

Hello, housefly!



Get up-close with world's tiniest creatures at MicroAngela, a Web site created by Tina Carvalho at the University of Hawaii. Carvalho uses electron microscopes to create black-and-white images, then colorizes them using computer software. "The colors are a product of my imagination," Carvalho writes from the Biological Electron Microscope Facility at the Pacific Biomedical Research Center. To view more of the world's bugs, visit www.pbrc.hawaii.edu/bemf/microangela/



A stronger board

Foundation's efforts bear fruit in encouraging way; bad old days of decentralized management recalled

A foundation effort to build a more unified CMS school board is already bearing fruit:

A solid board majority on Wednesday stared down a consultant's appeal for shorter, simpler language, and united behind its own draft text of its core beliefs.

The decision may be a harbinger of a board ready to work through a growing list of challenges. The list includes a superintendent search, pressure from the state courts over disappointing student achievement, and a restless public unwilling to meet the board's budget needs and deeply divided about entrusting its children to the school district.

Working as a committee of the whole at the district's Leadership Academy near UNCC, board members were continuing a session that began on Tuesday with a focus on better handling questions from parents and the public, and on more effective meetings.

Test-score prognosis

Incoming interim Supt. Frances Haithcock on EOGs, EOCs:

Elementary: Reading gains at a number of grade levels.

Middle: "Not down."

High (testing continues through Monday): "Hopeful."

Wednesday's session saw board members working in some harmony. Respect was in ample supply. Even the morning newspaper's editorial cartoon about the chairman using taser guns on squabbling board members provided some chuckles – and a pantomime, as Vilma Leake put her head down on the table, saying, "I'm playing my part."

But in a deeply divided county, harmony and respect did not banish from the room the huge policy differences separating members of

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Group trains parent leaders to pursue school change

Like the slow drip that erodes a rock, a local nonprofit has set out to alter school culture by training two dozen parents at a time.

Locally funded by Wachovia Foundation, the Parent Leadership Network has just released its first cohort of "parent leaders" into the schools, where they are pursuing projects to boost student achievement.

"Parent leaders are found everywhere," says project coordinator Sandra Byrd told the Tuesday Morning Breakfast Forum meet-

"Parent Leadership Network will prepare participants to become ardent advocates, benevolent agitators, and collaborative partners for school improvement."

– Advocates for Education program overview

ing at the West Charlotte Recreation Center. The network will be "reaching those that maybe in the past haven't been involved."

Network coach Claudia

Ollivierre's mother is longtime CMS principal and administrator Mildred Wright. Ollivierre recalled being in the car as a youngster as her mother would

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Extend protections to children facing suspension

The writer, a lawyer, is director of the Durham Child Advocacy Commission.

A bill that you may be interested in has been introduced in the House (H1747) – a bill to mandate appropriate education for suspended children.

The bill would require schools to follow procedures similar to those set for children with special needs when suspensions are recommended. Under the bill, students recommended for long-term suspensions and multiple short-term suspensions will have to be evaluated and placed in an appropriate educational program.

This legislation has broad-based support but will probably be opposed by school boards and by superintendents.

In fact, one superintendent has already weighed in with his opposition to the bill – mainly questioning why kids who misbehave should be accorded the same rights and procedural safeguards as children with disabilities and saying that the bill would cost too much (pretty much a “safe schools” response).

Basically, he and probably many

of the superintendents feel that schools shouldn't be responsible for bad kids, especially those who join gangs. If the opponents think clearly about the bill they would realize that:

– Children with behavior problems at school do usually have unmet special learning and emotional needs.

– The process outlined in the bill would not keep “bad kids” in school but would set up a process by which to transfer or refer these children to other programs without interruptions to the child's education.

– The bill doesn't ask schools to take on the whole responsibility of educating “bad kids,” but sets up a process for schools to work in collaboration with other community partners. The bill calls for the appropriation of \$20 million for grants for collaborative programs.

– There are some children caught up in the zero tolerance fervor who do not need to be suspended.

– If the superintendents think the process outlined in the bill is tedious, time-consuming and expensive, they should reflect upon the suspension process currently utilized.

– Development of social policy needs to reflect the damaging consequences of NOT EDUCATING

these children; i.e., the glut of suspensions has taxed local agencies, increased the risk of these kids becoming a greater danger to the community, and many of these children end up in the criminal justice system. A study by the Department of Juvenile Justice indicates that 80% of the children in their system had substantial behavior problems including suspensions while in the public school system.

Suspensions have been upheld by the courts and by statute. But because the Leandro case has held that all children have a RIGHT to a sound basic education, it seems that suspensions that result in a denial of education are not lawful. Some educators still hold to the notion that education is a privilege.

Al Singer

From Readers



www.ncchild.org
Singer

Manning's words fit the situation

In his recent review of educational performance at certain high schools within CMS, Superior Court Judge Howard Manning should be highly commended for using appropriately descriptive language, “academic genocide” (*Educate!*, May 27).

However and tragically, this assessment of Judge Manning's could and should be extended to describe what is hap-

pening to virtually all students within CMS, especially “at-risk” Black students.

