

**SECOND ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CMS EQUITY REPORT
TO THE CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG BOARD OF EDUCATION**

FEBRUARY 2004

I. INTRODUCTION

Your Equity Committee adheres to the vision we shared with you in February 2003. We fear, however, that we are a long way from achieving that vision of a new family coming to Charlotte-Mecklenburg and being assured that “it does not matter in what part of our City or County any new residents reside or purchase a home because consistently excellent educational opportunities are provided throughout our community.” From what we have learned and observed over the past year, excellent educational opportunities do abound in our school system. They are not, however, uniform – or even close to uniform – in their availability throughout Charlotte-Mecklenburg. In some ways, we also fear that this Board’s, and our community’s, commitment to equity may be waning.

In this year’s Report, we hope to accomplish several tasks. First, we want to summarize for you what we have done this past year to learn about equity, particularly our series of school tours. Second, we want to share with you our current “working definition” of equity and remind you of the breadth and scope of what real equity requires. Third, we want to remind this Board and our entire community of the need for recommitment to the importance of equity in the face of many pressures for the use of our community’s educational resources. Fourth, we want to provide you with some specific discussion as to how CMS is doing on progressing toward equity in a variety of categories from bricks and mortar for buildings to instructional resources in the classroom to administration and faculty and even to discipline in the schools where our children need to learn. Fifth, we want to provide some specific recommendations on how you and CMS could do better in providing and budgeting for equity, as well as in tracking the provision of equity and communicating it to our community.

Our task remains to “help the Board [of Education] to facilitate an annual analysis of its efforts to provide equal access to excellent educational opportunities for all of its students in all of its schools.” We liken our role in some ways to that of a brass band. We want to be able to trumpet successes in the area of equity, but we also want to be able to raise a loud enough noise to sound an alarm when we see a problem or believe that this Board is veering off track. We urge you to consider this Report more as a clanging cymbal of an alarm than a ringing affirmation that equity has been achieved or is close at hand. We believe that CMS is in a crucial time, and we urge this Board to have the resolve to stick to the long and admittedly costly track toward equity. To deviate from that path now poses the real risk that we will fall further behind and never catch up on providing equity for all children.

II. CMS EQUITY COMMITTEE’S ACTIVITIES THIS PAST YEAR

Your Equity Committee has spent a considerable amount of time becoming educated on the many issues that influence CMS’s ability to provide equity for all children. Dr. Pughsley and members of his staff, particularly our liaison, Rahman Khan, have been very cooperative in providing information and assistance relative to our course of study on equity issues.

Over the past year, we have had a variety of speakers attend our regular monthly meetings. Sheila Shirley spent significant time talking to us about the budget and the equity initiative template necessary for our understanding of the budget process. Dr. Frances Haithcock, Dr. Eric Becoats, and Mr. Howard Haworth educated us on the impact of curriculum, student assignment, and the promise and peril of relying on testing in realizing the provision of equity in every school. Dr. Barbara Jenkins talked to us about the importance of quality teachers in the equity process. Dr. John Fries provided us insights on the links between the CMS Central Office and the schools themselves. Mr. Guy Chamberlain provided us with significant information on two different occasions about the various capital needs of CMS and the importance of physical surroundings in each child's learning process. Also we met during the year with Mr. Lewis Guignard of the Citizen's Budget Advisory Committee and County Commissioner Dumont Clark to attempt to understand the competing needs and demands of Mecklenburg County's budget process.

In addition to these meetings, your Equity Committee also spent a considerable amount of time "in the field" visiting and touring both *EquityPlusII* schools and non-*EquityPlusII* schools. As we will describe in more detail below, members of our Committee visited and toured eight different schools in addition to schools where each of us regularly are active. We prepared our own "tour template" or checklist to attempt to insure that we considered the same types of issues and looked for same types of resources (or their absence) at each of the schools we visited.

We also spent a fair bit of the past year simply reading, listening, and talking amongst ourselves. In particular, we recently spent time reviewing CMS's January 2004 Status Report on "Achieving the CMS Vision: Equity & Student Success." We also have reviewed and read material from a variety of other sources, including the National Center for Education Statistics, CMS's website, the *Charlotte Observer*, and the *Educate!* newsletter of the Swann Fellowship, among other materials.

