendments were offered Tuesday night to the guiding principles to specify actions on behalf of low-performing students, board members Molly Griffin and Kit Cramer repeatedly said there would be time later for details. They pointed to the document's first sentence which reads, "Our focus must always be improving student achievement for every student in every school."

Asked if the guiding principles would help CMS boost achievement, Supt. Jim Pughsley told his board Tuesday, "It will help to some degree. I wish I had more running room. I don't."

Meanwhile, a self-appointed task force bankrolled by the Foundation for the Carolinas and business interests named 16 people to its \$500,000 review of CMS management.

before home school boundaries are established.

Home school boundaries will be changed only in accordance with a predetermined schedule or when necessary because of the opening of new schools.

New schools in high growth areas will reserve capacity for future growth. Consideration will be given to placing special/alternative programs in new schools to utilize seats until needed for growth.

2. Every student will be guaranteed a seat in a school close to home. There will be no capping of schools for students within the home school area. Home school zones will be logically drawn, compact and contiguous. To the extent possible, the boundary lines for such home school zones will incorporate whole neighborhoods, anticipate growth, and make efficient use of facilities.

3. We will make effective use of all of our school buildings. Determination of capacity must consider the need for room for differenti-

Task Force members, in addition to co-leaders Cathy Bessant from the Bank of America and architect Harvey Gantt., are corporate executives Astrid J. Chirinos, Joni M. Davis, J. Bernard Johnson, Patricia Rodgers, Michael Tarwater and Krista S. Tillman; bankers Carlos E. Evans and Malcolm (Mac) E. Everett III; lawyers Frank E. Emory Jr. and Shirley Fulton; community volunteers Karen K. Fesperman, Sharon Starks and Judi Strause; and the Rev. Gregory K. Moss Sr.

A Foundation press release quoted Foundation Chair (and Duke Power President) Ruth Shaw as saying the task force focus "is long-term and structural.

"Key steps in the task force's work," the release says, "will include: assessing the current structure, business model, and governance of CMS; benchmarking leading school districts across the country with similar growth challenges; considering alternate models; and making specific recommendations back to the public by August."

ated staffing and special needs programs. We will consider smaller schools, schools within schools, innovative scheduling and different grade configurations as methods to utilize schools efficiently.

We will develop a school overcrowding policy.

4. We believe that a diverse educational environment enhances learning. Therefore, diversity should be fostered, although it should not be forced. We will focus on strengthening schools in naturally diverse areas.

5. Magnet programs should be strengthened. Magnet schools should offer academically distinct programs. Ineffective magnet programs should be eliminated, and additional strong magnet programs should be considered. Magnets should be strategically placed to make effective use of facilities and offer reasonable access to students from all parts of the country.

Magnet programs should offer diverse learning environments.

Consideration will be given to establishing prerequisites and/or merit-based admission to some magnets.

Consideration will be given to establishing magnet zones which will not allow a student to choose a magnet outside of his or her zone.

The sibling guarantee should be maintained except for programs with merit-based admission.

6. The student assignment plan should be simplified. Relevant costs and benefits of the plan must be carefully weighed, and costs should be reduced if at all possible. Transportation costs and travel time for students should be minimized.

The sibling guarantee should be maintained.

Consideration will be given to reducing the size of the non-magnet zones and eligibility for transportation.

Because actual non-magnet choice options have been limited [by overcrowding], consideration will be given to providing non-magnet choice only through No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and a staff-operated transfer process for open seats.

7. To the greatest extent possible, students with disabilities (EC) and students with limited English proficiency (LEP) will be offered the same assignment opportunities as other students.

Calendar

MARCH

- 24** School board budget work session, 5 p.m., Board Room.
24 Parent meeting on comprehensive review of student assignment plan, Ranson Road Middle, 6-8 p.m. Subject: Magnet programs.

APRIL

- 8** Equity Committee, 8 a.m., Room 414, Education Center
11 School board's Policy Committee, 3:15 p.m., Room 414, Education Center.
12 School board meets, 6 p.m., Government Center Meeting Chamber. Includes public hearing on staff effectiveness, and staff recommendations on magnets, boundaries and feeder patterns.
19 Bond Oversight Committee, 7:30 a.m., Building Services, 3301 Stafford Drive off Wilkinson Blvd.
19 Parent meeting on comprehensive review of assignment plan, Waddell High, 6-8 p.m. Subject: Boundaries and feeder patterns.
20 School board's Safety Committee, 3:30 p.m., Room 414, Education Center.
21 School board's Personnel Committee, 2 p.m., Room 414, Education Center.
21 School board's Finance, Capital & Facilities Committee, 2 p.m., Room 414, Education Center.
26 School board's Curriculum Committee, 3 p.m., Room 414, Education Center.
26 School board meets, 6 p.m., Government Center Meeting Chamber.

MAY

- 10** School board public hearing on magnets, boundaries and feeder patterns; additional information about priorities.

DidYaHear?

✓ Addressing three dozen high school students at an NCCJ youth activism conference Sunday, CMS high schools boss Ann Clark said Supt. Jim Pughsley has a favorite question when senior staff come to him with an idea for a new initiative: "So what?" Our enigmatic superintendent means, she explained, that CMS needs not just new stuff but programs that make a difference.