This is a very ugly posture that elected officials and school board administrators could fix, in great measure, by adopting more enlightened policies that address gross mis-education within CMS, in conjunction with addressing disproportionate Black poverty in the larger society.

We are confronting a circular, no-win posture on at-risk stu-

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Foluke

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

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

Interfaith group backs full CMS funding

The CMS Interfaith Advisory Council issued the following statement encouraging full funding for CMS. The group's co-chairs are Rev. Wardell Henderson of Weeping Willow AME Zion Church and Rev. Tom Tate of Plaza Presbyterian Church.

As members of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Interfaith Advisory Council, we encourage the Mecklenburg County Commission to authorize the entire funding request for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools.

As people of faith, we are advocates for education of the highest quality for all children. This is the responsibility of a just and free society and indispensable to the political, economic, and spiritual health of our community. We cannot allow our schools to fall behind, to become resegregated, and to become divided into high-wealth and high-poverty schools.

This is not just about money. While we need to provide the financial resources to provide every child the best environment for learning, the best teachers, and the best resources, money alone will not solve the problems CMS faces.

CMS is being asked not only to educate our children but also to solve the issues of a growing, diverse culture in a community that hasn't yet mastered "inclusiveness" and "diversity." Let's

not handicap the one community resource that is best equipped to teach and train our children as to what it means to live and work and play in a diverse culture.

Let us look beyond the dollars for the real answers but not destroy the opportunities to address the deeper issues simply by underfunding CMS.

We need support and encouragement for public education throughout this community.

Without a strong public education system, democracy cannot survive. We urge our citizens and our elected officials to set aside all partisanship in favor of a united vision for our schools. We ask that you use your influence to be a catalyst for uniting our community in support of CMS.

Please join us in encouraging the County Commission to approve the budget request from our Board of Education.

Training in education, other fields compared

From "Preparing and Training Professionals: Comparing Education to Six Other Fields" by Karen Hawley Miles, Allan Odden, Mark Fermanich, and Sarah Archibald for The Finance Project. The study compared education with law, accounting, architecture, nursing, fire-fighting and law enforcement.

"Standards for In-Service Training: Education also is alone among the comparison fields in its lack of universally accepted standards for required in-service training and identification of a single entity to enforce those standards. While there is a growing consensus regarding characteristics of high-quality professional development, there is still a widespread need for standards that would enable educators to evaluate providers and offerings.

"Induction Programs: Novice firefighters, police, and nurses complete formal orientation or induction programs to prepare them for the demanding situations they will face. Despite disproportionate assignments to low-performing schools in low-income areas, new teachers do not have consistent access to formal and focused induction programs. Since research shows that quality induction programs can prepare teachers and reduce turnover, examining universally required programs in other fields could provide valuable models."

– www.financeprojectinfo.org/ProfDevelop/default.asp

Manning's words

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dents and families, where alleged student underachievement or academic genocide contributes to disproportionate poverty that, subsequently, leads back to more academic genocide, especially when much of the curriculum in the school system is not culturally relevant to needs of Black students, including the teaching and

analysis of our history or culture.

What we get in this community is a despicable urban Black condition, including a 51% poverty rate and about an 80% jail-prison population, adversely reflecting on local and national leadership.

The time has come – indeed, it is far past due – for public officials to declare a moratorium on repeating the phrase, "liberty and justice for all," in the Pledge of Allegiance. Blacks have been either excluded from or circum-

scribed in this White-controlled nation, even as Black troops are suffering about 22% of deaths in that immoral corporate-oil war in Iraq for the alleged "freedom" of this nation.

Therefore, may "God Bless America" – no, all of humanity – for all of us will need it, as we are being relegated to the dung heap of history; for "Whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad with power."

Gyasi A. Foluke

A stronger board

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the board.

Minority views were heard, and sometimes accommodated. But ultimately the board majority on any issue must be able to move the board forward. And Wednesday, the board was moving.

Core beliefs

Three versions of a statement of core beliefs were on the table. And consultant Julie Mikuta's advice was to whack what had been done.

"They seem to be too long to me," Mikuta said.

"They took a lot of quality time to write," offered District 6 member Lee Kindberg. Another consultant's revisions "lost some of the strength of what we did in November." Added District 3 member George Dunlap, "they speak to what this board as a whole believes."

Mikuta's argument was this: "There's a lot here to communicate to the community." With a full statement of beliefs, "you will have challenges that you would not have if you had five."

A consensus emerged: The long version more truthfully represents the community's beliefs.

The discussion went on and on: shorter or longer, a slight rewrite or major overhaul.

And at times the board descended into details. Is the right word "can" or "should"? Should the statement refer to "all schools" or "every school"?

With a soft touch Mikuta scooped up the minutia for committees to resolve later.

Some of the exchanges, however, were far more fundamental. One reflected the tension between the board's role in shaping the community's aspirations, against its ability to make good on its commitments. Example: Will the district "close the achievement gap" or will it "eliminate the achievement gap"?

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The Make It Happen Campaign

Q: Are you through raising money now?

A: We have exceeded Goal 3, which was to raise \$6,000 by May 31 to survive into fall.

So we will now return to our quieter ways towards meeting Goal 2, which was \$55,000 to publish another year; and Goal 1, which was to endow this independent advocate for quality schools.

