

What not to ask of a Super

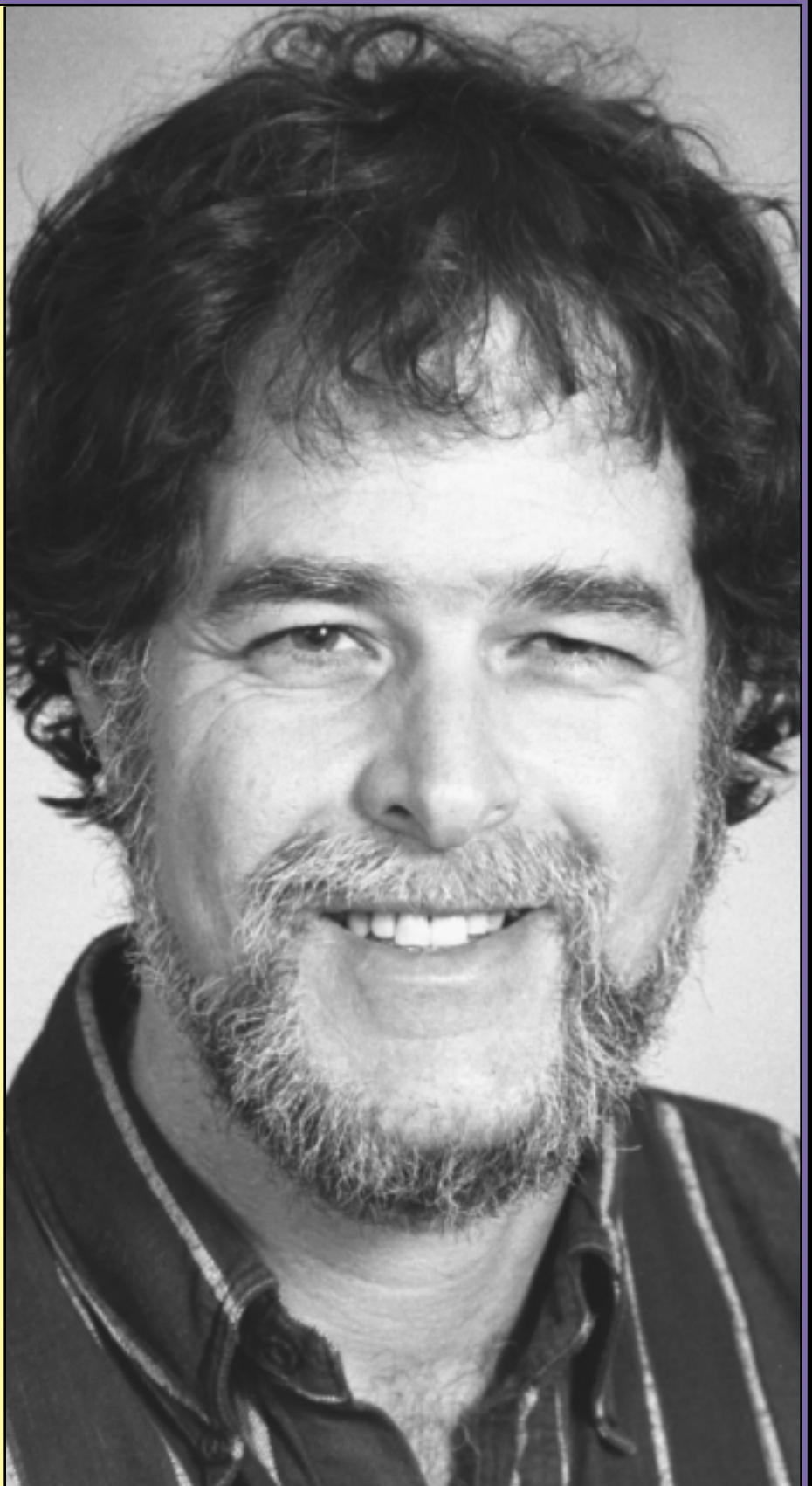
Teacher of teachers suggests how the community can get what it really wants

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My kids' homework leaves me stumped; how do I help?

My kids are only in middle school, but already they have homework I don't understand and can't help them with. Where can I turn, without going back to middle school myself?

Homework is harder and harder each year for parents and kids alike. I would advise you to speak with the teacher on tips to help your child with the homework.

Are there others in the household who can help? There is a homework hotline with most school systems where the child can call in with questions. The phone is answered by a teacher or other person considered a subject expert.

If you are computer-savvy, there may be easy tutorials out there to



Ask Tracy

help explain the subject that is proving difficult to teach your child.

