

FOURTH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CMS EQUITY COMMITTEE TO THE  
CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG BOARD OF EDUCATION  
FEBRUARY 2006

INTRODUCTION

Your Equity Committee begins this report with some hard questions. First, in Mecklenburg County, should where a child lives and how much money a child's family makes determine whether that child can get an excellent education?

Second, are the Board of Education (BOE) and your Equity Committee talking about the same thing when we talk about equity? Are we working toward the same goal of assuring that every school receives equitable resources to offer an excellent education for every child that the school serves?

Third, are the BOE and the greater Charlotte-Mecklenburg community sensitive and responsive to the realities of too much overcrowding, too many class disruptions, too low teacher retention, too few family advocacy resources, too few programs for at-risk children, a particularly high free-and-reduced-lunch (FRL) population, and really uneven student achievement? Are they responsive to these realities in a productive, positive way?

As we describe in this report, we fear that it does matter where you live and what your socio-economic status is in Mecklenburg County in terms of how well your children test in school. In this period when deserved attention is being paid to the recommendations of the recent Citizens' Task Force, we are not convinced that the BOE and the Equity Committee are even of the same mind about what equity really means and whether contemplated changes will benefit all students or just some of them. Finally, even as the BOE and the larger community grapple with the Citizens' Task Force recommendations, we are concerned that the BOE and the larger community are not dealing with our childrens' educational issues in a productive, positive manner. Before you decide on your own answers to these hard questions, we invite you to finish this report and read and see.

WHERE WE ARE NOW ñ AS A COMMITTEE AND AS A SYSTEM

A. Who We Are and What We Do: The BOE formed your Equity Committee in November 2002. You entrusted us with the responsibility of advising the BOE and CMS's administration on equity issues within CMS. We are concerned citizens from throughout the community who have been appointed by the Board Chair (two of us), the Superintendent (two of us), and individual Board members (who appoint one member each). Per the BOE's charge, we monitor equity issues in our schools, bring to the BOE and CMS administration any problems we see, and advise on how best to address those issues. We also attempt to monitor the response to those issues and report to the BOE the success or failure of those responses. To fulfill this role, we: (i) meet at least once each month; (ii) gather information and review data from CMS; (iii) hear reports from CMS staff and listen to the concerns of parents, teachers, administrators, and students; (iv) tour schools ; and (v) present an annual report.

B. The Equity Definition: Your Equity Committee believes that equity does not mean equal. What is necessary for one school may not be necessary for another school. Some

schools and students need much more than others. To address equity issues from a common understanding, we developed early on an equity definition: 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 on-going 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 need of each student.

C. Where We Are Now: CMS has not achieved equity. In some ways, progress toward equity is being made. EquityPlusII or FOCUS schools are a step, but only a limited step, in the right direction of differentiating resources. Implementing and attaining baseline standards for faculty, facilities, curriculum, and supplies are good, necessary steps, but progress is slow and needs are constantly changing. In some places, but not all, mentoring programs for teachers and other teacher incentives are having some positive impact on teacher retention and overall effectiveness among faculties around CMS. We see signs that better prepared elementary and middle school students eventually may raise performance levels in later grades system-wide. Despite this limited progress, we remain far from having equity ñ as we define it ñ embraced as a core value and institutionalized as a goal in every CMS decision ñ where to place a school, with whom to staff a school, what will be taught at a school, and which students will attend a school. Accordingly, inequities abound throughout CMS. Despite the distance we have to go as a system, your Equity Committee remains concerned and passionate about seeing equity illuminated throughout all Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools. Although ñ as we have written the BOE at the end of last year and as we detail later in this report ñ we are not pleased with the level of feedback we have received from this Board about equity issues, we have not given up the quest for equity, and we hope to echo our concerns throughout the Charlotte-Mecklenburg community. We want to continue to work with you and for CMS, but we want to do so in better, more effective ways. Before discussing both the ways we want to work with you and some ways that CMS better can achieve equity, we want to highlight some of the most glaring equity issues CMS continues to face.