Our thanks to all participants in The Make It Happen Campaign.

You did, you are and you will!

To make a tax-deductible donation, send a check to The Swann Fellowship, 1510 E. 7th St., Charlotte, NC 28204. Or sign on to www.networkforgood.org, and use the keyword Swann Fellowship to make a secure donation.

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**Donations To Date:
\$7,488**

A stronger board

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Minority is heard

At-large board member Kaye McGarry continued to storm over use of the word “diverse” in the board’s proposed core beliefs.

“I just think we need to get over that,” she said. “Twenty years ago that may have been fine.” Today, “that just sticks us down.” Later, she put it this way: “It sticks us where we are at and not where we’re going.”

Mikusa suggested that a sub-committee look at keeping the thought “without using a word that is a trigger... that has no meaning or too much meaning.” That suggestion prompted a stern speech from Dunlap opposing “concerted efforts to take out words that some people aren’t comfortable with.”

What kind of change?

Getting a head start on a discussion to be continued in Utah in July, Mikuta led the board through some discussion of “theories of change.”

The Broad Foundation, which is paying for the school board’s exploration of these matters, appears to be promoting a theory based on central control of curriculum, but decentralized control of school operations. CMS has strong central control over both

Oh D.E.A.R. Day

NASCAR drivers start their engines. Charlotte Reads plans to ask folks to pick up their books and read.

The literacy advocate plans a Drop Everything And Read (D.E.A.R.) Day on Thursday, June 9 at noon at Founders Hall, 100 N. Tryon St.

For supplies for your own D.E.A.R. Day event or information about how to help people who can’t read now to be a part of next D.E.A.R. Day, contact Arden McLaughlin at Charlotte Reads at amclaughlin@charlottereads.org.

Eric Smith on test gap: ‘When is enough enough?’

Excerpts from The Capital newspaper in Annapolis, Md., in a profile of former CMS Supt. Eric Smith, who is completing the third year of a four-year contract as superintendent of Anne Arundel County schools. The profile credits Smith with rapid-fire reforms and rising test scores, but notes that only half of eighth-graders are proficient in reading:

“It’s terrible,’ Dr. Smith said. ‘It’s the definition of a school district, where you’re failing, where you’re missing out with some sub-group. That really defines the quality of a school system. We’re just missing the target still. These kinds of numbers simply have to change’....

“I wasn’t hired to move slow, I was hired to move fast.’...’

“If they want to fire me at the end of the year, go ahead, cut me loose,’ he said. ‘I guarantee there are places who want to take care of kids like (I do). I’d rather have that. We have a real keen ability to debate and discuss this forever. When is enough enough? If this community doesn’t want that, tell the board to take the appropriate action.’”

— www.hometownannapolis.com/cgi-bin/read/2005/05_22-35/TOP



Smith

spheres: mostly centralized budgeting and other controls over operations, along with the districtwide calendars for curriculum characteristic of “managed instruction.”

“Now we can finally talk about decentralization,” said District 1 member Larry Gauvreau, who supports a north Mecklenburg effort to deconsolidate CMS.

But CMS has already tried decentralization, piped up Associate Supt. Greg Clemmer. And it’s name was John Murphy.

In the period 1992-1996, Clemmer recalled, Supt. Murphy substantially dismantled the central office and dismissed 38 principals. Replacements were empowered to make schoolhouse decisions. “If you did not perform you were dismissed.”

“It was a disaster,” recalled District 4 member Louise Woods. “It was wonderful for teachers,” but a mess for students.

The black-white achievement gap was 40 points, she said. White students, who did better, did not do well, with only about 75% on grade level. Students moving from one school to another would confront totally different

textbooks. “It was really bad.”

Under Supt. Eric Smith, the pendulum swung back.

Mikuta said the July training would offer some case studies. But CMS staff and board members had case studies of their own on their mind.

Supt. Jim Pughsley said decisions on empowerment should be guided by the talent of the school-based staff, and the record of student achievement at the school. “You have to know what your talent is.”

Dunlap suggested staged movement from managed instruction based on competencies: “Allow 10 schools to do that, until we have 15-20 principals who can do that.”

At-large member Kit Cramer said that once a school achieved its academic goals, “more flexibility with budgets and staffing” ought to follow.

“Set criteria. As you meet it, move,” said Pughsley.

Incoming interim Supt. Frances Haithcock offered an example: High-poverty Highland Renaissance Elementary, like its peers in the Equity Plus or Focus category, was earlier under rigid

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A stronger board

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requirements for pacing of curriculum and mini-assessments to ensure achievement. Since the opening of the Craighead Road campus in fall 2001, Highland Renaissance has become an N.C. School of Distinction. With that, Haithcock said, came less focus on the constant testing built into the mini-assessment routine.

Can workers serve?

This is an election year, and those considering a run for office will pay close attention to a board discussion over whether it should schedule meetings during the workday.

The debate imperfectly splits five members who do not have regular work hours from four who hold down regular full-time jobs.

As of Wednesday, the board was holding to its two evening meeting slots on the second and fourth Tuesdays. Committee meetings that have exploded during Joe White's tenure as chairperson may be cut back. A third full-board time slot each month for use when necessary may fall into evening hours.