Tutors may be available at a nominal cost, or they may be free through the school system.

Is there a college nearby that offers early childhood education? Some of the students majoring in education might be willing to help tutor your child. This could be a win/win situation because it will help the teaching students know what issues they may face in the classroom – and your child will get necessary help with a subject.

What do you think helped you the most to succeed in elementary school?

My parents were a strong part of my education. If I did wrong, there was discipline. Not physical discipline, but privileges taken away. I could not do fun things when I had a bad report. My grades were always good but I did like to talk in class. My talking in class was reported to my parents by my teacher.

Also, I had older siblings that helped me in class.

My mom, especially, knew my teachers and that was a partnership that was strong from the beginning of the school year and beyond.

Tracy Morris, a Winston-Salem native, works for an insurance company in Charlotte and has volunteered in several CMS schools. Write her with your questions at swannfello@aol.com.

Let's focus on skill base of all children

I was profoundly disappointed by the lead article in the Aug. 26 edition of *Educate!*

In Dr. Foluke's article, he fails to address adequately how disadvantaged children can be helped to move to the next level. Focus on allegations that teachers are "most often racially biased, at least subconsciously" and that quality teachers are "generally non-existent within CMS, if they have not learned Black heritage-culture" doesn't address this.

Cultural consciousness is valuable – on both sides of the street. However, reality says that economic success must come first. Economic success is not something that can be handed to someone – it has to be earned. Unless disadvantaged children are given the skills and tools to make that happen, they will be condemned to abject poverty for another generation (and another, and another...) until they do receive them.

These are not "white" or "black" skills – they are universal and realistic requirements to survive and thrive:

1. The ability to think critically

From Readers

and develop conclusions based on fact.

2. The ability to communicate with others in the community and represent oneself as competent. In this community and in the rest of the United States, this requires a command of standard American English grammar and usage.

3. The ability to understand and apply basic mathematics.

4. The ability to understand and apply principles of economics.

5. A basic work ethic – honesty, punctuality, and effort.

These are NOT culturally-limited skills. They are the basis for success in every culture in the world. This skill base is the first place the schools need to focus their efforts. Enlightened members of this community, black and white alike, need to promote this focus as the first priority of the schools. Success in every area – from test scores to the diminution of poverty – will inevitably follow.

David Yarbrough

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What NOT to ask of next superintendent

By JEFF PASSE

When Charlotte-Mecklenburg prepares to select a new superintendent, there will be hearings to solicit the qualities that the public seeks in its school leader. The search committee will produce a document in which all of the criteria will be identified. This document, which may accurately be called a “wish list,” will describe some sort of superhero that will meet everyone’s demands.

Of course, any future administrator that fulfills even a majority of those wished-for criteria will cost us a lot of money. And we will gladly pay, only to become disappointed when the new superintendent turns out to be something less than a superhero.

I would like to save the public from some of that potential heartbreak by offering an idea that would benefit thousands of children:

Don’t ask the superintendent to raise test scores.

Let’s ask for improvements in attendance, behavior, school spirit, and parental satisfaction. Demand safety, fiscal responsibility, and efficient management. Just don’t ask for something that perverts the educational process.

Our previous superintendents have found themselves in a pickle when they realized that they would be judged by test scores, rather than by the quality of education being offered. There is a big difference!

The tests only measure a fraction of the district’s curricular goals, and then only the ones that are most easily measured.

The tests don’t measure the qualities that educators work so hard to instill – love of learning, a desire to read, in-depth problem solving skills, confidence, and social skills, among others.

(One may argue that higher test scores would indirectly reflect those achievements, but only if the exams measured higher-level thinking.)

The author

Jeff Passe has since 1986 been a faculty member in the UNCC Department of Reading and Elementary Education. A consultant to charter schools locally and to the State Department of Public Instruction, he is a former recipient of the UNCC College of Education’s Faculty Award for Sustained Service to Public Schools.

The promise to improve test scores forces superintendents to focus on short-term goals, using curricular materials that would never be chosen for any reason other than improvements in minimum competency.

The over-emphasis on test scores seeps from the superintendent’s office into the schools, where principals pressure their teachers to forget about the rest of the curriculum. The only thing that matters is the numbers! Most administrators go along with this exercise because jobs are at stake.

At the teacher level, when there are more jobs than there are candidates, the threat of being fired is replaced by the potential loss of a financial bonus. Hundreds of teachers, most of whom did not enter the profession for the money, somehow succumb to the bribe. All of this occurs because increasing test scores has become the only criterion for judgment.