Finally, we also adopted our own attendance policy in the face of some Committee members simply not participating and not allowing our Committee to work at full strength. Essentially, we agreed to monitor ourselves and to commit to attending at least two-thirds of our regular meetings and not to miss two consecutive meetings. We urge the Board to adopt a policy for all of its appointed committees and require at least these levels of attendance as well as real consequences (such as removal from a committee in appropriate circumstances) for not complying with the policy.

III. OUR CURRENT WORKING DEFINITION OF EQUITY

Your Equity Committee's working definition of equity continues to be the following:

Equity is the condition in which each student is able to realize his/her full potential for academic achievement, individual performance, and personal success. Equity requires an ongoing process to allocate resources to each school so that each student has access to rigorous academic challenges and an environment that promotes high expectations. An equal allocation of baseline resources is the first step toward equity, but equity requires much

more. Equity requires a differentiation of resources among all schools to enable every school to meet the unique needs of each student.

To be clear, our Committee believes – and our entire community needs to understand – that equity does not mean “equal.” Equity also is not merely a *quid pro quo* with some segments of our community in exchange for a certain student assignment plan. Equity also is not limited to just a specified list of “extra” resources available at certain schools that meet certain criteria. Equity is nothing less than the fair distribution of resources to our schools. What is necessary for one school may not be necessary for another school. Some schools and students are needier than others, and these schools and students simply need more support. On the other hand, equity does not mean that because some schools need more and get more in terms of resources then there should be schools – or students – that are overlooked. Equity means being fair to all of our schools and children, and our community’s challenge is to achieve a fair balance of our limited educational resources.

IV. THE NEED FOR A RE-COMMITMENT TO THE IMPORTANCE OF EQUITY

Your Equity Committee unanimously agrees that equity is an educational imperative for CMS. We believe that equity is the key to providing an excellent education for every child. We must never abandon the efforts that already have been made (such as in renovating schools in our City’s inner core and providing differentiated staffing in schools addressing particular challenges), and we must strive to make a greater impact. We are aware of the organized pressure and voices echoing from different parts of our community that would diminish the importance of equity, or sacrifice its achievement to address other needs, or “cap” the resources needed to achieve it, or so radically redefine the term “equity” to make it meaningless. In such an atmosphere, we believe this Board – and each of you – must commit or re-commit to the importance of equity.

Promises have been made to give every child a fair and excellent education. What good is a promise if this Board (and/or the Board of County Commissioners and/or the General Assembly that provide educational funds) block, impede, or even tear up the pathways to reach that goal? We believe equity is the pathway. If equity is not a priority, we fear more EquityPlusII schools, fewer resources available to meet EquityPlusII needs, and the steady worsening of areas and segments within our community that already have too high concentrations of poverty, drugs, and crime, and not enough concentrations of hope and opportunity. Environments that drain hope and opportunity, as well as environments that foster frustration, despair, drugs, and crime, are inevitable if equity is abandoned or crippled. Schools alone cannot create more positive environments or neighborhoods, but schools with equitable resources can galvanize communities, draw parents into their children’s educations, promote achievement, and increase spirit, pride, and opportunity. If equity is short-changed or put on life support, then growth, progress, and higher student achievement will be only a dream and never become a reality for too many of our current and future students. Without such growth, progress, and achievement, the schisms within Charlotte/Mecklenburg only will widen.

Your Equity Committee wants this Board to operate under a sense of urgency to re-commit itself and properly prioritize equity within CMS. We appreciate the challenges today’s environment poses in the forms of both shifting political criteria on local, state, and federal

levels as well as growing needs in many areas with which sources of funding have not kept pace. We fear, however, that without your leadership in a crucial time, equity will be placed on the “back burner” if not actually taken off the stove and thrown out with the trash. Our community needs your leadership to promote a civil dialogue, a shared vision of how equity can be achieved, and ultimately the needed “buy-in” from across the spectrum of the Charlotte/Mecklenburg community to achieve that vision. We fear the growing schism – and the proximity of a yawning chasm out of which we may never climb – between both “have” and “have not” segments of our population and the “have” and “have not” schools their children attend. We implore you to rally and lead our community away from that chasm and its threat to separate our community even further and drag our “premier urban school system” into a chaos of mediocrity, division, and sub-standard status that afflict so many other school systems in urban centers across our country. Based on what your Equity Committee observes, the time is now to commit, re-commit, and do the work necessary for CMS and Charlotte/Mecklenburg to avoid such a fate.