And White says he will experiment with holding closed-door sessions after board meetings, rather than in late afternoons. (Former chairperson Wilhelmenia Rembert moved closed sessions to the afternoon.)

"If you do closed sessions after a board meeting I will not attend," announced McGarry. Business dealt with in closed session "requires clear heads. With the composition [of the board] we have right now that won't work."

The first closed session to return to late evening, White said later, would be June 29. "That," he quipped, "will give me a chance to keep Dr. Pughsley late one more time. Pughsley retires June 30.

"I will not be there," McGarry advised.

DidYaHear?

✓ As he pulled a handful of call-back slips out of his pocket, Jim Pughsley sighed, "I know it's graduation season because I'm hearing from parents" about children who have yet to do what's required to walk across the stage. Mumbling something about "four years," the superintendent added in jest, "If you see me walking with resource officers all the time you'll know why!"

✓ Board member Molly Griffin limped through the Leadership Academy Wednesday morning after a Tuesday night fall involving her knee. The rainy weather was a godsend: a big umbrella made a fine makeshift cane. "If it's not feeling better tomorrow I'm going to the doctor," she said.

✓ Longtime CMS administrator Calvin Wallace hosted the school board out at the Leadership Academy, where Wallace spends most of his time nurturing principals. Changes in routine now keep new recruits in the Principals Academy for four years – a good thing, says Wallace, because the second year, not the first, "is when principals get in trouble." The first year is a honeymoon. Beginning with the second, parents and teachers and administrators expect delivery.

Wallace says he's concerned that high school principals have such short tenure – an average of three to four years, he says. But there's good reason why these leaders move on. "What are our objectives for high schools? Until we decide that" as a system, he says, turnover will remain high.

✓ Greg Clemmer, who will retire this fall from CMS after 35 or so years, loves to joke. But it looked like the serious wheels were turning as he recalled conversations with people now in their 30s and 40s who were at high schools where he served as principal, and now want him to run for school board. "Boss, you've got 80,000 votes and 40,000 are still here. Run at-large and you could clean out any one you wanted to."

"Not now," Clemmer mused. "Wait for change. Change."

Later in Wednesday's meeting, as board members wrangled over whether to update their 2005 goals before or after hiring a superintendent, Clemmer whispered, "We could have a whole new board" after the November election. Six of the nine seats will be on the ballot.

✓ From "Ways To Communicate The 2005-2006 Budget," attached to a May 23 CMS memo to "All Principals and Senior Staff Members":

– "Contact County Commissioners about the budget request and the needs within the district (BE SURE THAT CONTACT IS NOT MADE BY E-MAIL OR PHONE FROM SCHOOL)."

– Send intelligence to swannfello@aol.com

Back to the public

When wordsmithing on the mission and core beliefs statements is completed, possibly in July, board members plan to submit them to the public for more comment.

Ironically, the work may be finished just in time for six members, whose terms are ending, to run on the statements in the November election.

Grassroots group building support for education funding

Open letter from NCCARE, a Raleigh-based grassroots group, from the May edition of "From the Ground Up," a newsletter of the N.C. Justice Center's Education and Law Project:

In the Leandro case, Superior Court Judge Howard Manning ruled the state has the responsibility to provide every child with a sound basic education.

NCCARE – North Carolina Community Advocates for Revitalizing Education – is working to make sure the state fulfills that promise.

Right now, thousands of children in North Carolina do not have access to the quality education which is their right. Low-wealth districts cannot afford the salaries necessary to keep qualified teachers. Urban areas don't have the funds to educate at-risk children and those for whom English is a second language.

NCCARE is made up of parents, educators and community leaders, and it has two primary goals.

1. To reform our current system of school finance to make sure every district has adequate and equitable funding.

2. To eliminate the achievement gap.

To achieve these goals, the members of NCCARE are working at the grassroots level, meeting with parents and leaders in low-income and urban communities, informing them about their children's rights and teaching them to be advocates. NCCARE intends to build a powerful movement in these communities which will be able to demand that legislators provide the leadership and funding necessary to turn the promises of Leandro into reality.

We support House Bill 1745, which would do the following:

– Give low-wealth districts \$75 million over the next two years to

Why 'sound basic education' isn't a U.S. right

From "Leadership Insider: Practical Perspectives on School Law & Policy," published by the National School Boards Association's National Education Policy Network:

"In 1973, the Supreme Court in *San Antonio v. Rodriguez* shot down prospects of a federal remedy for school finance reform. The plaintiffs' suit sought protection under the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. In response, the Court held that education is not a fundamental right protected under the federal constitution. Plaintiffs must turn instead to their own states for remedies.

"Nevertheless, the Supreme Court has repeatedly recognized the importance of education. '[E]ducation is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments, ...' the high Court stated in the landmark case of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954. 'In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education.'

"The Court reaffirmed that belief in 1982, saying: '[T]he public schools [are] a most vital civic institution for the preservation of a democratic system of government ... In sum, education has a fundamental role in maintaining the fabric of our society.'

"Barring the unlikely reversal of *Rodriguez*, however, the only way a federal right to education will foreseeably arise is through congressional action. The No Child Left Behind Act may move us in that direction, but no court has recognized the statute as creating a federal right.