## CMS HAS MANY EQUITY ISSUES TO ADDRESS

A. Inequity in Student Achievement: Your Equity Committee reviewed a significant amount of testing data in 2005. Specifically, we reviewed EOC and EOG test results for each school in the system for 2002-03, 2003-04, and 2004-05. We had that data broken down at each school for FRL, non-FRL, African-American, and Hispanic populations. The results sobered us. If the ultimate measure of equity is consistently high student achievement throughout Mecklenburg County, CMS has a very long way to go.

1. The Limits of Test Results: Before sharing some of our striking ñ even disturbing ñ findings, we want to acknowledge the limits of using EOC and EOG test scores as the ultimate measure of academic progress. As we have noted to the Board of Education before, many schools within CMS have student populations already performing at or above grade level on the first day of the school year. Accordingly, not much education

may be needed to keep those student populations on grade level in a given year. In other schools, however, student populations may arrive well below grade level. By the end of the year, these students may have made extraordinary progress in improving test scores. If, however, they do not score as well on a particular EOC or EOG test on a given day, this progress will not be appropriately measured, recognized, or acknowledged.

Our Committee has written before about the importance of tracking student achievement and progress within each school as a matter of climbing rungs on a ladder, and not simply measuring the particular rung at which a student is perched at a given time. Students high on the ladder of achievement may or may not have gotten there because of their educational opportunities at their given school in a particular year.

2. *Grading Schools and Geographic Disparities:* Accepting these limitations on the testing data's use as a definitive measure of achievement, the data demonstrates that how well CMS students achieve on EOC and EOG tests is closely linked with the geographical areas of Mecklenburg County where they go to school. For ease of reference, your Equity Committee broke down schools into five categories based on 2004-05 testing data: (i) those getting an A, or having 93% or greater of their students at or above grade level; (ii) those getting a B, or having between 85% and 92% of their students at or above grade level; (iii) those getting a C, or having 77% to 84% of their students at or above grade level; (iv) those getting a D, or having 70% to 77% of their students at or above grade level; and (v) those getting an F, or having less than 70% of their students performing at or above grade level. We recognize the somewhat arbitrary nature of assigning a letter grade to a particular percentage range. We also appreciate that these letter grades no doubt fail to tell the entire story of the educational opportunities a particular school provides. Still, letter grades are a convenient reference for ranges of percentages on or above grade level, and CMS students themselves no doubt deal with, in some ways, just as arbitrary a grading system every day.

Applying the results and grading scale described above to CMS's schools in each School Board District, we learned the following. Of the twenty (20) elementary schools receiving an A, seventeen (17) are in Districts 1, 5, and 6. Districts 2, 3, and 4 have one (1) A elementary school each. Of the nine (9) D or F elementary schools, eight (8) of them are in Districts 2, 3, and 4. There is one (1) D or F elementary school in District 1, and there are zero (0) in Districts 5 and 6.

Among middle schools in CMS, all five (5) of the A schools are in Districts 1 and 6. All eleven (11) of the D and F middle schools are in Districts 2, 3, and 4.

Of CMS's seventeen (17) high schools, twelve (12) of them get an F on this grading scale. All ten (10) of the high schools located in Districts 2, 3, and 4 get Fs.

One could draw a host of conclusions from this admittedly superficial analysis. Your Equity Committee draws only the conclusions that a state of equity has not yet been achieved and that students going to schools in Districts 2, 3, and 4 either need more resources, more efficient use of the resources allotted them, a different testing system, or

some combination thereof. Your Equity Committee told you in 2003 that we would know that equity had been achieved when a new family moving into Charlotte-Mecklenburg could be told by a realtor that wherever the new family purchased a home in the county, that family's children would have access to educational opportunities as good as those anywhere else in the county. These numbers clearly demonstrate that CMS remains a long way from achieving that goal, at least in terms of the conventional measures of student achievement employed by CMS.