V. HOW CMS IS DOING ON MOVING TOWARD EQUITY

How is CMS doing in moving toward equity? In a word, slowly. We commend CMS for moving toward equity, but the pace is slow and the progress uneven. In some areas, including, for example, Equity*Plus*II categories of quality of faculty, EC instructional materials, and even physical facilities, movement toward equity seems to be stagnating. At some schools, the process toward equity appears to have reversed as different populations leave certain schools, and some schools’ resources are unable to stem the exodus or adequately teach all of the student population that remains. As will be described more fully in Section VI below, your Equity Committee supports more funding for various equity initiatives so equity goals can be reached sooner.

A key component of our assessment of CMS’s slow push toward equity has been a series of school tours. We have attempted to examine and verify data and trends that both contribute to and undercut equity. Specifically, small groups of Committee members visited eight CMS facilities. We used a “tour template” to compare a variety of factors at each school; we interviewed a variety of administration, faculty, parents, and/or students at the schools; we ultimately prepared reports shared among Committee members. The list of schools visited and brief excerpts from our reports are below:

- **First Ward Elementary:** An Equity*Plus*II and Title I school in a brand new physical facility with a talented, experienced principal who excels at recruiting a strong faculty. The contrast between the “old” building and the “new” is bold, but there are still physical problems without enough recreation space, parking, or even room to evacuate all of the students during a fire drill. What parent leadership is active is strong, but the group is small. Diversity of many types is lacking. EOG scores are generally quite strong, although there are some groups within some grades that still lag.
- **McKee Road Elementary:** A very strong school with a stable, deep faculty and administration, but it is a myth that an active PTA simply can overcome every physical need with a fundraiser. This school works as well as it does despite its cramped facility and heavy use of trailers, not because of any superbly appointed

and maintained facilities. EOG scores are impressive, but concerns exist about the effect of too much crowding, particularly because the school's recreation facilities, computer lab, meeting space, art room, and especially its music room (or lack thereof) are simply inadequate for the needs of the large number of academically accomplished students.

- **Selwyn Elementary:** At first glance, Selwyn has what too many CMS schools still lack – an impressive combination of a gleaming new facility; an able principal and stable faculty with varying degrees of experience; an active and successful PTA; strong community support; and impressive EOG test scores. Closer examination reveals more subtle equity problems like a facility already growing too small and not built with enough actual “educator input” to make the structure as useful as it could be. Concerns also exist about the ready availability of classroom basics like paper supplies.
- **Thomasboro Elementary:** Thomasboro is an excellent example of what can be accomplished in bringing to bear an outstanding principal, a modern facility, numerous community and corporate partnerships, and *EquityPlusII* and Title I resources. EOG results for the over 90% FRL student population are not as high as they could be, but the gains are striking and the grade level percentages are climbing. Even with lower-than-system-wide averages in families with income above \$25,000, students living with two parents, and mothers with some college or technical school, Thomasboro decisively beats the system-wide-average for “parents volunteering at their child’s school at least once during the year.” Innovations like the “Thomasboro Family Almanac” for acclimating parents to what goes on at school during the year should be replicated system-wide.
- **Wilson Middle:** An *EquityPlusII* school, Wilson has a small, dedicated group of involved parents and in the main students willing to learn, but there also exists a small group of students that disrupts the learning process at every opportunity. This stress places undue pressure on staff and faculty as they work to promote student achievement (which lags behind CMS averages) and contributes to too much teacher turnover and a faculty consisting of too many newer teachers than is optimal. A fifty-year-old physical plant badly in need of renovations/repairs exacerbates the problems and hinders the progress being made.
- **Davidson IB Middle:** Davidson IB occupies a unique niche within CMS. Everyone agrees that the physical facility is beyond deplorable, but families chose to send their children there to benefit from the IB program, a strong faculty, and geographical proximity while a new elementary school is built that eventually will house the IB program. Even with this unique situation, some inequities cry out to be corrected. New computers need to be supplemented with adequate wiring and software. Some basic outside storage units would save precious space within the cramped building, and a few fans this spring could help cool temperatures in a lot of ways. Davidson IB also demonstrates how some flexibility in spending can help address equity needs, specifically by allowing the school to spend library money on

books it wants and needs, not on a security system to protect the inadequate collection it has.