"Congress still might take action that gives rise to such a right, though. It might pass a bill that requires states to prove they adequately fund school systems on their own before they can receive federal education funds. No such law currently exists.

"Alternatively, Congress could pass the Student Bill of Rights that will be introduced this session by Rep. Chaka Fattah, D-Pa., in the House; a parallel bill will be introduced in the Senate by Sen. Chris Dodd, D-Ct. If passed, the bill would create a federal right to an adequate school system. As Fattah has said, 'States need to equalize their educational opportunities.'

"Fattah and Dodd first introduced the bill in 2002 and have been introducing it every session since. At the end of last session, it had more than 200 co-sponsors between the House and Senate. Only 3% of bills garner more than 100 House co-sponsors. Fattah has high hopes for this session, as he believes NCLB's testing requirements will generate a discussion about educational disparities."

– <http://www.nsba.org/site/docs/36000/35973.pdf>

enhance their instructional programs and student achievement.

– Put \$300 million into the Disadvantaged Student Supplemental Fund, which would go to school districts based on the number of disadvantaged students.

– Establish a commission to conduct a comprehensive study to determine the professional development, instructional strategies and financial resources needed to

achieve the goal of a Sound Basic Education for all North Carolina children. We hope we can count on your support as we work to educate our communities and advocate for our children.

NCCARE Executive Board:

Revondia Barrow (Beaufort);

Elizabeth Brown (Orange);

Margarita Machado-Casas (Durham)

NCCARE Hotline: 1-866-446-8398

Benevolent agitators

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drive parents to meetings.

“In order for parents to make a difference, they have to be empowered,” Ollivierre said. “One of the main things they need is knowledge.”

After one cycle of Parent Leadership Network, who can describe the content of the Standard Course of Study, which guides learning in N.C. classrooms? “Now I know 18 parents who can,” Ollivierre said.

Exposure to some educational research and testing data, Ollivierre said, gives parents “an understanding of how to go below the surface... and find what is it my school really needs.”

At bottom, Ollivierre said, the program focuses on “how do we make the school system work for us, and how do we work with the school system.” (For other skills taught in the network curriculum, see Page 11.)

After initial training, participants design projects for individual schools where they will work. The target school may be in their neighborhood, where they have children, or where they have some other connection.

At North Meck High, a huge student body has created a problem with senior exit exams, Ollivierre said. “There aren’t enough people to help. There just isn’t enough time.”

At West Charlotte High, a parent leader project is focusing on reviving parental involvement and “changing the image to bring it back to its glory days.” The project aims to link a mentoring adult to each student.

At Rama Road Elementary, added Byrd, parents recognized that the assignment plan had fundamentally altered the student body. “It is not the same school. What made them successful yesterday is not going to make them successful today.” The project is aimed at a new base of Hispanic parents. (Full list of projects, Page 9.)

Guiding principles

Guiding principles for the Parent Leadership Network:

- Meaningful school reform beyond today’s realities will not occur unless parents, teachers, principals, the community and businesses work together in new and different ways.
- Parents are held in higher esteem by educators when they are well informed about education issues and when they use educator’s language.
- Parent leaders must receive and understand school effectiveness information and must be equipped with new skills to become authentic participants in improving their schools and student achievement.
- Parents must receive ongoing, timely, effective support as they engage in improving their schools and the academic outcomes for all students in their schools.
- All parents can learn and parents learn best from each other in interactive learning environments.
- Learning is enhanced when individuals work with others with experiences and perspectives that differ from their own. Therefore PLN will seek racial, economic, geographic, education-level and gender diversity in each group of parents.
- Parent leaders are found in all neighborhoods, within all schools, within all faith-based and community organizations.
- Disengaged or under-involved parents can be engaged if the proper conditions exist. Therefore, PLN will reach out to historically under-involved parent leaders (e.g. low socio-economic status, minority, males, working parents) to involve them as partners in their child’s school.
- Parent leaders work for all children, not only their own children.

– Source: Charlotte Advocates for Education

Asked if parents would be advocating for curricular changes, Ollivierre said participants’ “role really isn’t to change the SCOS,” though parents can’t change what they don’t know even exists.

“They may find that they want to get involved with advocacy work to change it.”

Said Dr. Gyasi Foluke, the “core of the problem” in N.C. schools is that the N.C. curriculum fails to teach black children “their own history and culture.... While the things you are doing may be good, you need to get some people who can open your eyes about what’s not going on.”

Margaret Carnes, who directs the parent leadership program as managing director of Charlotte Advocates for Education, said the network “is a piece of the solution. It is not the total solution by

any means....

“A quality teacher in front of every child is the most critical piece.”

The network project is designed “to work with parents who want to be part of a process to make our schools better... and to be role models who bring other parents to the table.”

Added, Ollivierre, many parents don’t realize that the annual testing program is controlled by the state. To create parents ready to advocate for change, “our first task is to teach them how the schools work.”

Asked to define on whose behalf the parent leaders will be working in schools, Carnes pointed to the last of the program’s guiding principles (box, above).

“Leaders work for all children,

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Benevolent agitators

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not just for their children,” Carnes said. “It’s listed last, but it’s probably the first we insist on.”