3. Disparities by Socio-Economic Status and Race: The numbers also tell a sobering story when student achievement is broken down by socioeconomic status and race. Among CMS's seventeen (17) high schools, only four (4) have free-or-reduced lunch (FRL) populations above 50% on grade level. The high school with the highest percentage of its FRL students on grade level is the high school with the lowest percentage of FRL students in its population. We also see a distressing "FRL gap." Among CMS's high schools, an average 11.8% gap exists between students on grade level overall and FRL students on grade level. Please realize that this gap would be higher still if we compared only the paid lunch population with the FRL population. Instead, we compared each school's FRL population with its overall population.

The 11.8% average gap comes from a range with a high of a 28.8% gap at one (1) high school and a low of a 0.4% at one (1) high school. Of CMS's seventeen (17) high schools, six (6) of them have FRL gaps (as we have measured them) of less than 5%. Problematically, however, five (5) of those (6) schools are CMS's lowest performing high schools. This data suggests to us that when CMS is able to achieve equity for FRL students with their non-FRL peers, it is an "equity of mediocrity" that should satisfy no one.

Breaking the high school numbers down by race is not very satisfactory either. What is the number of CMS high schools in which African-American students are on grade level in percentages equal to or above the percentages of all students at a school? Zero (0). What is the number of high schools in which the percentage of African-American students on grade level is at least within five (5) percentage points of the percentage of all students on grade level at the school? Five (5). Of the five (5), however, four (4) of these high schools are CMS's lowest performing, which again suggests only an equity of mediocrity — i.e., the only times African-American high school students are performing close to the rest of a high school's population (on a school-wide basis) is too often when the whole high school's numbers are simply too low.

The picture brightens somewhat for Hispanic students in CMS's high schools. At three (3) high schools, Hispanic students are on grade level in percentages equal or greater to the school's populations as a whole. At six (6) more high schools, Hispanic students are on grade level at percentages within five (5) percentage points of the school's population as a whole. These nine (9) schools range from CMS's strongest performing high schools (in terms of EOC percentages) to its weakest.

Among CMS's twenty-nine (29) middle schools, marginally better news exists. We found an average "FRL gap" of 7.1% in all the middle schools with a range of one (1)

school with a high gap of 18.9% and one (1) school with a low gap of 0.8%. Along racial breakdowns, African-American students are on grade level at or above the percentages of student populations as a whole at two (2) schools. African-American students are on grade level in percentages within five (5) percentage points of school populations as a whole at fourteen (14) middle schools. These sixteen (16) schools generally range across the county geographically as well as in terms of overall performance (i.e., some very strong performing schools overall and some weaker). For Hispanic students in middle schools, these students are on grade level at or above the percentages of student populations as a whole at six (6) schools. They are on grade level in percentages within five (5) percentage points of school populations as a whole at seven (7) schools. These thirteen (13) schools also are dispersed throughout CMS in terms of both geography and performance.

Among CMS's eighty-seven (87) elementary schools, the news gets better still, at least in terms of equity and student performance. We found an average FRL gap of 4.76% in all the elementary schools with a range of one (1) school with a high gap of 18.7% and one (1) school with a low gap of -0.7%. This negative gap number means that the FRL students at this school actually performed better, in terms of percentages on grade level, than the overall student population at the school. Four (4) elementary schools had these negative FRL gap numbers in 2004-05.

Along racial breakdowns in the elementary schools, African-American students are on grade level at or above the percentages of student populations as a whole at nine (9) schools. African-American students are on grade level in percentages within five (5) percentage points of school populations as a whole at forty-nine (49) elementary schools. These fifty-eight (58) schools appear to range across CMS geographically as well as in terms of overall performance. For Hispanic students in elementary schools, these students are on grade level at or above the percentages of student populations as a whole at thirty-five (35) schools. They are on grade level in percentages within five (5) percentage points of school populations as a whole at another twenty-five (25) schools. These sixty (60) schools also are pretty well dispersed throughout CMS in terms of both geography and performance.