- **Olympic High:** An *EquityPlusII* school, the administration here stresses – and your Equity Committee agrees – that the most important factor in school success is human resources, faculty and staff. Olympic has gotten more creative in using a variety of approaches, including how it allocates its faculty slots to particular desired functions, to increase teacher retention. Physical resources, particularly in science and computer resources are quite good, but concern exists over crowding and how capacity is calculated based on some rooms at Olympic that really are not adequate as high school classrooms. Concern also exists at Olympic about whether progress will continue once Olympic lifts itself out of *EquityPlusII* status and loses many of the resources that has enabled it improve academic achievement.
- **East Mecklenburg High:** East Meck exemplifies many of the challenges CMS confronts. East Meck’s student population mirrors CMS’s overall demographics, and the school achieves outstanding results, for example in the form of SAT scores above CMS and national averages, but not enough folks seem to care. As East Meck’s “minority” population trends upward to become a majority within the school, perception appears to be – despite actual evidence so far to the contrary – that the academic achievement goals cannot be maintained, and “bright flight” sends families to other school options, thus perpetuating the perception problem. In terms of physical resources, East Meck appears adequate in all areas and more than adequate in most. Its administration and faculty are exceptionally strong, and your Equity Committee encourages lunch at “Feathers,” the in-school restaurant run by East Meck’s culinary classes, whenever possible.

This Board, and the larger Charlotte/Mecklenburg community, should be pleased that what we observed in the schools tracks the data compiled by CMS in reports like the January 2004 Status Report on “Achieving the CMS Vision: Equity & Student Success.” For example, the “*EquityPlusII* Status Report/January 2004,” with its helpful format (more on that below), states that Wilson Middle is the only *EquityPlusII* school with physical facilities “not meeting expectations” in CMS, and we agree with that assessment. We also wonder why Wilson Middle has been in this situation for at least the last two years and nothing is being done about it. On the more positive side, we also agree that, for example, Thomasboro and First Ward are meeting expectations or improving in all of the categories tracked. That type of confirmation suggests that CMS is accurately gathering and reporting data, and we applaud that kind of progress.

Looking at the “Achieving the CMS Vision: Equity & Student Success” measures as a whole, we see some good, but we see far more equity issues that still need to be addressed. In *EquityPlusII* schools, high levels of support in technology systems, AV equipment, instructional programs, textbooks, and teacher/student ratios and staffing are good. Particularly from 2002-03 to 2003-04, significant progress has been made in instructional materials and co-curricular activities. We are not as pleased with the need for more improvements in facilities and media center resources. We are quite frankly disappointed in the lack of progress – and in too many

instances the losing of ground – in providing EC instructional materials and in meeting criteria for experienced and highly-credentialed faculties.

Other glaring inequities exist in non-Equity*Plus*II schools. Although we applaud progress in bringing more of our facilities to baseline standard as of December 2003, with now 47 (or 32%) meeting the baseline standards set in 2001 and another seven anticipated to get there by December 2004, we are disappointed with a state of affairs that leaves 99 schools as of now below the agreed-upon baseline level of where they need to be just in terms of bricks and mortar.

Similarly, we both applaud and are disappointed by the “student success” side as detailed in the January 2004 “Achieving the CMS Vision: Equity & Student Success” volume. CMS is “meeting expectations” or “improving” in a lot of categories, but CMS struggles to meet its achievement goals in too many areas, particularly at the high school level. CMS is not seeing the gains in achievement it needs to see across the board to be “equitable.” Your Equity Committee does not want anyone to lose sight of the fact that the overarching point of providing equity is to enable all students to realize their full potential in achieving academic success. If academic success is not being accomplished then it ultimately matters little how we have moved resources around. Your Equity Committee also hopes that its 2005 Equity Report can link specific equity spending to academic performance and highlight how equity spending results in improved academic performance in more than just the discrete examples above of schools that have been toured or visited.