Applications are being taken for the next cohort in the program. Applicants need not be leaders in schools now, Carnes said.

“But this is a program that is for people who are leaders, who have already demonstrated leadership characteristics. If they are not in that role... persistent, reaching out to others... then they’re not going to be very happy in the program.”

Asked how the program is different from other parent education groups, Carnes said most other groups want to make adults into “better parents to their children, which is really important.”

The network seeks to create “more parent leaders in the community that can reach out to parents and families that need help and support” and be the “friendly face that sees this from a parent’s perspective.

“The fact is that we are targeting a specific subset of parents in a structured approach to teach parents about school reform” and “helping them understand the N.C. Standard Course of Study.”

To reach that goal, “two years of coaching is critical.”

Asked if the network wouldn’t result in setting apart some parents from others, Carnes replied, “We are teaching these parents to be bilingual... forming a bridge between the parent community and teachers.”

One of the program’s guiding principles reads, “Parents are held in higher esteem by educators when they are well informed about education issues and when they use educator’s language.”

“I’m not saying it’s necessarily a good thing that unless parents are using that terminology” that they will not be respected, Carnes said. “But that’s a reality.”

Said Ollivierre, “It’s almost like

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Projects that Network grads are working on

Members of the first cohort of participants in the Parent Leadership Network have begun their projects at individual schools. Among them:

David Cox Elementary

Title: “Writing Works!” with Jordan Whitfield, Michelle Belt, Jonette Stanley.

“Exposing students to written communication in an exciting, educational way across the curriculum to help students become life-long communicators.”

Hidden Valley

Title: “Higher Reading Achievement” with Deloris McAfee.

“Increasing parent involvement, home/school relationships and student reading scores through a book discussion group for families.”

Idlewild Elementary

Title: “Play and Learn” with Beth Bailey.

“Effectively using recess to play organized games that involve physical exercise, multiple intelligences and integrated curriculum.”

Merry Oaks

Title: “Cultural Awareness” with Jay Ferguson and Reneisha Ferguson.

“An international week of activities (aligned with the curriculum) which allows families to share culture and language with the students, staff and families of Merry Oaks Elementary.”

North Mecklenburg High

Title: “Improving Senior Exit Projects” with Crystal Edwards.

“Improving Senior Exit Projects through scheduled checks, improved communication, better access to resources and timely intervention.”

Piedmont Middle

Title: “Communication for Student Achievement” with Cynthia Harrison.

“A program of activities to ensure middle school parents are

adequately informed of student progress, middle school curriculum and academic options.”

Rama Road Elementary

Title: “Rama Road Big 5” with Linda Lee Davis and Margaret Steitz.

“Re-focusing school mission and increasing authentic parent participation through a program of activities that inform parents of curriculum expectations and form home-school partnerships.”

Statesville Road Elementary

Title: “No Parent Left Behind” with Kim Graham.

“Helping LEP students and students with exceptionalities meet and exceed baseline NCLB standards.”

Sterling Elementary

Title: “Loving LEP” with Whitney Wertz.

“A program of activities to help Latino LEP students feel they are in a safe environment that celebrates Latino culture by infusing it seamlessly into school culture, instruction, and extra-curricular activities.”

Thomasboro Elementary

Title: “Increased Parent Participation” with Michelle Whitmore and Balencia Hart.

“Increasing student achievement through authentic parent participation by providing parents with a series of workshops, a lending library and student book exchange.”

West Charlotte High

Title: “Welcome to the Lion’s Den” with Leslie Davis and Ike Mason.

“Insuring students have an informed, involved adult in their lives to support their educational endeavors, while preparing mentor groups and the community to support West Charlotte’s students and overall vision for improved student achievement.”

Source: Charlotte Advocates for Education

Benevolent agitators

Continued from Page 9

being an ambassador, to bridge that gap between parents and teacher.” As they do their work, she said, parents will probably have occasion to “tear down those bridges and say to educators, ‘Make it plain.’”

Said parent educator Blanche Penn, “The concern that I have is that with so many groups out here... how can we partner together?... I don’t want CMS to decide that Parent Leadership Network is the only one out there. I don’t want the public to get false information.... Since you’ve got all the money, put us all together so we can be more powerful to reach all the parents.”

Carnes replied that she hoped that “through this process that every neighborhood and every community will have parent leaders that can reach out to parents that are more distant from where they should be.”

The network cannot meet the needs of all parents, Carnes said. “What we can see happening is creating parent leaders that then reach out to those in their circles. It will take time but that’s where we’re headed.”

Advocates for Education receives no tax dollars, Carnes said. Most of its regular funding is corporate money. The leadership project was launched with a grant from the Wachovia Foundation. Results of an application for continuation funding won’t be known until July.

“We don’t have lots of money, we really don’t. I wish we did. If we did we would be doing this a lot more often.”

To replace foundation funding for the long haul, Carnes said she was seeking \$3,000-per-parent partnerships from area businesses and faith communities. “We want to create ownership.”

The group’s five-year goal is to train 351 parent leaders.

Asked who identified appli-

Fall schedule for Parent Leadership Network

Interested parties should note that network training may require of working parents the investment of some vacation time:

June 30: Application deadline.