Fortunately, there are still teachers in CMS who teach the entire curriculum for the right reasons. They believe that a quality education will result in higher test scores because the minimum competency goals will be met on the way to achieving higher-level goals.

I hear from those teachers all the time. They either resist the pressure from overzealous administrators or are given a free rein

by principals who can recognize quality professionals. I also hear from good teachers who fled to private schools, other counties, or left the profession altogether.

Wouldn’t it be nice to keep those teachers? And it would be even better to persuade the ones we’ve lost to come back.

We can keep excellent teachers in our schools if we hire a superintendent without a demand to raise scores on high-stakes tests. There are award-winning superintendents all over the country who have restored the arts, run tight fiscal operations, addressed the needs of students in poverty, and retained their systems’ best teachers. Many would take the CMS job because they would be excited to work for a system that understands educational priorities.

Assuming that stance demands political courage by school board members. It asks them to honestly admit that high-stakes tests are limited measures of achievement, and that they are hurting children. It requires honest leadership to tell the public that the testing emperor has no clothes.

My experience tells me that legions of parents already support that stance, and many others can be convinced. CMS can return to the cutting-edge by standing up against NCLB and against North Carolina’s minimum competency mindset.

The first step in that courageous struggle will be to hire a superintendent who does not confuse test scores for learning.



Passe

Briefly...

Selling on eBay: Schools are coming up with new and inventive ways to get rid of excess supplies and earn money for their schools, the Boston Globe reported. Pembroke, Mass., schools, along with others around the country, have turned to eBay to sell their excess inventory. Recent sales include \$2,000 for an outdated printing press.

www.bostonglobe.com

Getting active: Researchers at the University of South Carolina-Columbia found that girls who participated in gym classes such as single-sex aerobics classes were more energetic and exhibited higher energy levels than those who attended traditional gym classes with group sports such as basketball, Education Week reported. The study, conducted with high school students, found that 45% of the girls-only group reported daily vigorous activity, while 36% in the traditional classes did. Research director Russell Pate said girls are often self-conscious and have different sports interests than boys.

www.edweek.org

Meeting No Child: High turnover in schools often makes it difficult to meet No Child Left Behind requirements, the Washington Post reported. Some schools are more prone to high student turnover than others due to large immigrant populations. As student success on end-of-

Changing the world, one child at a time

Scott Martelle, in a Los Angeles Times interview with Jonathan Kozol, 68, author and longtime critic of American public education:

"I do feel heartsick that the inequalities, if anything, are worse today than they were when I wrote 'Savage Inequalities,' and that segregation is now back at the point where it was when I published my first book," Kozol says. Yet he remains optimistic, believing a political movement will rise to fix the system he has been railing against for most of his professional career.

"I write books to change the world. Perhaps I can only change one little piece of that world," Kozol says. "But if I can empower teachers and good citizens to give these children, who are the poorest of the poor, the same opportunity we give our own kids, then I'll feel my life has been worth it."

— www.latimes.com

grade tests relies in part on what students learned the previous year, it is often difficult to bring students to proficiency within the year allowed by NCLB.

www.washingtonpost.com

More K-12 donations:

Traditionally, colleges have received much more private funding than elementary schools, the New York Times reported. But that pattern has been changing. Private donors, in an effort to decrease dropouts and increase achievement levels, have been giving more to K-12 schools than to colleges. In 2003, private donors gave \$1.23 billion in grants to K-12 schools and about \$1.1 billion to colleges. Five years earlier, elementary and secondary schools only received about \$620 million, while college grants were about the same.

www.nytimes.com

Calendar

SEPTEMBER

10 School board huddles with Broad Institute consultant, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., Leadership Academy.

15 Supt. Frances Haithcock on "State of the School System and How the Faith Community Can Partner with the Public School System," Mecklenburg Ministries' lunch, noon Covenant Presbyterian, 1000 E. Morehead St. \$5.50 by reservation at 704-347-2404 by Sept. 9. Or bring your own lunch.

28 Wake Education Partnership annual meeting, 7:30 a.m., Embassy Suites Hotel, Cary. Info: Fran Caruthers 919-821-7609 ext 30 or fcarruthers@wakeedpartnership.org

Double your money for classroom projects

DonorsChoose was recognized with the Amazon Nonprofit Innovation Award this summer. The top prize: A dollar-for-dollar match of money raised through Sept. 30 to the group that raises more than nine other finalists.

DonorsChoose has directed

\$67,000 toward CMS as individuals agreed to finance projects proposed by teachers. Donations from the Charlotte community will go back to CMS projects.

Further information on how to make a donation is available at donorschoose.org.