One also could draw a host of conclusions from this, again, admittedly superficial analysis. Your Equity Committee draws these. First, CMS is doing a better job providing equity along both socioeconomic and racial lines in elementary schools. The data suggests to us that programs like Managed Instruction and Bright Beginnings are working for younger children. The achievement gaps (both between socioeconomic groups and racial groups) grow larger in middle school and larger still by the time students are in high school. Second, the data indicates that for whatever reason, children in certain categories (at least of class and race) are not yet getting the educational resources they need to achieve their full academic potential. Again, these students need either more resources, more efficient use of the resources allotted them, a different testing system, or some combination thereof.

B. Other Examples of Inequities: In addition to student achievement, we continue to observe many other inequities within CMS that have not been adequately addressed. We

highlight here what we consider some of the most urgent equity issues: disparities and inadequacies with physical facilities; the recruitment, retention, and allocation of experienced, effective administrators and teachers; the presence and fostering of family involvement within schools; inadequate discipline in too many places; and not enough focus on resources for Talent Development and Exceptional Children programs throughout CMS.

1. Physical Facilities: On our many school tours, it is disappointingly apparent both (i) how many schools are in disrepair due to a lack of maintenance, and (ii) how many newer schools simply have radically better facilities than older schools. For example, we tour South Mecklenburg High and see a suburban school with a facility that has not changed much since it was built in 1959. To be clear, strong academic achievement goes on at South Meck, and the school ranks in the top five among CMS high schools for students on or above grade level. South Meck's buildings, however, are old, moldy, and in the case of the Building, literally sinking. Rooms such as the media center, science rooms (these cannot be called labs), gym, and auditorium still have too much outdated equipment. Classrooms and science labs have very little, if any, storage space for equipment and supplies. These problems exist in a school that does comparatively well academically and that is neither considered crumbling in the inner city nor bursting at the seams in the outer suburbs. The reality, though, is that the school is both crumbling in some ways (check out the science lab storage rooms) and most certainly bursting at the seams, and academic achievement takes place despite these challenges. We see similar issues at North Mecklenburg High (which among other physical needs, sorely needs a real computer lab, not a laptop cart rolled from one end of campus to the other) and Garinger High (which is long overdue for some new science classrooms).

Then we tour Berry Academy of Technology and see a facility that is nothing short of fantastic. Berry has a wealth of the science labs and storage space that teachers at South Meck, North Meck, Garinger, and other places would love to have. Linked to a branch of the Public Library, Berry boasts research and computer resources other high schools just do not have. Granted, Berry exists to be a technology magnet and thus needs some specialized resources. New schools and old schools also obviously cannot be equivalent. Every high school, however, ought to have the resources it needs to help its teachers teach and its students learn. CMS simply does not have equity in facilities when such wide disparities exist about the physical conditions in which teachers attempt to teach and students attempt to learn.

Linked inextricably to inequities with physical facilities is the problem of too much overcrowding. Learning cottages are fine to address short-term overcrowding and surprising increases in student population. Too often, however, they come with too few instructional supplies or wiring that is not connected to the rest of a school. Most problematically, they expand the volume of a school's campus without an adequate increase in staff (ranging from security personnel to cover more area and guidance counselors to work with more students) to handle the corresponding increase in student volume. When used as an ongoing part of a school's campus for as many as twenty-eight (28) classrooms (recently at Hopewell High) or sixty-eight (68) classrooms (this year at

North Meck), the trailers create a dependence on overcrowding that damages the prospects for equity in too many places. We generally support the idea of more and smaller schools with fewer trailers as a means toward achieving equity.

2. Faculty Recruitment, Retention, and Allocation: As important as physical facilities are, we believe the people doing the educating – both teachers and administrators – are the most important resources a school can have. Our various tours and conversations teach us that positive teaching environments attract and retain experienced, high quality teachers. Positive teaching environments come in a lot of forms, but they invariably share in common at least recent contact with a strong principal. Strong principals attract good faculty. They creatively use resources and champion their school in the community at-large. They give teachers room, support, and flexibility to teach, but the strong principals also know when a younger teacher needs help and a seasoned veteran needs a break. Strong principals know their students and their challenges; strong principals come up with plans to help address those challenges. CMS is blessed with many strong principals and many, many outstanding teachers. In terms of equity, however, CMS seems to struggle with pairing strong principals with schools that most need positive teaching environments. Despite progress in recruiting and retaining high-quality faculty, CMS still struggles to hire enough teachers for an ever-growing student population as well as to attract many of its very best teachers to the schools that most need many of those teaching skills. CMS will not achieve equity until the system's administrative and teaching resources are matched more effectively with each school's needs.