July 23-Aug. 2: Participant orientations.

Aug. 10-24: Principal contacts.

Sept. 30-Oct. 1: Session A, Hyatt Charlotte at SouthPark. Begins 8 a.m. Friday, ends 4 p.m. Saturday.

Oct. 21-22: Session B, Hyatt Charlotte at SouthPark. Begins 7:45 a.m. Friday, ends 3:30 p.m. Saturday.

Nov. 18-19: Session C, Hyatt Charlotte at SouthPark. Begins 7:45 a.m. Friday, ends 3:30 p.m. Saturday.

Jan. 22-28: Project review process.

Nov. ’05-Sept. ’07: Project design, planning, implementation, evaluation.

Nov. ’05-Forever: Parent Leadership Network.

Source: Charlotte Advocates for Education Parent Education Network

cants, Carnes said an advisory panel helped identify the first cohort. Some were identified by school principals.

And while parents must already be leaders, “this doesn’t mean necessarily that they are plugged into schools,” Carnes said. They may be leaders in a “community of faith, but you know that these are folks who lead others.”

Asked about her five-year plans, Carnes said Advocates had projected that, if each trained parent involved 10 new parents a year in network-spawned work, the program would touch 10,530 parents over five years.

“What we’re trying to do, for better or worse, is huge,” Carnes said. The goal is to create “a different kind of social norm in our community, of parents supporting each other and interacting with the school in whatever way they need to to make students succeed. It’s going to take time to do that.”

Foluke argued that “five years from now you’re still going to have the dead man’s gap” unless the community looks “at the system of white supremacy racism” perpetrated by the schools and their curriculum.

“Education is, at the very bottom, a public enterprise,” observer former Charlotte City Council

member Malachi Greene.

“The only way we are going to see fundamental change in the way education is delivered is through politics. The North Carolina General Assembly and its minions control what is taught and the way it is funded.

“In five years,” Greene told Carnes, “you will have created a group of citizens who can apply knowledgeably the kind of education reform that is so critical if this community is going to remain a good place to live.”

“I realize education is political,” Carnes replied. “I spent many years working with and against the political system.

“What I mean is that as we look at issues we feel we can have an impact on, we don’t choose based on political pressure. Nor do we choose our approach based on what Dr. Foluke or anyone else says... but on what the data tells us. That’s how we form our objectives. We are not owned by anyone, even though you may think otherwise.”

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More information on the Parent Leadership Network is available at www.theparentleadershipnetwork.org or from Charlotte Advocates for Education at 704-335-0100.

Inside the PLN: A summary of Class 1 this spring

Excerpts from a flyer published by the Parent Leadership Network describing the three sessions held for participants this spring.

Demographics

During March and April 2005, 18 parents from 12 diverse schools throughout CMS completed six days of sessions. These parents included:

- 3 fathers.
- 67% African Americans and 33% whites.
- 3 high school mothers and fathers, 1 middle school mother, and 14 elementary parents.
- Parents from both economically disadvantaged schools and schools with few economically disadvantaged students.

First session

The objective of the first session (two days of training) of the Parent Leadership Network was to lay a foundation for authentic participation by providing the Parent Leaders with information and resources. Participants received basic information needed to operate effectively as leaders in the schools they represent. The following workshops were presented:

– **How Do We Learn:** Parents were introduced to many of the different ways all of us adults and children learn.

– **Engaging Even the Hard To Reach Parents:** Parent Leaders developed strategies for overcoming barriers to parent involvement in schools.

– **N.C. School Reform:** One half-day was devoted to North Carolina school reform efforts, the rationale for standards-based reform, the North Carolina Standard Course of Study and the recent Leandro Case. Consultants from NCDPI [N.C. Department of Public Instruction] joined us.

– **Data, Data, and More Data:** Dr. Susan Agruso, Assistant Superintendent for Assessment, Planning and Technical Services for CMS, facilitated a discussion of the types of available data and the meaning behind the numbers.

Second session

The objective of the second session was for participants to develop the skills necessary for authentic participation. Through hands-on activities, parents increased their leadership capacity through activities geared towards facilitating groups, strategic planning, and recruiting other parents to support their efforts toward improving teaching and learning in schools. The following workshops were presented:

– **Disaggregated Data:** Parent Leaders compared the data of two schools, whose disaggregated data told a very different story than the one depicted when the data was examined as a whole. Parent Leaders discussed the implications of the disaggregated data.

– **School Improvement Planning:** This session explored the scope and functions of the School Leadership Team (SLT) as defined by the State of North Carolina and implemented by Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. A major function of the SLT is school improvement planning.

– **Creating an action plan:** Participants were introduced to a *Theory of Change* model, an effective tool for identifying required resources and expected results of efforts made toward improving a stated problem. From this Theory of Change, participants were introduced to tools designed to enable them to develop an action plan as well as an evaluation plan for their projects.

– **Involving all Parents:** Based on the research of Joyce Epstein, this workshop discussed proven strategies for recruiting parents to be involved in their children's education.

– **Behavioral Styles:** Each participant completed a behavioral styles inventory, based on how controlling or supportive, as well as how direct and indirect, he or she may be. After determining their particular style, participants compared characteristics of each behavior type, leadership approaches, and

how each performs under stress.