Overall, your Equity Committee wants to make clear that we trumpet the progress being made because of the Equity*Plus*II template for high-poverty and/or lower-achieving schools. Based on our observations, we believe that additional Equity*Plus*II resources can play a significant role in improving a school’s performance. Although we want to study the Equity*Plus*II model in more specific detail, our impression is that this approach works as far as it goes, and it can do much to alleviate perceived and actual inequities in schools. We encourage the Board not only to continue with this model, but we urge you to expand it. Specifically, we make two suggestions.

First, we encourage either a broadening of the Equity*Plus*II standards or the specific recognition of another category of schools “trending toward” or “teetering near” Equity*Plus*II status. Providing resources earlier to a school to enable it to avoid becoming Equity*Plus*II would seem to benefit the school in the short term (hopefully by avoiding further population shifts or lowering of achievement) as well as conserve resources over the longer term, given the expense of providing full-fledged Equity*Plus*II resources over time.

Second, we encourage the Board to consider phasing out Equity*Plus*II resources more gradually once a school emerges from Equity*Plus*II status. Our concern is that schools not “relapse” once they have built successful educational programs because the financial underpinnings of that success are taken away too quickly. At this stage, we cannot make specific suggestions for an appropriate formula or schedule for cutting back resources over a limited window, but we urge the Board to consider such an approach of extra resources being provided for some period of time so schools do not slide back into becoming an Equity*Plus*II school all over again. Your Equity Committee wants to express to this Board in the strongest possible terms that it maintain its focus on high poverty and low performing schools through the Equity*Plus*II model.

Achieving equity certainly involves more than just addressing needs in high poverty and low performing schools, but equity certainly cannot be achieved if such needs are not met and the ultimate goal of having as few *EquityPlusII* schools as possible is not achieved.

Finally, your Equity Committee believes CMS is doing better in reporting progress toward equity in “reader-friendly” documents, although much more remains to be done in this area as well. We commend CMS on the format of the “*EquityPlusII* Status Report/January 2004” with its columns of “dashboard indicator” information for multiple years for easy comparisons. We suggested such approaches in the past, and we appreciate you and CMS staff for responding. Now, we suggest you do similar reports for non-*EquityPlusII* schools as well. Instead of such a report in chart format for just approximately 50 schools, provide us and the Charlotte/Mecklenburg community with such a report for all approximately 150 schools.

VI. OUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DOING BETTER ON EQUITY

Based on our observations and understandings, the Equity Committee believes that some portions of CMS’s budget can impact and promote equity more than others. Some of these expenditures occur in the capital budget, and others are part of the annual operating budget. As the Board determines its spending priorities, we urge you to prioritize spending so that as much money as possible flows toward programs and plans that address the following issues:

- Leadership Training/Development for School Administrators. As a Committee, we increasingly are convinced that the quality of a school is in large part determined by its teaching faculty and the quality of that teaching faculty is in large part determined by the quality of the principal and assistant principals running the school. We believe that CMS should spend time and effort identifying the leadership criteria that successful principals and other administrators have in common in our school system. A useful tool in this regard could be the Charlotte Advocates for Education recent study on the “Role of Principal Leadership In Increasing Teacher Retention: Creating a Supporting Environment.” CMS should not just rely on academic credentials, as important as these may be for academic leaders, but focus instead on attempting to list and quantify traits and characteristics that successful principals and administrators share, particularly in *EquityPlusII* schools.
- Attracting and Retaining Quality Faculty. As we stressed last year, equitable opportunities for excellence in education require equitable access to high quality teachers. As much as CMS can do to attract and keep good teachers should be done. In particular, we encourage using resources to help develop cultures in the individual schools that empower our teachers and encourage them to “buy into” a particular school’s overall success. We believe strongly that monetary incentives at *EquityPlusII* schools are effective as far as they go. The financial incentives need to be increased as much as possible. Financial incentives also need to be provided at schools that are trending toward *EquityPlusII* status yet which do not currently meet that criterion. We also continue to be concerned that *EquityPlusII* schools too quickly lose their *EquityPlusII* resources when they lose their *EquityPlusII* status. We favor a budget that allows for such resources to be