3. Family Involvement: We repeatedly hear principals and teachers describe family involvement as a critical issue for school achievement. Family involvement within CMS is not equitably distributed among all schools, and given the structure of most student assignment plans, it likely never will be. CMS offers resources to promote family involvement in some schools, but we do not believe that these resources are distributed equitably or always used as effectively as they could be. Generally, CMS's family advocates at FOCUS schools can help address needs in this area, but there should be more of them and they need to be properly trained and supported.

4. Discipline: Discipline generally troubles staff at many (but not all) of the schools we have visited. On our school visits we heard about a myriad of discipline problems. Frequently, these discipline problems stem from the same core group of students who continue to cause problems yet continue to attend their assigned school. We hear of students who have been violent returning to schools, and we hear concerns that these decisions – contrary to those being made by folks at a school who know the students – are being made downtown. The issue is one of equity simply because too many teachers and students do not feel they are getting the same safe teaching and learning environments available at other schools.

5. Talent Development and Exceptional Children Programs: We have ongoing concerns about CMS's Talent Development program and whether CMS's brightest students have the resources they need to be challenged and to achieve their highest potential. These concerns are expressed both at the magnet program level (i.e., Barringer Elementary) as well as by faculty, students, and parents in (and out of) TD programs across the system. Too many TD teachers question CMS's support of the program, particularly in terms of

responding to issues with the identification process for qualifying students into the program, whether there are enough trained TD teachers, and the adequacy and quality of the TD program within CMS. We also have heard complaints about CMS's Exceptional Children programs, including whether instructional supplies are adequate, all staff is qualified, and all schools have adequate physical space for their EC populations. According to our definition, 'equity' must mean that all students can reach their full academic potential. Inadequate identification of and resources for CMS's brightest students and not meeting the needs of exceptional children both impede the achievement of real equity throughout CMS.

#### WHAT WE FEEL WE HAVE BEEN TELLING YOU ALL ALONG

After highlighting some of these inequities, we call your attention back to the 'hard questions' of our introduction. Where a child lives and how much a child's family earns obviously affect a child's test scores. They should not, however, stop CMS from providing each child with an educational environment (a fine teacher, a functional building, a safe classroom, up-to-date books in the library, technological advances, etc.) that empowers a child to reach his or her full academic potential. That is what we mean by equity and what we have been talking about as a committee. We wonder, however, if the Board of Education believes what we believe about equity. Specifically, first, we believe our definition is right. Do you? Or does the BOE have a different definition? Second, we believe that intentionally striving to achieve equity is essential, even if actual achievement may be hard and slow in coming. It is difficult enough to say what a child's 'full academic potential' may be, let alone whether he or she actually achieves it or has all the resources needed to achieve it. But can we ever afford to say that we will settle for less than providing every child the chance to achieve that potential? Does our BOE think we can afford to do that? Third, we believe failing to commit and to work specifically toward equity hurts all of us as a community because it says to some portion of our community, 'Your children and their future success are just not as important as some other children and their future success.' We believe that our community is made up of many different parts, but that each of them ñ and their children ñ are important. We hope ñ and trust ñ that you do as well.