– **Question Formulation Technique (QFT):** Through a process of brainstorming and prioritizing questions, participants are able to get to the heart of a problem by determining which questions, if answered, would have the greatest impact. Parent Leaders had hands-on experience using QFT to explore questions that related to school attendance, the dropout rate, and teacher morale.

– **Enhancing Effectiveness:** Parent Leaders honed their group process skills by learning the tricks of the trade and reviewing the facilitator's tool kit in their materials.

– **Power and Authority:** Parent Leaders were informed they have both the power and authority to make a positive difference in teaching and learning in schools. They learned ways to use them effectively.

Third session

The objective of the third session was for Parent Leaders to use their new knowledge, experiences and skills to draft a project for their school.

Parent Leaders worked cooperatively to draft a project that meets three criteria: (1) improves student achievement, (2) involves more parents, and (3) creates conditions required for teachers to teach and students to learn. Included workshops were:

– **Meet the Models:** Parent Leaders were able to review actual model projects enabling them to understand elements of a good project and to see the value of good planning.

– **Project Design:** After reviewing model projects and brainstorming project ideas, Parent Leaders began designing their own projects using the tools provided.

– **Barriers to Leadership:** In one of the moving workshops, Mike Whitehead talked of his experiences and challenged each Parent Leader to break through personal history, fears and perceived barriers to perform effectively as leaders.

Briefly...

Academics first: Although some argue that No Child Left Behind requirements are unreasonable, most agree that the Act has caused educators to focus on narrowing the achievement gap between whites and minorities, the New York Times reported. Example: Before NCLB, the Cloquet, Minn., public schools' Indian Education program used class time for Native American students to sew beads on traditional costumes, leaving students behind in core subjects. NCLB refocused educators' attention on increasing the academic abilities of these students. Program director Vernon Zacher told the Times, "I couldn't have kids doing beadwork when they were reading two years below grade level."

www.nytimes.com

Small is better?: California lawmakers approved a bill restricting all school book purchases to those that are 200 pages or less, the Sacramento Bee reported. Supporters maintain that by concentrating information in textbooks and increasing appendices and online resource guides, children will be better able to use the Internet for learning. Opponents fear higher costs and argue that not all children have computer access at home.

www.sacbee.com

Military tie: High school officials are required to give out student address and phone information to military recruiters, Newsday told its readers. This requirement is a part of No Child Left Behind, but few parents appear to know it is occurring. Parents are allowed to "opt out" of giving this information to recruiters, but since few know it is an option, they do not take advantage of the provision. Some lawmakers concerned about privacy issues would prefer that parents "opt in" instead.

www.newsday.com

Calendar

JUNE

- 3 Equity Committee, 8 a.m., Board Room.
- 13 School board's Policy Committee, 3:15 p.m., Room 414, Education Center.
- 14 School board meets, 6 p.m., Government Center Meeting Chamber.
- 15 School board's Safety Committee, 3:15 p.m., Room 414, Education Center.
- 16 School board's Personnel Committee, 2 p.m., Room 414, Education Center.
- 16 Finance, Capital & Facilities Committee, 4 p.m., Board Conference Room, Education Center.
- 26-July 1 or July 31-Aug. 5 "Anytown Summer Leadership Program"¹
for high school students, first week at Blowing Rock Assembly Grounds, Boone; second week at Kanuga, Hendersonville. Fee of \$350 includes transportation; financial aid available. Information: Alex Wagaman at 704-334-0053 or awagaman@nccj.org
- 28 School board's Curriculum Committee, 3 p.m., Room 414, Education Center.
- 29 School board meets, 6 p.m., Government Center (Moved from June 28).

JULY

- 10-14 "Bring It On: Rising to Meet the Challenge of High School," an NCCJ residential summer program for rising ninth-graders, held at The Summit at Browns Summit, N.C. Register by June 10. Fee of \$300 includes transportation; financial aid available. Information: Alex Wagaman at 704-334-0053 or awagaman@nccj.org
- 20 School board meets, 6 p.m., Government Center (Moved from July 26).

Big gains: In New York's District 9, the Bronx, 47.6% of fourth-graders passed their end-of-grade tests, the New York Times reported. Low, perhaps, but a 56% increase over last year year for a district where only 17.1% were passing six years ago. Educators cited cooperation between schools, teachers and parents as well as increased teacher training for the gains.

www.nytimes.com

Caffeine and behavior: According to a study by the Smell & Taste Treatment and Research Foundation in Chicago, first-graders who drank caffeine in, say, sodas before school were more than four times as likely to demonstrate behavior problems than children who did not drink caffeine. The Atlanta Journal-

Constitution reported that even in small amounts, caffeine inhibits concentration and increases energy levels in young children.

www.ajc.com

NAEP at 12th: An independent commission studying testing among high school seniors recommended that all 12th-grade students should be required to take the National Assessment of Educational Progress, Education Week reported. Currently, the test is limited and conducted as a national sample, but there is concern over participation rates. The participation rate for seniors is about 55%, down from 65% in 2000. The board that sets policy for the tests is worried about how decreasing participation will affect the credibility of the test.

www.edweek.org