phased out, not immediately cut out just as a school is able to improve. We also believe that CMS enjoys several good examples of mentoring programs for younger teachers, particularly through CMS's Department of Instructional Excellence. We encourage complete funding for this Department. We also believe that, if possible, extra administrative money should be spent to provide specific administrative support for teachers in dealing with licensure and certification issues. In at least one *EquityPlusII* high school, we observed the positive use of a designated faculty position just for this task, and that faculty/administrative spot was instrumental in helping to recruit and retain some talented faculty who appreciated the availability of assistance on these issues in the school building. Perhaps such services, if adequately funded and monitored, can be provided by CMS's Central Office, but we consider worth exploring – and experimenting with funds if necessary – the placement of such administrative help directly in certain schools or groups of schools.

- Bricks and Mortar Spending. No aspect of providing equity is easy. In recent months, however, we have seen the task of providing equity in school facilities made even harder by various political and financial pressures. Even in the face of a fluid political landscape, we consider it essential that CMS adhere as much as possible to its ten-year plan for spending bond money to meet construction needs. As a Committee, we urge this Board and the Board of County Commissioners to resist the idea of imposing any sort of fixed “cap” on spending either in terms of real dollars or as a percentage of the annual Mecklenburg County budget. In short, such a “cap” restricts too much CMS's need to be able to respond to increases in its student population year-to-year, both in terms of numbers of students and the needs of the particular students coming into our school system. We also encourage this Board to think long and hard before deciding to “reprioritize” the spending of bond money that was passed in prior years for particular work on particular schools. While times, circumstances, and priorities certainly may change, we reminded you last year (in a slightly different context) that “equity is inextricably intertwined with the notion of accountability for scarce resources and developing trust within our community.” This Board shifts bond money at the risk of losing trust. We also encourage implementation and spending for programs that provide better planning and input from the teachers and administrative staff who will be occupying new schools being constructed or schools being renovated. We believe strongly that physical facilities impact the instructional quality of CMS, both in obvious ways (like the need for sufficient numbers of EC classrooms in schools or sufficient cafeteria space) and other less obvious ways that still impact morale, student achievement, and test scores.
- Instructional Supplies. The Equity Committee also encourages more efficient spending, and when appropriate to meet needs greater than efficiencies alone can achieve, increased spending for instructional supplies. Our Committee believes that CMS should invest at least some money in identifying a system that will enable it to distinguish between “mandatory” and “discretionary” needs in the classroom. We also believe that teachers in the classroom, or at least principals in the schools, should be afforded some flexibility in prioritizing spending for the

needs that are identified as “discretionary.” Equity also is enhanced throughout the system when there is enough spending for differentiated materials in each classroom. We generally believe that CMS has done a good job in providing these sorts of instructional materials at *EquityPlusII* schools, but we are concerned that schools only trending toward *EquityPlusII* status are not getting access to the resources they need. A very tangible example is the constant lament we have heard about the restrictions on numbers of copies and copying paper being provided to individual teachers in the classroom. We also continue to hear too many horror stories of schools being provided new computers and being listed as having adequate resources, but still not being provided software so that the computers can be used as anything other than bookends or very expensive paperweights. Our Committee continues to applaud the use of Classroom Central for *EquityPlusII* schools. We also suggest, however, that Classroom Central be opened up at least for new teachers at all schools as a means both to provide additional instructional supplies and to promote retention of teachers.