In preparing this report, we have gone back and looked at our prior reports to this Board (see footnote 2 above). Four more things stand out. First, we have made a lot of suggestions about achieving equity over the last four years. We really would like to hear back from this Board to see if any of those prior suggestions have been implemented. Second, we would like to hear if the Board believes that any of our suggestions, if implemented, actually have worked and had a positive impact on equity. Third, if particular barriers block using some of our prior suggestions (i.e., CMS just does not track data that way, or CMS just does not have enough money, etc.) that otherwise might work, we would like the Board to tell us what those barriers are. Finally, fourth, we see consistent themes in our prior reports that echo in our work, school tours, and discussions over the past year. To avoid 'reinventing the wheel' in this context, we summarize those suggestions and themes below with some added comments based on our specific work this past year:

CMS needs to report clearly to the community where inequities exist and suggest

remedies for fixing those inequities;

CMS needs to be sure it is measuring equity correctly and adopting a broad enough definition of the word. Just providing some measure of extra resources to schools designated as EquityPlusII or FOCUS is not getting the job done. Two sizes do not fit all;

CMS needs more financial transparency so that the larger Charlotte-Mecklenburg community understands where the CMS budget goes and where CMS credibly can demonstrate more resources are needed. We appreciate that equity needs are vast, but our community's financial resources for education (and thus CMS's budget) are ultimately limited. CMS needs to cut and be able to show that it cuts programs that do not work and do not help promote equity. If after those cuts are made, CMS still needs more financial resources to enhance equity, CMS can better demonstrate those needs and ask for those resources;

CMS should adopt a template and an approach that empowers each School Leadership Team to assess each year whether each school has the resources it needs to teach the students it has and tell that to CMS. If CMS cannot provide the resources a school's School Leadership Team says it ought to have, CMS ought to explain why;

What is the most precious resource for obtaining equity? Faculty, both teachers and principals. How do we encourage excellence in developing and retaining teachers and principals? Try (or try more of) the following:

Offering more leadership training and development for administrators;

Encouraging and empowering teachers, not drowning them in paperwork, foisting discipline problems on them, and nickel-and-diming them on school supplies;

Providing competitive pay with incentives to encourage good teachers to accept challenging positions in high-poverty schools;

Funding and staffing mentoring programs to prevent early burnout and high turnover.

The best way is to place experienced staff at the schools that need the most help and having mentors in the schools right down the hall from the teachers who can benefit from the mentoring;

Providing more support for licensure and certification, particularly for teachers at high-poverty and low performing schools;

Giving teachers the tools they need to teach, including but not limited to computers that are internet ready with up-to-date software, decent storage space, and time every day to plan;

Making sure every classroom has necessary classroom supplies and do not make teachers ever have to buy these out of their own pockets (talk about a morale buster!);

Providing adequate numbers of teacher assistants;

Implementing specific plans to recruit, develop, and retain male teachers, and in particular male African-American and Hispanic teachers; and

Treating teachers as the professionals they are.

CMS must develop a realistic and fair way to address CMS's burgeoning needs for adequate bricks and mortar. It is not equitable for some students to learn every year in a learning cottage and to get lost on a cart (when there simply are not enough classrooms in suburban schools bursting at the seams), but it is also not equitable for inner ring and middle ring schools not to get the resources they need to upfit and renovate older, sometimes crumbling facilities. It is no answer to assert that too many inner ring schools

are not at capacity, and thus do not need renovation. Too many populations at inner ring schools need the smaller class sizes that come with EquityPlusII or FOCUS status, but those students still should have the facilities they need. In designing schools and renovations, CMS should do more at every step in the design and building process to listen to administrative staff and teachers when implementing changes or designing new schools;

CMS should focus on building and utilizing smaller schools. Large, and even overcrowded, schools may appear at one level to give more students access to the same resources. Such access, however, is not equity, particularly when a school is so large that a child's individual needs cannot be recognized and addressed. Even within some of the larger schools CMS currently has, CMS should continue to explore and develop the school within a school concept. We particularly applaud the school within a school idea at CMS's high schools;

Magnet school programs should be magnets in more than name only. Schools that CMS trumpets as providing special opportunities in particular subject areas actually should have special instructional supplies, adequate equipment, and trained teachers in that particular magnet subject area;

CMS should continue working to promote parental and community involvement in schools that do not have strong enough involvement in these areas. For example, has every FOCUS school implemented the kind of iFamily Almanac booklet we reported on from Thomasboro Elementary? Has CMS fully funded Family Advocate/Parent Liaison staff positions at all schools that need these positions, both in terms of adequate numbers at FOCUS schools and as options at non-FOCUS schools that may need these positions?; and

Build trust with the larger Charlotte-Mecklenburg community that educational issues are being addressed professionally and responsibly (the litany of basic behavioral issues by School Board members is not the way to build such trust!).