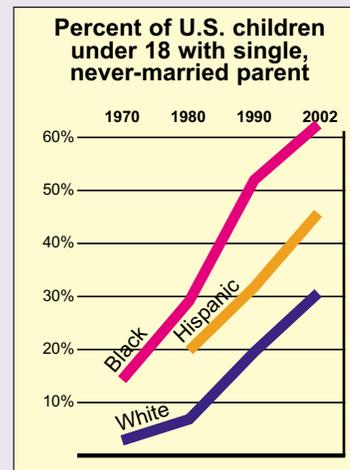
✓ The N.C. Forum's Friday Report last week cited Governing Magazine for the U.S. Census data in the chart at right, and under a headline, "Father's Importance in Welfare Reform Debated," said the policy debate in Washington is refocusing on fathers. "An influential study," the Report continued, "interviewed unwed couples prior to the birth of their child, which found that large percentages of mothers and even

higher percentages of fathers thought they would marry. Follow-up interviews found that fewer than 10% were married a year later."

✓ The school board approved a pitch for \$40,000 from the Gates-funded New Schools Project to convert Olympic High into five autonomous schools, or what would otherwise be called magnet programs. Oddly, the board also heard Tuesday that a quarter of Olympic already belongs to an autonomous program: Its name is JROTC. Nationwide, JROTC claims higher attendance and graduation rates, lower discipline and dropout rates, and higher achievement. Supt. Jim Pughsley Tuesday told board meeting visitors that JROTC is another example of "managed instruction."

✓ Longtime CMS Diversity Office coordinator Rahman Khan reportedly leaves next week for similar work with Compass Group.

– Send intelligence to swannfello@aol.com



- 11** School board work session, more discussion of magnets, boundaries and feeder patterns.
24 School board vote on magnets, boundaries and feeder patterns.

JUNE

- 14** School board meeting to include annual staff report on end-

of-grade test results and their implications for student assignment.

- 28** School board meeting to include staff recommendation for lottery priorities; annual staff report on end-of-grade test results and their implications for student assignment.

Reading lesson

Teacher and columnist Stephen Simpson:
 "When I begin working with a new student, I talk with him or her long enough to get a rough idea about their attitude, skill level, likes and dislikes, interests. Then I pick a book and hand it to them. I tell them that they only need to read 25 pages, long enough to give the author time to get something

going with the plot and characters. If they like it, go ahead and read it. If they don't like it, we will trade it in on something else.

"If they read one book, no matter what it is, you have a good chance of helping the student transcend past failures."

– www.edbriefs.com

Briefly...

Wake's ask: Wake Schools administrators are to ask Wake County for \$107.4 million more over three years, the News and Observer reported. Additional funds will be used to increase teacher salaries, hire new teachers, buy buses, keep up with rising insurance costs, and provide seats for a growing student population. The proposed funding would increase the average homeowner's annual property taxes by about \$44.

www.newsobserver.com

AP binge: Increased state funding and emphasis on achievement is causing teachers to encourage more students to take AP classes, Education Week reported. Although most praise the trend, some are skeptical and fear that increased AP enrollment will lower the academic standards of the program. The College Board reported that in 2003 65% of white AP test-takers scored at least a 3, while only 30% of African Americans did so.

www.edweek.org

Teacher exams: A new bill could make it easier to hire teachers in North Carolina, the News and Observer reported. The bill would allow teachers licensed in other states to avoid retaking the license exam. Opponents, including Gov. Mike Easley, worry that due to differing licensing requirements the bill may put under-qualified teachers in classrooms.

www.newsobserver.com

No time: One unintended consequence of No Child Left Behind may be the neglect of social studies in the classroom, Education Week reported. Teachers are spending so much time prepping students for the standardized math and English tests required by NCLB, they often do not have time for social studies. This may be particularly evident in under-performing schools. The California Social Studies Project

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New digital window on our world

This 1826 lithograph by Charles Etienne Pierre Motte of President Thomas Jefferson is among thousands of images available for research and personal use at the New York Public Library's Digital Gallery. Schoolchildren will find a wealth of information, from old maps to 19th-century images of people at work. The gallery's Web address is <http://digitalgallery.nypl.org>.

found that often children in low-performing schools do not see any social studies until they are a sophomore or junior in high school.

www.edweek.org

Giving up on some?: A new study from the Philadelphia Education Fund and Johns Hopkins University found that student characteristics present in sixth grade were reliable predictors of high school dropouts. The Philadelphia Inquirer reported that students who exhibited bad behavior or who failed math or English in sixth grade were unlikely to graduate from high school. The graduation rate for students with these characteristics in sixth grade ranged from 16% to 18%.

www.philly.com

Mister Teacher: The percentage of males among elementary teachers has dropped to 9%, and among secondary teachers to 35%, the Christian Science Monitor reported. Currently the male to female ratio of teachers is at a 40-year low. MenTeach, a nonprofit clearinghouse, says fear of abuse charges, low pay and the perception that teaching is "women's work" contribute to the decline.

www.csmonitor.com

Pendulum swing: Critics believe that zero tolerance policies in schools have gone too far, stateline.org reported. They assert that when elementary school children are arrested for inappropriate drawings or hitting

teachers, it may do more harm than good. In addition, Russ Skiba, an education psychology professor at Indiana University found that African American students are not only more likely to be suspended, but their suspensions are for more minor infractions than white students and that there are correlations between dropout rates, incarceration and suspensions.

www.stateline.org

More NAEP?: Currently the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is only required in 4th and 8th grade and is taken voluntarily by 12th-grade students. Education Week reported that President Bush is now calling for mandatory participation of samples of 12th-grade students. Currently students do not have an incentive to take the test, as they do not see their scores. Some advocates suggest giving students grades, scholarships, or awards for taking the tests.

www.edweek.org

One answer: Florida's Education Commissioner, John Winn, said he is considering lowering the standards for student achievement, the Palm Beach Post reported. Last year, 77% of the state's schools failed to make No Child annual yearly progress, but this was often due to the failure of one subgroup. One proposal being discussed is to measure growth rather than test passing rates for particular subgroups.

www.palmbeachpost.com