- The Need for More “International” Outreach. We believe that CMS needs to develop and fund better programs for reaching out to Charlotte-Mecklenburg’s international or ESL populations. A key component of equity is making sure that all the segments of our population are aware of the resources that exist in our school system. Equity cannot be achieved in any meaningful sense if distinct sections of our population are cut off from being able to understand and access everything that CMS has to offer.
- Parental Leadership Development. After spending time in a variety of our schools, it is obvious to us that successful schools share in common having parental resources that are brought to bear in the schools every day. Sometimes these parental resources take the form of active PTAs, with significant volunteer participation in the schools or a significant fundraising prowess that can augment CMS spending (such as we observed at Selwyn Elementary r McKee Road Elementary). In other schools, however, these parental resources take the form of motivated and empowered parents hopefully being encouraged and enabled to be present in the schools and in the educational lives of their children even when a traditional, more formal PTA structure may not be as strong (such as we saw at Thomasboro Elementary and to a certain extent at First Ward). We encourage CMS to spend time and money studying resources like Thomasboro Elementary’s “Family Almanac” and considering the ways that similar types of materials can be provided for parents at all schools. We also encourage CMS to spend resources identifying what is effective at various schools in terms of getting parents to the schools, empowering parents in the schools, and training these parents to be educational leaders in the lives of their children and communities and to “clone” these successful programs at other schools. We urge CMS to find funds to make possible sufficient Family Advocate/Parent Liaison staff positions at least in all *EquityPlusII* schools and preferably in all schools trending toward *EquityPlusII* status.

- The Need to Develop Community Trust. Our Committee has spent considerable time debating the role of public relations and community knowledge in providing equity. As much as we want money actually spent on teachers, instructional supplies, completing repairs to old buildings, and the construction of new buildings (see “Bricks and Mortar Spending” above), we recognize – and the current “Choice but No Longer Really Choice Student Assignment Plan” drives home the fact – that perception is all too often reality. We encourage CMS to continue to figure out ways to communicate its equity successes, its need for additional resources to provide equity, and the type of transparent financial reporting that will show good stewardship of CMS’s educational resources to the larger taxpaying community. As many of us are parents in the CMS system, we do not want to be inundated with self-serving, promotional paper coming home with our children from school. At the same time, however, we appreciate getting well-organized, concise reports of data about our children’s schools and the school system at large, such as the *EquityPlusII* Schools Status Report, discussed above. We also appreciate being able to access the CMS website, although we appreciate that not all parents of CMS students have this opportunity. Accordingly, we also appreciate being able to access the CMS cable channel, which at least is accessible to larger numbers of families. The temptation exists to cut the public relations, publicity, and television budgets in order to provide “real” educational resources. We encourage CMS, however, to resist this temptation even as CMS recognizes its superficial attractiveness and takes all the steps it can to make spending in this area as efficient, transparent, and demonstrably effective as possible.

VII. CONCLUSION AND LOOKING AHEAD TO ANOTHER REPORT IN 2005

As a community and a school system Charlotte/Mecklenburg has come too far and accomplished too much for us to give the slightest hint of accepting any sort of “dual system” of “have” and “have not” schools serving divided “have” and “have not” populations within our community, whether populations are divided by race, national origin, or socioeconomic status. Too many high poverty schools without equitable resources, however, tend to give the impression of having such a “dual system.” We must not allow equity to enable or perpetuate any kind of “dual system” in educating students in Charlotte/Mecklenburg. Instead, we must use equity to address and resolve any such tendency in our community. Any trend toward embracing, or being satisfied by, a “dual system” may in fact be the outward signs of our inward vacillation on the issue of equity. Our community may be vacillating inwardly because things are not happening fast enough outwardly. The agonizingly slow pace of change aggravates our “push button” mentalities. We want to “TiVo” though the hard parts of accomplishing equity and just get to the part of the program we like in which all schools have what they need and all students are achieving at grade level or beyond at whatever school they attend. Your Equity Committee tells you, however, that equity will not be achieved all at once, or in a short span of time. Equity is a lengthy process that requires the building of trust and the commitment to a stated plan over the long haul. It needs specific goals and measures, and it needs accurate reporting of the meeting of agreed-upon measures to bolster confidence and garner ongoing optimism. Equity cannot be achieved – and it will not endure – in an atmosphere of broken promises, mistrust, and constantly shifting priorities.