## THE FUTURE VISION OF EQUITY WITHIN CMS

We turn now from the challenges we presently face and the history of what we have told you before to the opportunity of a future vision in a new year. Our vision has two parts. First, we have a vision of how we can work more effectively with you as a Board. Second, we have some specific suggestions for what we would like to see done in 2006 both to help us better serve you as the BOE and to move CMS closer to achieving equity for all of its students.

A. The Equity Committee's Role: First, your Equity Committee feels that our interaction with the Board has not been as effective as it could or needs to be. Our primary role has been to produce a yearly report on the state of equity in the CMS system, submit it to the Board, and meet eleven more times until the next report is done. This description is perhaps an over-simplification of our work, but it is largely accurate. We feel that with relatively few changes in how we interact with the BOE we can be much more effective in doing our work and also be much more helpful to the Board in its work.

If the Board feels your Equity Committee cannot be an effective tool in promoting equity throughout CMS, or the Board cannot commit to more effective communication with this Committee, we request this Committee be disbanded. Given the importance of equity to CMS, we hope that such a step will not be taken. Given the time and energy the

volunteer members of this Committee commit to this task, however, we would rather be disbanded than ignored. If there is an effective role this Committee can take, we first request specific written feedback from the Board regarding how the Board views our role moving forward. Secondly, we feel it is essential that all members of the Board and this Committee put forth a renewed effort to communicate. We would like to suggest four changes in our interaction in order to improve communication:

**Better Reporting by Your Equity Committee:** We want to be sure our report(s) do not reinvent any wheels or cover ground that others might be doing. To this end, we hope to link any future suggestions and recommendations we have to CMS's iProject Management Charter Process.<sup>1</sup> This step hopefully will allow the Board and the Superintendent to tell us about processes and measures already in place. We then can concentrate on areas within the Charter Process that need study or clarification by the Equity Committee. Our goal will be to work within the existing framework, but we reserve the right to make recommendations to change the framework when we feel it is needed;

**More One-on-One Contact:** We feel additional contact with the individual Board members who appointed us will enhance the dialog between the Board and the Equity Committee. Our goal is to build stronger personal relationships that will help us work better together. We commit that we will attempt to communicate with each Board member and the Superintendent one-on-one in person, by telephone, or by e-mail each month;

**More Regular Joint Meetings:** We want to meet jointly with the Board once a quarter, starting this quarter. These meetings would focus on a particular topic such as Board reaction to our annual report, concerns about overcrowding at certain schools, issues from particular school tours, concerns about teacher retention, and so forth. The topic of the quarterly meeting would be agreed upon beforehand. Our goal is for 100% participation by the Board and the Equity Committee at each meeting; and

**More Feedback from the Board:** We feel that we need a built-in process for us to obtain specific, written feedback from the Board regarding issues raised by this Committee. In line with our recommendation for quarterly meetings with the Board, we suggest that our March meeting focus on the Board's reaction to this report. Going forward, we hope that quarterly meetings and one-on-one contact already mentioned above will serve as the automatic feedback mechanism we feel we need to do our job more effectively.