We refer you back to our “lofty vision” from 2003. We wonder what residents in different sections of Charlotte-Mecklenburg would say to a new family about the quality of public education in our community. If the family moved into North Mecklenburg, would a Families United for North Mecklenburg Education (“FUME”) parent recommend a crowded school with trailers for a few years until new schools are built or perhaps suggest considering a magnet program closer to central Charlotte? If the new family moved into a southeast Charlotte neighborhood in the Rama Road/McClintock/East Meck feeder zone, would they see a Partners for Highest Quality Schools (“PFHQS”) sign and meet a neighbor that encouraged them to send their children to their “assigned home schools,” or would they meet a neighbor who told them they better find a magnet program or more realistically a private or charter school? If the new family moved into Villa Heights or perhaps another neighborhood in West Charlotte, would they be pleased with their educational opportunities or would they simply put up with them and “suffer in silence” rather than confront the confusion and complexity of considering alternatives within CMS. Or perhaps would they meet someone from the Swann Fellowship or the “Justice, Not Just Us” advocacy group who could explain some of the progress in equity that has been made in their assigned home schools but also help them understand the resources their children’s assigned home schools closer to the inner city still need.

Actually, we have some confidence that if the new family meets most any of the dedicated parents and volunteers who care enough about CMS to be involved in FUME, PFHQS, or Swann/JNJU, the new family likely will have some positive impression of CMS. In our “brass band” role, we actually trumpet the work of these organizations and the host of other parents, volunteers, and educational professionals working for equitable education opportunities in our community. The very existence of such specific groups, however, and their links to specific geographic areas or population bases in Charlotte/Mecklenburg, highlights for your Equity Committee how far we still have to go to achieve our vision for equity. One of our Committee’s goals for our 2005 Report will be to meet representatives from each of these groups and learn more about their concerns and ideas for providing equity throughout CMS.

We have other goals for the rest of 2004. We want to probe whatever correlations may exist between specific equity spending and the ultimate goal of student achievement. We want to see if we can link spending over time with increased achievement over time, and if we cannot find such links, we want to know why. We recognize and want to consider the effects of *de facto* resegregation in many of our schools and the costs of too many high poverty schools emerging under our current student assignment plan. We want to understand CMS’s very latest plans for using bond money in renovating old and building new schools. We want to communicate in as many forums as possible our concerns about arbitrary spending “caps” being imposed by the Mecklenburg County Board of Commissioners to CMS’s operating and capital budgets instead of considering the actual needs of CMS and the children it serves on an annual and future basis. We want to explore more the placement of magnet programs in CMS, the prioritization of preferences to get into magnet programs, and understand better the effects such placement and preferences can have on student assignment and equity. We want to continue with our school tours and also work on some other ways to monitor the provision of equity in both *EquityPlusII* and non-*EquityPlusII* schools. We want to continue the progress being made on providing clear, readable, “dashboard indicator” reporting of the resources available – and the resources still needed – at all CMS schools. We want to study the CMS budget – particularly the largest chunk

of that budget provided for teachers from the State of North Carolina – and consider whether there is more we can do to provide equity in Charlotte/Mecklenburg as North Carolinians working in Raleigh than just as members of our immediate community working locally.

We also want to encourage you and others to “think outside the box.” If we do not have enough money both (i) to build and renovate enough schools to address “growth” and “equity” at the same time as well as (ii) to hire and retain enough teachers in all of these schools, should we consider radically adjusting our school schedules? Would shorter days (4 to 5 hours?) and longer school-years (up to 240 days or higher instead of 180?) allow for different student populations in a building each day such that we can cut our building needs and spend the money saved on teachers? We hope someone out there at least is imagining possibilities and considering creative solutions.

We also understand that there are only 12 months in a year and 11 members of our committee when we are at full strength and all attending meetings. Our agenda, like our vision for equity in CMS, is lofty and broad. We commit to you and our community that we will continue to work toward this vision. We hope this Board and our community will heed the warnings in this report and continue to work toward this vision as well. We appreciate the opportunity this Board gives us to work for equity as well as the attention this Board pays to the particular work of our Committee and equity needs of CMS in general. We started what needs to be an ongoing dialogue in last year’s Initial Report, and we hope this Report will assist in continuing that dialogue in 2004 and beyond.

The CMS Equity Committee

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