**B. Our Specific Recommendations for 2006 and Beyond:** In order to move CMS closer to a state of equity during 2006, we suggest the following steps and offer our help in addressing the following issues from an equity perspective. These are in no particular order of importance (we think they all are important), but they are in our suggested order for a timeline going forward:

The BOE review and approve within the next month this Committee's specific role moving forward;

The BOE adopt and implement within the next two months your Equity Committee's recommendations for improved interaction with the Board;

CMS and the BOE specifically assign your Equity Committee the task of reviewing the Citizens' Task Force's recommendations on restructuring CMS's governance and let us report back to you in ninety days on whether those recommendations are more likely to impair equity or help achieve it;

CMS and the BOE specifically assign your Equity Committee to review and comment upon any proposed bond package or suggestions for additional funding from Governor Martin's Task Force in order to assess whether such a package and/or other funding adequately address equity concerns;

CMS, the BOE, and your Equity Committee jointly develop, review, and implement a plan to address the concerns raised by the disparities in EOC/EOG test scores recognized in the Equity Committee's Summary of 2005 Testing Data;

CMS and your Equity Committee discuss and assess the current schedule of repairs and new school construction already approved to consider whether the current schedule adequately addresses equity concerns about physical facilities;

CMS and your Equity Committee discuss and assess current initiatives in administrative and teacher recruitment, development, and retention to consider whether equity concerns are being addressed. We especially suggest looking at ways to recruit, develop, and train faculty who can address the particular challenges of African-American males who consistently score highest in numbers of disciplinary issues and lowest in terms of test scores as well as the needs of a rapidly expanding iEnglish as a Second Language (ESL) population within Charlotte-Mecklenburg;

CMS and your Equity Committee look at ways to bolster family involvement in schools throughout CMS, particularly in terms of assessing the need for more family advocates and more training and support for these positions;

Your Equity Committee spend time in 2006 touring CMS's alternative schools and programs designed to address discipline issues within all schools and report back to the BOE on whether those programs are adequately addressing equity issues; and

Your Equity Committee spend time in 2006 observing CMS's programs for Talent Development and Exceptional Children and report back to the BOE on specific concerns about those programs and ways they could be enhanced in order to provide more equity throughout CMS.

#### CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

More than any other point, we hope that this report stresses that much work remains to be done before we can say as a community that CMS provides truly equitable educational opportunities for all children. We also want the report to reflect our willingness – indeed our passion and enthusiasm – to aid and support this Board as it grapples with the difficult task of determining priorities in the pursuit of equity. We temper that willingness, however, with an underlying concern that the time and energy we devote to the task be utilized in real ways. Your job as a Board is a hard one. You must deal every day with the issues presented by the three hard questions we posed at the beginning of this Report. We understand our role to be one of helping the BOE in its hard job. In order for us to help, however, we need to communicate with you more.

We hope that you will agree that more communication will be helpful. We ask you to take seriously the items and the timeline that we suggest above. Let us hear from you about whether you believe we are fulfilling our role or not. Let us perform specific tasks in concrete areas that will help you as you analyze whether particular policies promote equity, or impede it. Let us report back to you regularly about equity issues, and please give us regular feedback on whether our role is helpful and our advice useful, or whether we simply are wasting your time and ours. We hope that in 2006 we will be in regular dialog with you about a variety of topics: the Citizens' Task Force recommendations; a

potential bond package; strategies for eliminating achievement gaps, among others. Our goal in February 2007 will be a report that need only summarize those ongoing, productive discussions and point to all the positive progress toward equity that CMS has made.

THE CMS EQUITY COMMITTEE

Alice Bennett

Rev. George Cook, Jr., Vice Chair

William Garcia

Paul R. Haisley

Richard Helms

James H. Henderlite

Ellen C. Martin

Reggie Singleton

Rev. Dr. John H. Walker

Julian H. Wright Jr., Chair

In 2005, we toured the following schools: Shamrock Gardens Elementary, Endhaven Elementary, Quail Hollow Middle, James Martin Middle, South Mecklenburg High, North Mecklenburg High, and Berry Academy of Technology. We will provide the BOE with copies of our summaries of each school tour. Please be aware that we keep an archive of the summaries of all of our school tours from 2003-2005.

Specifically, we provided reports to the BOE in February 2003 and February 2004, as well as recommendations on budget priorities in December 2004 and student assignment in February 2005, which considered together, constituted an annual report.

We did so in order for the data to be comparable with the racial breakdowns we considered. In our racial breakdowns, we compared student performance against the entire student population at a school, not other races.